

Wednesday, May 7, 2014

11:00 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
FIRST PERSON SERIES
Speaker: SUSAN WARSINGER

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. We are in our 15th year of the *First Person* program and our *First Person* today is Mrs. Susan Warsinger whom we shall meet shortly.

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

First Person is a series of weekly conversations with survivors of the Holocaust who share with us their firsthand accounts of their experience during the Holocaust. Each of our *First Person* guests serves as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue through mid-August with programs each Wednesday and Thursday.

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 that you'll find in your program or speak with a museum representative at the back of the theater at the end of the program. In doing so you will receive an electronic copy of Susan Warsinger's biography so that you can remember and share her testimony after you leave here today.

Susan 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 our program we will have an opportunity for you to ask Susan a few questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about

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to hear from Susan is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with her introduction.

Susan Hilsenrath was born in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, the eldest of three children. Here we see Susan's family. From left to right is her brother Joseph, her mother Ani with Ernest in her lap, her father Israel, and Susan with her arm around her father.

Here we see Susan with her brother Joseph.

On November 9 through 10, 1938, known as Kristallnacht or Night of Broken Glass, Nazi thugs smashed the windows and furnishings of the Hilsenrath home. Months later Susan and Joseph were smuggled to France.

In May 1940, the German Army invaded France. Susan and Joseph were evacuated from a children's home from Paris to Versailles where they were temporarily housed in Louis XIV's palace. Soon German soldiers arrived and the children fled with their guardians to the unoccupied part of the country under the Vichy government. The arrows indicate their journey southward.

With the help of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Susan and Joseph received permission to emigrate to the United States. Information written on this tag that Susan wore identifies her name and states that she is sailing for the United States onboard the SS Serpa Pinto.

After crossing the Pyrenees to Spain, the two children sailed from Lisbon, Portugal, and arrived in New York in September 1941. And Susan and Joseph are circled here in this photograph from, I believe, "The New York Times."

Susan lives here in the Washington, D.C. area. She has three very accomplished daughters and, as she notes, nine wonderful grandchildren. She spent 29 years as an educator in the public school system.

Susan's volunteer work at the museum includes being a member of the museum's Speaker's Bureau. She is also a tour guide leading law enforcement officers, including FBI agents, from all over the United States and from throughout the world through the Museum's permanent exhibit. She gives tours to special groups such as college-age leaders and individual tours to visually and hearing impaired people.

During the summers, Susan participates in the museum's program "Conversations in the Wexner Center" where she welcomes questions and conversation in an intimate setting as she discusses her experiences during the Holocaust. Susan is also giving tours for the museum's new exhibit, "Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust."

Susan is also a contributor to the Museum's writing project which produces editions of "Echoes of Memory," a collection of writings by survivors associated with this museum. You can read some of her writings online on the Museum's website. And following today's program Susan will be available to sign copies of "Echoes of Memory."

Her neighbor, Eileen is here in the front row with her. And I think her niece Christina Hilsenrath is going to be in the audience with us somewhere, but I can't see from up here. We welcome both of them.

With that I'd like to ask you to join me in welcoming our *First Person*, Mrs. Susan

Warsinger.

[Applause]

Susan, thank you so much for joining us today and for being willing to be our *First Person*. We have just an hour for you to cover a whole lot of territory, many years. So we'll get started.

Your early years were spent living in the town of Bad Kreuznach in Germany. Before we talk about your experience during the Holocaust and what you went through tell us, first, what you can about your family, yourself, your community in those years before Kristallnacht, before war was on the horizon and began.

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, Hitler first came into power in 1933. I was a very young girl. I really didn't understand what Nazism was all about. I was a very happy little girl. We lived in a nice house. And my father had a linen store. He provided for the family. I was happy.

All of a sudden, after 1933, my father didn't have his store anymore. What I found out later on, the Nazis boycotted his store. All of a sudden we couldn't afford to live in our house anymore, so we kept moving to a lower and lower economic area, into a very small apartment. It was all because my father eventually lost his store because he didn't have any business. The only people that were allowed to shop in his store were the Jewish people, but the other people wouldn't buy anything.

>> Bill Benson: Do you know if your parents explained to you, knowing you were very young, what was going on, why you had to move to different places, why he didn't have his business anymore?

>> Susan Warsinger: I was very young. I think my parents always tried to protect us. They didn't tell me about it. I guess my father thought maybe the Nazi government was going to blow over. Everything, we just knew that we couldn't afford all of these things.

My father started -- when he didn't have his store anymore, he started to sell strawberries and blueberries and blackberries in these big baskets to the people who were our neighbors. That's how he --

>> Bill Benson: In effect, going door-to-door selling fruit, cherries and things.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: You told me one time that you would know if you had had a good day selling the cherries or blueberries.

>> Susan Warsinger: Oh, yeah. We had, like, a signal -- we had a signal. If he raised two fingers, it meant that he had sold two baskets and made a certain amount of money. And each of his finger signs we had this little thing between us. I felt very close to my father because he included me in the economics of our family. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us a little bit about your early education. As I recall, you recall your very earliest years as being unhappy in school.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah, I did. I hated going to school. I was in first grade and the children made fun of me. They called me names. Then I finally realized they called me names because I was Jewish. So I was happy one day because they said you can't go to public school anymore. So I didn't have to go to school because all the Jewish children in Germany at that time were not allowed to go to public school. I was very happy.

But eventually we started a one-room schoolhouse for the Jewish children in our town. There were not too many families living in the town. So we had one teacher. The room --

>> Bill Benson: For multiple grades. Right?

>> Susan Warsinger: Multiple grades. The room was smaller than this auditorium. The first grade sat in the first row, the second grade in the second row, all the way to the 10th grade. And that teacher taught all of those children and met all of their needs. And I really loved it because I was comfortable there and nobody called me any names.

>> Bill Benson: You told me about an incident that really left an impression on you where your mother sent you to a local store to get bread. Tell us about that.

>> Susan Warsinger: I felt very important. This little kid. She used to put this in my hand and said go to the store and buy the bread for the family or sometimes it was bulk or sometimes it was something else.

Can everybody hear me ok? The people in the back row, can you raise your hand to let me know that you can hear me? Ok. I want to make sure that I speak loud enough.

Anyway, so she said go to the store and buy this loaf of bread. So in order to go to the store -- I lived here. The grocery store was like on the end of the row over there. It was like -- so in order to get to the grocery store I had to go through a park. Pretend all of you are that park. So I started walking down the steps into the park. And the gatekeeper came out and he said to me you can't walk through the park anymore. And he started calling me names. He said: Don't you dare go through the park anymore. So after I got home, I told my mother.

And my mother said don't walk through the park anymore. And that was it.

So the next time she told me to get a loaf of bread, and I was very happy. I get to the steps. I said to myself: Oh, I'm very tired; I do not want to walk all the way around; go this way, down this street, up this street, and over there. So guess what I did. I went down the steps and walked -- tried to walk through the park.

So the gatekeeper came out. And he started to throw rocks at me. And he started to call me "You dirty Jew" and all kinds of horrible things. But the worst part of it was he had a daughter, and she was not much older than I, and she followed what her father was doing. After all, he was her role model. So she did the same thing. I was terribly upset. I ran home to my mother and I never walked through that park again.

>> Bill Benson: Your mother had had your youngest brother in 1938, but she really had no choice but to have him at home as I recall. Tell us a little bit about that.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. I remember the night she had the baby because she was not -- Jewish people were not allowed to walk -- to go to the hospital. So she had the baby at home. And I don't think she had even a midwife. She had somebody to help her. So my brother Joe and I, we had to sit outside on the steps and wait for her to have the baby.

>> Bill Benson: And it was all because she was not allowed to go to a hospital.

>> Susan Warsinger: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Susan, you mentioned earlier that as things got worse with your father having lost his business, you had to move to different housing each time because you couldn't afford where you were.

>> Susan Warsinger: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about the place you ended up at.

>> Susan Warsinger: We lived on 11 [Speaking German]. There was a place, the Adolph Hitler Platz. It was like a big square. The house was there. It was a house. We lived on the first floor. And the rabbi of the town lived on the second floor. A non-Jewish family lived on the third floor. And up on top was the attic. We stored apples and exciting things up in that attic.

>> Bill Benson: That brings us, then, to that terrible night in November 9 through 10, 1938, that we call Kristallnacht or Night of Broken Glass. Please tell us what you remember or know about Kristallnacht, that night, for you and your family.

>> Susan Warsinger: Ok. My mother and I -- my brother Joe and I -- the one that you saw, that was in the picture before, was on the right-hand side; the older one, not the baby, the older one. We shared a room. We were very excited that night because it was going to be our mother's birthday. It was the eve of the 9th of November. We had just gone to sleep. And all of a sudden some bricks and rocks were being thrown through the window. My brother is much braver than I am. I cowered under my blanket. He was brave. He went to the window and pulled himself up, and he looked over the window. He saw that it was our neighbors that were throwing the bricks and rocks through the window. And there was a civil policeman standing at the edge of the crowd, standing like this. He didn't do anything to stop the crowd from throwing these bricks and rocks through the window.

So we were really very scared. So my brother and I rushed to my parents'

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bedroom. While we were crossing the hall some people outside had uprooted a telephone pole and they smashed down our front door, which was made out of beautiful glass. It was blue and green and red. And the glass was strewn all over the hall. Their objective was to get to the rabbi's apartment and to loot --

>> Bill Benson: And he was on the second floor where you are on the first floor.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. And they looted some of our things but it wasn't too serious. Then they went up to the rabbi's house. And, of course, they destroyed a lot of valuable things that he had in his apartment. So my father said, well, let's go hide up in the attic until this whole thing blows over. Because it was dangerous.

We went up to the attic. There we had apples stored from the winter -- for the winter because it was November and we had just gotten all of these wonderful apples. So the rabbi's children were up there and our family was up there. But the rabbi wasn't there. So I asked, "Where is the rabbi?" They didn't tell me. And just then there was this little slit in the window from the attic. I looked outside and there he was on his veranda. And two SS officers -- how many of you have been to the permanent exhibit already? And how many of you are going? Oh, good. So this is what I would like for you to look for while you're going up to the permanent exhibit. And those of you who have seen it you saw those SS officers in the brown uniforms with the swastika on their arm. The civil policemen -- look for that when you first get up to the fourth floor. You see two policemen walking together. One is a civil policeman, a big blue hat and a blue uniform.

This policeman didn't do anything. Anyway, the rabbi was on his veranda and two

of the SS officers, the men in the brown uniforms, were holding him and another one came along and cut off his beard. And at that time, you know, having a beard was prestigious and something important that a rabbi --

>> Bill Benson: You saw that.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes, I did. I did.

So I found out later on that they didn't only go to our apartment but they did that to every Jewish family in our town of Bad Kreuznach. And then I found out that they looted all the Jewish stores that were still there. And then I found out that they tried to burn down our synagogue. And then I found out later on that they not only -- they didn't only do that in our town but they did it in every town in Germany.

>> Bill Benson: Hundreds of synagogues burned.

>> Susan Warsinger: Right. Right. And lots of people lost their homes and lost their belongings. And many of the stores had to close up.

>> Bill Benson: And on that night thousands of Jewish men were arrested and taken to a concentration camp. What about your father?

>> Susan Warsinger: The rabbi was taken to prison. Didn't take him to a concentration camp. But my father, he went for a few hours and then he came back. I could never figure out why my father wasn't sent to prison or the concentration camp.

The thing is, we found out that my father -- later on I found out in life that he was a friend of the chief of police in Bad Kreuznach. They used to play chess together. And I figure, well, maybe that's what saved him. Also, he was Polish. He had been born in Poland. And at

that time the Nazis had not gone to war with Poland yet and maybe because he was a Polish citizen. I don't know.

I just want to tell the audience. You ask your grandparents everything that you want to find out because after a while, you won't know. And I'm so sorry that I didn't ask my father so many more things. I would understand things, perhaps, or some of my curiosity would not be so great as it is now.

>> Bill Benson: How long do you think you stayed in that attic with this terror really going all over -- as you said, not only all over your town but all over Germany?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. I was a little kid. I really don't remember. But I think it was just a few days. Because we didn't have any place to go to the bathroom and we didn't have anything to eat except those apples.

Did I ever tell you the story about my father who kept all of his money -- maybe the audience might want to know.

>> Bill Benson: I do want you to share that actually. I was trying to think how I'm going to ask you that.

>> Susan Warsinger: My father had some money saved up from, I guess from the store, whatever, from selling the strawberries. So at that time we didn't -- Jews didn't keep money in the bank. I guess they kept it under their mattress. When we were hiding in the attic, my father told me to put the money in my underwear. So I remember I felt very important but I also had to go to the bathroom a lot so that money got very wet.

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: But it stayed safe. That may matter later.

So the events of that night, of Kristallnacht, of that night, that led your parents to make this very profound decision that they want to the get out of Germany.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what they tried to do and what they were able to do.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. Before the Night of Broken Glass a lot of Jewish people that were living in Germany, they didn't want to leave. They saw these atrocities that were going on against the Jews but they didn't want to leave. They thought, well, maybe things will blow over; the Nazis will be out of the government and things will be all right. But after the Night of Broken Glass, every Jew wanted to get out of Germany.

Where were they going to go? Then, you know, everybody had a quota. The United States had a quota. My mother wanted to go. She had always wanted to go to the United States. She had heard about how wonderful the United States was. So we wanted to come, but the United States had a quota. And all the other countries had a quota.

And when you people go up to the permanent exhibit, there is an editorial cartoon with "The New York Times" and it talks about how the people wanted to get out of Germany but there was this Evian Conference and all of the countries wanted to get together to see what they could do to help the Jewish people. But every country except the Dominican Republic said we're not going to raise our quota. So there is this editorial, there's no place for this non-Aryan or -- the Nazis called themselves Aryans. There was no place for us to go.

>> Bill Benson: Just to have you repeat that. The one place that raised its quota was the

Dominican Republic.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: In the world.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

Anyway. So my father had heard of this lady who was smuggling children across the border. If you saw in the map, Bad Kreuznach is not too far from Frankfurt. I know most of you know where Frankfurt is. In the car maybe it's two hours away, so closer to the French border. My father had heard of this lady and she was going to take children across the border for a fee. So my father had the money dried up, and my father gave all of this money to this lady to get us safely across the border into France.

I don't remember being separated from my parents because my brother Joe and I have put this so far into our brain, but it must have been horrible for my mother to send her children away and never to know that she was going to see them again. So the separation to me -- I have children of my own and I have grandchildren, and the idea of sending my children away is just horrible.

>> Bill Benson: Almost unimaginable.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: So you went with this lady. Tell us -- you were I think 9 at this point. I don't know if you remember much about it, but there was one incident that you told me about on the train as you're going with her to France. I think with some SS officers got on the train.

>> Susan Warsinger: I had to pretend that I was sleeping because I was supposed to be her

child. The passport said she had a child of her own and the passport said I was her child. So I had to pretend that I was sleeping because if I had woken up, he would have spoken in French to me and at that time I didn't know how to speak any French.

>> Bill Benson: You just spoke German.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. So it worked out.

>> Bill Benson: As a 9-year-old, you had to go along with that, be, in effect, schooled on how to behave as you're being smuggled across the border.

>> Susan Warsinger: Right.

>> Bill Benson: And then, of course, you have your youngest brother with you at the time. So you go to France.

>> Susan Warsinger: Go to France. We get to Paris. And here we are, my brother and I, we found this third cousin who lived in Paris in Place de la Vendome. He had this very small, little apartment. He was going to take care of us. So here we are in this apartment. This man is young, very young.

>> Bill Benson: And single. He's a bachelor. Right?

>> Susan Warsinger: Right. And he has these two kids. So he went to work, and he told the two kids: Stay in the apartment until I come back at night.

>> Bill Benson: A 9-year-old and a 1-year-old.

>> Susan Warsinger: My brother Joe was 8.

>> Bill Benson: Oh, 8 at the time. I'm sorry.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. This is not the baby.

>> Bill Benson: Not the baby.

>> Susan Warsinger: The baby is Ernest. The other is Joe.

>> Bill Benson: So he leaves the two of you all day long while he was at work.

>> Susan Warsinger: And my brother, I told you, you know, he was very curious and brave.

He used to sneak out of that apartment and go on the Metro in Paris and go all over the Metro.

He looked all over Paris. And then before the cousin came home, he was always back in time.

He was very curious. He's a wonderful person. He still is. I love him very much.

Anyway, this man couldn't keep us any longer. So with the help of either the Quakers or the HIAS or the -- these were all organizations that were helping children to find a place. All the money that sometimes we give to organizations, they really do a wonderful job about helping children.

Anyway, they helped my brother and me to stay with a family in the outskirts, in a tiny little village in the outskirts of Paris. So now it's 1940.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us about that. If I remember right, that was not a particularly happy place for you.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. Well, when we went to this lady. I was just going to skip that part.

>> Bill Benson: No, you can't. No.

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, she was doing this -- keeping children to make money from this organization. She had a daughter. She was very good to her daughter, but she wasn't very good to us. And we were not allowed to go to the bathroom in the house. We had to go eat

outside. Finally we complained to this cousin.

>> Bill Benson: Only allowed in the house to sleep. That was it. And you slept on straw.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Anyway, well, let's forget about this lady. Going to go to the other children's home. There were two young girls. They did the same thing. And they were very good to us. And I went to public school. I learned how to speak French. You know, kids are wonderful. They learn -- if you can't speak the language, and you can't do anything else, you have to learn it. So by that time I could speak French pretty well.

But the bad part happened in 1940 when the Nazis, you know, they first went into Austria and then Czechoslovakia and Poland. And it was time to conquer France because this was Hitler's objective to conquer all of Europe.

>> Bill Benson: May 1940.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes, May 1940. We were sleeping in our bedrooms. We see the bombs falling near us. It looked like the Fourth of July. So anyway, this was right near Paris.

Finally in June of 1940, the Nazis came marching with their armies into France. Everybody was really frightened. So people wanted to leave. It wasn't only the Jewish people that were frightened. People wanted to get out. So they either went south to Vichy or some of them went west and some of them went to Versailles.

>> Bill Benson: It was a mass exodus out of Paris, tens of thousands of people fleeing including you and your brother.

>> Susan Warsinger: Right. So I don't know who took us. I think it was some nuns who took us. I don't remember. People were fleeing in cars and bicycles and walking. It was just this --

people just going; just going and running away.

So where were they going to go? They went to Versailles. They thought it would be safe there. So we were there. So when we got to Versailles, there was a palace. And in that palace, like you were telling the audience before, the chief official of the town said, "What am I going to do with all of these people that are coming to Versailles?" So he says, well, we have to put them up someplace. So guess where they put us up. In the palace in the Hall of Mirrors.

Anybody been in that Hall of Mirrors? Yeah? Anyway, for those of you who haven't seen it, it's this long room. There are mirrors all over, crystal chandeliers all over the place. So what they did is they gave us these burlap bags. They had this pile of hay outside. We filled the burlap bags and we tied them up tightly. Then we laid all of our mattresses against the edges of the Hall of Mirrors. So there were all of these people, one after the other, in the Hall of Mirrors. So we stayed there. I don't remember who gave us food, but I remember sleeping on those mattresses. I tell you, the straw was itching my back.

But then the Nazis didn't stay in Paris.

>> Bill Benson: So they come to Versailles.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. They had come to Versailles. We heard them with their boots. You know, those boots they have up to here. We heard them marching. We heard the tanks. We heard the commotion. And they stopped in front of the palace. There was this head guy. I don't know, maybe he was a colonel or a major or something. He wanted to talk to the highest official in Versailles. So they got the two of them together.

>> Bill Benson: Like the mayor of Versailles is there with the German commander of some kind.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. Some kind of commander. I don't know what he was.

Anyway, the German commander did not know how to speak any French. And the French official didn't know how to speak any German. So they wanted to talk to each other, so they needed an interpreter. They didn't have one. Somebody in the crowd yelled: Well, we know this little girl who lives in the palace, who's living in the palace, and she knows how to speak German. So guess who they got.

So I tell you, I was scared. I really was scared. The Nazi officer was tall, like the ceiling. And I could just see to the top of his boots. So they said something to each other. I really don't know what it was they said, but they seemed to be satisfied. I had translated each person. So they seemed to be satisfied.

And at the end of the conversation the Nazi officer turns to me and he says, "Little girl, how come you know how to speak German so well? So I said to him, "Oh, the French schools are very good and I learned it in the French schools." And then he clicked his heels like that. And the noise, the noise that it made. I still remember. And he bowed to me and said thank you very much and he left.

>> Bill Benson: What an amazing presence of mind on your part.

>> Susan Warsinger: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: I'm in a good school system.

>> Susan Warsinger: Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: So you can't stay in Versailles. So now you move on.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. We can't stay. So at that time the Nazis were invading all of these countries. So what they said in France that the northern part of the France was going to be the occupied area of the Germans. And then I don't know if you noticed on the map but there was this white line. It was mostly the southern part of France. Not the part that was near the ocean but because the Nazis wanted that for themselves. So there was one area in the southern part, in the middle. Vichy was in there. And they said to the French people that this was going to be their part of the country. But the leader of the --

>> Bill Benson: Of the Vichy government.

>> Susan Warsinger: He was in cahoots with the Nazis, too.

So we wanted to get to safety. So we went to Vichy. And near Vichy is a little town called Brout-Vernet. And there they have -- they had a chateau, a castle, which was really dilapidated. And there Jewish children this time from all over France that had come that were refugees from Germany and Poland and Belgium and all the other countries. They ended up in that particular chateau. It was a children's home. It was run by the OSE there and they took care of us.

>> Bill Benson: So essentially in an orphanage for Jewish children in this small town?

>> Susan Warsinger: Right. Right.

>> Bill Benson: What was that like for you?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, we always wanted to be reunited with our parents because we didn't hear from them.

>> Bill Benson: You didn't know anything about where your parents were or what had happened to them.

>> Susan Warsinger: No.

>> Bill Benson: During that time.

>> Susan Warsinger: No.

>> Bill Benson: And your brother is still with you.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. I was always with my brother.

>> Bill Benson: Right.

>> Susan Warsinger: That was very good to be with him. But they were good to us in the children's home.

>> Bill Benson: Did the neighboring town -- I know this was Vichy, France. There was so much collaboration with the Nazis. Here's a place filled with Jewish children. Did the townspeople know you were there?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. The townspeople knew we were there. They had a public school, and here all of these kids have to go to school. But the townspeople, they did not want us to go to their school because they did not want these children to rub elbows with their children. These were all farmers. They would have learned so much from the children because we were cosmopolitan and we went from all of these different countries and we would have benefited by being together.

However, they allowed us to have another one-room schoolhouse in that town. So all the children, we had a teacher who was very good to us, a French teacher. Very good to

us. We went to school and learned everything in French. So by that time I was pretty good at it.

>> Bill Benson: I would say so.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: You were, of course -- things were scarce, food, things like that.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: But they managed to feed you while you were there. But you told me -- you told me a story I'd like you to share. Obviously there were no frills, no extras for you. But you told me how you celebrated each other's birthdays with the other kids. I want you to share that.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. In that book that's in the -- oh, it's a new book. The "Echoes" book. -- I wrote a story.

>> Bill Benson: You can get that online.

>> Susan Warsinger: You can get it online. You can read it in the book.

What happened was there really wasn't much we could do for each other's birthday. So when we knew it was somebody's birthday, like two or three weeks ahead of time, we used to get a little bit of dessert sometimes. So we used to not eat it. Every one of us had a locker in the attic. And so we picked one of our lockers and we put all the desserts that all the kids had saved. It wasn't very much. All the dessert that kids had saved. And we put it in that locker. And then when it was time for the person's birthday, we went down to the cafeteria and got this brown tray and then we put doilies on it and then we put all of our loot that we had

saved. And then somebody went down into the yard and if there were any flowers, we would put the flowers in. And then we put the tray on the person's bed so before they woke up. And then we all the waited for that person to wake up; then we sang "Happy Birthday." It was a different song. It wasn't "Happy Birthday" like here. But --

>> Bill Benson: A French version. That's a very touching story about you and the other kids at that time. But there you are, you're in this orphanage with other Jewish children. And at some point you learn that your parents now are trying to locate you and get you out of there. And they did. Tell us about that.

>> Susan Warsinger: Children got notices, like different notices came to these children that their parents found them. They got out of the chateau -- one day the lady of the directories called me to her office. Usually you go to her office only if you did something bad. And I was always such a goody-goody; I couldn't figure out why she was calling me.

>> Bill Benson: As opposed to maybe your brother.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. Well, she was calling me to go to her office. So I went in very meekly and scared. And she said, "Susi" -- my French name. My German name was Susi and my French name was Susi. And then when I came to the United States, I wanted to be Susan. Anyway, so she said, "Susi, your parents found you and your parents are in the United States. And they sent affidavits, and you're going to go to the United States."

>> Bill Benson: How did they get to the United States?

>> Susan Warsinger: You see, this is another thing that my brother and I didn't ask them enough. But I found out through some papers that my father came to the United States in the

beginning of 1940. We had some relatives that had a pickle factory. And he got the affidavits -- only him. He didn't get enough affidavits. They said we'll only take one person. So my father evidently decided they must have decided he should go and that he would work here. And these people who owned the pickle factory would help him get the affidavits for the baby, the one you saw on the screen, for the baby and my mother. So he worked hard and somehow or other between the pickle factory people and my father my mother came with the baby. Then the minute they got here they started to look for us.

>> Bill Benson: That was 1940 when they got to the United States?

>> Susan Warsinger: Right.

>> Bill Benson: Of course, we're not yet at war in this country. So we're not at war with Germany. That would not come until after Pearl Harbor in 1941.

>> Susan Warsinger: 1941. Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: So now they found you and they've arranged for you and your brother to leave and come to the United States. Tell us what that was like to leave and to come here.

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, I was extremely happy to come here. We got on a train. We went to Marseille. We went across the Pyrenees and went to Lisbon where we got the boat the Serpa Pinto.

How much time do we have?

>> Bill Benson: We're in good shape.

>> Susan Warsinger: Should I talk about the Serpa Pinto?

>> Bill Benson: Yes.

>> Susan Warsinger: Ok. We got on this Portuguese ship.

Do you want to hear about this?

[Laughter]

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

>> Susan Warsinger: We got on a Portuguese ship. It was like a cruise ship but not like the Carnival and -- oh, no. But it was --

>> Bill Benson: It was a tourist ship.

>> Susan Warsinger: It was a tourist ship but it was much smaller. They didn't have boats like we have now. And what they did is they had people who were crossing for pleasure, across the ocean. So they had the hull of the ship, like way down in the bottom of the ship, at the front of the ship, they had this place for 50 children that had gotten out of Europe at that time. 50 kids were together.

>> Bill Benson: Down in the lowest part of the ship.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. We were not allowed to go and mingle with the passengers, but we didn't care. We were coming to the United States. So it was wonderful.

My brother was going all over the ship investigating things.

[Laughter]

He found a place where they had stored a lot of pineapples. He was very excited to find these pineapples because we had never eaten pineapple before. He gorged himself with the pineapple. Sometimes he got very sick. He used to go up on the deck and all of the insides went into the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. But anyway, it was a grand voyage.

What happened, they told us -- there was like 14 days up and down like this. They told us that the next day we were going to get to the Statue of Liberty at 6:00. We were all very, very excited. We got up early in the morning. My brother was already up there, I don't know, earlier than that. We were up there. It's 6:00. There was such a fog. You couldn't see even your hand in front of you. It was really upsetting because we had looked forward to it. But then at exactly 6:00 -- and I'm not making this up. This really happened. At exactly 6:00, the fog just lifted like a curtain in the theater. You know, like in an opera house or at a musical. It lifted up, and there was the Statue of Liberty right in front of us.

I tell you, it was the most exciting thing that ever happened to me in my entire life. Because it stood for being together with my parents. It stood together for coming to a democratic society.

When we got into the port of New York -- my brother tells this story differently than I do. You know, there are some people who are Holocaust deniers and they say, oh, the Holocaust didn't happen because different people tell different stories. But, you know, sometimes it's such a small different thing that you remember that's different. And then they had different customs and different places.

Well, anyway, my brother remembers that he had a high fever and that -- the doctors came on to the ship. They checked out all the children to see if they could get off the boat and if they didn't have any communicable diseases.

The way I remember it is because he had a rash all over his body from eating all of that pineapple. But he said he had a fever, so I'm not quite sure which one it was.

>> Bill Benson: But either way, something was up with him.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. So the officials said he can't get off the ship. So what did they do in those days with people who can't get off the ship? Does anybody know? Where do they send you? Huh?

>> [Inaudible]

>> Susan Warsinger: No. I don't think the captain wanted to see us anymore. But there's a special place. And I will give you a clue. It's right next to the Statue of Liberty. Ellis Island. You guys are right.

Anyway, Ellis Island.

>> Bill Benson: You can tell she's been a public school teacher. So there you are at Ellis Island.

>> Susan Warsinger: Mm-hmm. So Ellis Island. So they checked him out and they really realized that he had the fever or the rash, whichever one of those things that it is, and that he didn't have a communicable disease. And they kept us until he got better.

But in the meantime while we were there it was the most exciting place. When we went to eat at these long tables, they had white bread on the table. And we had never seen white bread. Because they had only bread in Germany -- you can't throw anything away. So white bread, you know, you throw away a lot of things. So white bread was such an elegant thing for us to see. So I looked at it. I could take it. I could squish it in my hand, make a little ball out of it.

[Laughter]

And tasted it. It tasted so delicious. And I found out that it was Wonder Bread.

[Laughter]

Anyway. So that was my introduction to the United States. And my brother was sitting next to a sailor. And the sailor was always drinking this brown drink that had bubbles in it. So he told my brother he should have a taste. So my brother tasted it. And he said, "Oh, it's really very good." And he found out that it was Coca-Cola.

We also learned that children in the United States could have candy and just chew it all day long and it wouldn't go down into your stomach. Of course, we found out that it was chewing gum.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us in the time we have left a little bit -- there's a couple of other things I want to ask you before we close. What was it like for you to transition? Here you're back -- you've experienced American food. But now you're experiencing American culture, reuniting with your parents that you have not seen for several years. What was that like for you?

>> Susan Warsinger: Well, it was wonderful to be with our parents, but we did have to get adjusted to the culture in the United States. We had to go to school. We didn't know how to speak any English. It was very difficult for me. In that time they didn't have any ESL teachers. Now kids get special help in the schools. There was nobody there to help kids with problems. And also at that time they had homogeneous grouping, which means that all of the smart kids were in one class and the dumb kids were in another class, the in between kids were in different classes. So 7B1 is where all the dumb kids were, so they put me in 7B1 because I didn't know how to speak any English. And the kids -- I was really surprised because in

Europe teachers were looked upon like --

>> Bill Benson: Like lords.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. Exactly. Here these kids that were in that class, they didn't do their homework and a couple of people fell asleep in class. And I could not believe such a thing. So I was really upset. But then I found out that all of the problem kids were in that class.

Of course, we don't do that in the public school system anymore. But anyway, I finally -- when I learned how to speak English a little bit, I got out of 7B1 and got to 7B2.

>> Bill Benson: And worked your way up from there. Absolutely.

I want to ask you just a couple of questions, Susan, before we might have time for a couple of questions from the audience.

What happened, to your knowledge, to other kids that were at the orphanage?

>> Susan Warsinger: That's the bad part. If you go through the Museum, you will learn -- especially the one exhibit, "Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust." They took thousands of Jewish people and they put them -- this was near Paris. They put them into this big arena. And all of the French policemen just helped. And while they were there, they put them on the trains and sent them to the concentration camps.

They did the same thing in the part in the unoccupied zone. Eventually all of those people were collaborators and said: Here, here are the Jews; take them. So most everybody was killed. I don't know of many people that survived.

All of my relatives, the ones that were on my father's side, they were born in

Poland. So all of them lived in Poland, which is now the Ukraine. And if you go to the exhibit that I was just telling you about -- after you see the permanent exhibit, go see the other one. The Nazis didn't even put them in the concentration camps. What they did with the people in the Ukraine they just gathered them up and shot them and put them in graves and buried them in the graves. So that's what happened to all of the relatives on my father's side.

My mother had some relatives in Germany. I found that they were in the concentration camps and they died in the concentration camps.

>> Bill Benson: So you lost most of your family.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: One other question I want to ask you. Just today, just an hour ago before this program began, you were able to look at and touch documents for the first time in your life.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah.

>> Bill Benson: Very profound. Tell us about those.

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. I got this e-mail from a guy called Ron Coleman. I think he's over there.

>> Bill Benson: Raise your hand, Ron.

>> Susan Warsinger: He called me up -- no, he didn't call me. He sent me an e-mail. He said: I found some papers that you might be interested in and that you might -- that you probably didn't know that they existed. So I immediately -- he said, "Do you want me to e-mail them to you? And I said, "My God, yes." So he e-mailed them to me. It was all the correspondence that my father had with all of these organizations, with the Quakers and the

HIAS. What were the other ones?

>> [Inaudible]

>> Susan Warsinger: Yes. Several other organizations that my father got in touch with to try to find us in France. So eventually they found us. And eventually all of these organizations helped my brother and me to come over.

Today he made copies of it so that if I get it lost online, I have some copies of them. They are like 100 pages of correspondence.

>> Bill Benson: You held for the first time ever. What was that like to read those words?

>> Susan Warsinger: It was very exciting because I saw my father's handwriting. The English -- he wasn't speaking English too well. Somebody else must have written it for him and then he signed his name on the bottom. But the language is his and the signature is his. And I touched it. It was very moving. Yeah.

Thank you. Thank you.

>> Bill Benson: We have time for a couple of questions from the audience. I want to remind you when we do finish up in a little bit, Susan will go up and sign copies of "Echoes of Memory" and you can chat with her a little bit there as well. We have time for a couple of questions. Anybody here have a question?

I'm going to ask you make it as brief as you can and wait for the mic if you are so inclined. I have a zillion more if you don't. But we have a person right here in the second row. There we go. I may repeat the question just to make sure everybody in the room hears it.

>> What things are happening in the world today that gives you pause and makes you worry

that the rest of us don't seem to notice?

>> Susan Warsinger: That's a very good question. You want to --

>> Bill Benson: No, no. I think you're going to answer that. Right?

>> Susan Warsinger: Yeah. He's going to ask me at the end my last -- what is it you say?

>> Bill Benson: The last word.

>> Susan Warsinger: And I'm going to tell it to you right then.

>> Bill Benson: You anticipated it perfectly.

[Laughter]

And we have one right here. Let me get the mic to you if you don't mind.

>> Thank you, first of all, for being here and sharing all of this with all of us. I wondered if you ever had a chance to go back and what that was like.

>> Bill Benson: The question is did Susan go back and what was that like for her. Thank you. I would liked to have asked that myself.

>> Susan Warsinger: That's a very good question and I'm glad you asked it. When my kids were, like, 16 and when they were teenagers -- I think it was in 1973, something like that. I told them that I would like to show them my town of Bad Kreuznach where I was born. So we packed and we got to Bad Kreuznach. I was really very excited to show them, but the people -- [No audio] -- there were lace curtains, looking. When they saw me looking, they immediately closed the curtain.

You know, in 1973, in the 70, nobody wanted to talk about what happened. The Jews and the survivors didn't want to talk about what happened. They all wanted to forget.

They wanted to be Americans. They wanted to be -- not remember any of their experiences. We were going to stay there for a week. We stayed two days and left because it was uncomfortable.

But then maybe five years ago my other brother, the baby brother -- he is a big scientist. He's a -- he's into physics. He does a lot of work with the ozone in the air. He goes all over the country. He meets with scientists. So a few years ago he had to go to Germany to a town not too far from Bad Kreuznach to meet with the scientists. So I said to him, "Can I go with you?" And he said sure.

This was in the late 90s, or maybe it was in 2000. Something like that. So we went and I said to him, well, after you finish your meeting let's go to Bad Kreuznach. In the meantime, I had written to the mayor and I had written to different people and they said, oh, come, and we will pay for your room in the hotel. It was in the fancy hotel. So we got there and the reporters came. The mayor took me out to tea. Another lady took me all over Bad Kreuznach and showed me what the town did now to remember what had happened during the Holocaust.

So it was an entirely different experience. And the same thing that happened in the United States. Nobody wanted to talk about the Holocaust. It wasn't until 1993 when this building opened up and everybody came out of the closet. Germans came out of the closet. And the survivors came out of the closet. And the whole world -- it's important for us to know this -- getting back to your question, it's important for us to know this because when we see injustice happening we have to do something about it. But I'll talk about that.

>> Bill Benson: In just a moment. We're going to close our program in a moment. I will turn back to Susan because we believe our *First Person* has to have the last word. So that's what we'll do.

I want to remind you that we have these programs every Wednesday and Thursday until the middle of August. Hope that you can come back either this year at another time or in future years. And our website includes information about the program.

I want to also remind you that when Susan finishes, one, she's going to leave the stage when she's completely done and go up so she can sign copies of "Echoes of Memories." If you would like to talk to her or purchase a copy that would be great, or say hi. The other thing, when Susan finishes I'm going to ask you all to stand. And the reason for that is our photographer, Joel, will take a picture of Susan with her back to you but you're the backdrop. It has just a wonderful effect. So we're going to do that, if you don't mind.

With that I will turn to Susan to close our program.

>> Susan Warsinger: I want my children, my grandchildren, my brothers and their families, my friends and the visitors here in the audience to rejoice in the fact that we are living in a democratic society and that all of us should make sure that no dictatorship would ever usurp our liberties. We need to remember the atrocity that happened to families during the Holocaust and pass this information on to our progeny. We need to learn from this horror and history. We cannot undo the atrocities of the past, but besides remembering we have to take action to confront hate. When we see injustice taking place, we have to do something about it. We cannot be onlookers. We have to be sensitive to each other and we have to take care of

each other.

Why do I volunteer in this museum? People ask me how can you do this over and over. How can I not? Giving tours to our visitors through our permanent exhibit hopefully teaches them what hatred and prejudice can do to people. When touring law enforcement officers and future FBI agents, I hope that they understand their role when encountering atrocities. We cannot be bystanders and definitely not be collaborators.

There are threats of genocide in many parts of the world at the present time. We cannot be indifferent to emerging threats of genocide and mass atrocities. All of us need to be aware about what is happening. And we need to work together and take the necessary actions to prevent people from being murdered for the simple reason that they are different. Never again do we want to stand by and do nothing.

I want to thank you, Bill Benson, for helping me tell my story. And I want to thank you, the audience, for coming to our museum and being witnesses to the story of the Holocaust and for listening to my story.

Now, those of you who are going to go up to the permanent exhibit, I would just like you make sure that you look at certain things that are up there. You might want to look -- there's one that has to do with boycotting. There's the SS man standing in front of the store. And then there are the two policemen walking together with the ferocious dog. Make sure you look at that exhibit. And then make sure that you look at the Jewish responses and see what the Jews did after the Nazis very slowly started their discrimination against the Jews. And then take a look at that Evian Conference, editorial cartoon. And then also take a look -- we have a

big exhibit with Torahs all over, under glass. It talks about Kristallnacht in a large area there.

I hope that you have a wonderful learning experience.

[Applause]

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[The presentation ended 12:05 p.m.]