UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
"FIRST PERSON" SERIES
FIRST PERSON MANNY MANDEL
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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 began our 17th year of the "First Person" program just yesterday. Our "First Person" today is Mr. Manny Mandel, 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 and 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 serve as volunteers here at this museum. Our program will continue twice weekly through mid August.

The museum's website at www.ushmm.org provides information about each of our upcoming "First Person" guests. Anyone interested in staying in touch with the museum and its programs can complete the Stay Connected card that's in your program or speak with a museum representative at the end of the program. In doing so, you will receive an electronic copy of Manny Mandel's biography so you can remember and share his testimony after you leave here today.

Manny will share with us his "First Person" account of his experience during the Holocaust and as a survivor for about 45 minutes. If time allows at the end of the program, we'll have an opportunity for you to ask Manny some questions.

The life stories of Holocaust survivors transcend the decades. What you are about to hear from Manny is one individual's account of the Holocaust. We have prepared a brief slide presentation to help with his introduction.

Manny Mandel was born to a religious Jewish family on May 8th, 1936 in Riga, Latvia. Manny was just 3 when World War II started in 1939. Although he was born in Riga, Latvia, Manny's family were Hungarian Jews. They had moved briefly to Latvia

because of his father's work. Here we see a portrait of Manny's parents, Yehuda and Ella Mandel holding their infant son Manny.

Shortly after Manny's birth his father accept add post as a chief cantor in Budapest and the family returned to hungry where they lived in 1933. Hungary is highlighted on this map and Budapest is highlighted in yellow. Manny father was based it at the renowned Rombach Synagogue. In this picture we see Manny and his father on a street in Budapest. The Hungarian government passed anti-Jewish laws beginning in 1938. In 1940, Hungary joined the Axis Alliance and in 1941 Hungarian troops joined in the invasion of the Soviet Union. The war, an increasing restrictions, made for lives in Jews in Hungary increasingly difficult. The photo on the left shows Manny outside his apartment on his first day of school in 1942 in Budapest. On the right, we see a contemporary photo of Manny standing outside the same apartment.

German forces occupied Hungary in March, 1944. Manny and his mother Ella were fortunate to be included in a program in which Jews would be transported to Palestine in exchange for trucks. Within months, they were transported by the Nazis to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Hannover, Germany in preparation for the event actual departure from Europe. This is a historical photo of Bergen-Belsen.

Negotiations for their transport to Palestine broke down and in December 1944, about six months before the end of the war, Manny and his mother were released from the Bergen-Belsen camp and transported to safety in neutral Switzerland. There they stayed at the Heiden Children's Home pictured here where Ella worked as a teacher. Manny is lying down in the front on your left and his mother Ella is standing in the back in the middle.

After the war, Manny and his mother reunited with his father in Israel. They subsequently immigrated to the United States and lived in Philadelphia. Manny is a graduate of Temple University and did his graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a clinical social worker. He met his future wife Adrienne in Philadelphia and they were married in 1958. They have been married 58 years.

After working for the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization in Cleveland and in Michigan, Manny and Adrienne moved to Washington, D.C. where Manny became the national program director for B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. He would later go to work for the Peace Corps before beginning his own psychotherapy practice in 1980. Manny retired from his practice in 2014. Adrienne's many accomplishments include having served in the Maryland Legislature as an elected member of the House of Delegates. She is the immediate past-president of the Washington suburban san a tear commission, the nation's eighth largest water and wastewater utility. Adrienne retired from the water authority just in 2014.

I might also mention Adrienne for many years on the board of directors for the center of global aiming at Catholic University of America. Manny and Adrienne live in Silver Spring, Maryland. They have two children and three grandchildren. Their daughter Lisa 26-year-old son Zachary graduated from the University of Maryland and their 24-year-old daughter Gabrielle graduated from the University of Michigan and is now a graduate student at John Jay University in New York. Manny and Adrienne's son David has a 19-year-old daughter Alexandra who has been at the summer Bolshoi Ballet Program in Julliard in New York. She graduated from high school in 2015 and attends

George Washington University. I'm pleased to say Adrienne, their son and daughter and nephew are all in the front row and joined by their family friends Christine Bishop from Chicago and Tom McIntyre.
Manny speaks about his Holocaust experience in schools and synagogues. He volunteered at the museum, leading museum tours for school and law enforcement groups. Manny celebrates his 80th birthday on May 8th. He may say the significance about that date a little bit later. With that, I would like to join you in welcoming our "First Person" Mr. Manny Mandel.

(applause)

>> Bill Benson: Manny, thanks so much -- thanks so much for joining us and for being willing to be our "First Person" today. I know you have got a busy week. You're speaking again here at the museum tomorrow, I understand. You have so much to share with us and a limited time, so we'll get right to it.

You were born in Riga, Latvia, as I mentioned earlier, in 1936 but your family stayed there and certainly yours was a short one before you moved to Budapest. War began in Europe when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939 when you were just 3 years old.

Let's start first with you telling us a little bit about your family, your parents, and your life before the war, before the Holocaust began.

>> Manny Mandel: You need to know that there is something unique about Hungary, not us, but Hungary and the Nazi government. You need to know if you don't know that only two countries in Europe, basically, were in a different situation than all the others. Specifically Hungary was an Ally was Germany. As a consequence, the Jewish community of Hungary had a different experience than the Jewish community of Poland, a very significant difference in that we did not have any occupation by Germans. The Germans don't arrive in Hungary, in presence, in person, until 1944. And you know how late in the war that is because the war ends in 1945.

So for the first years of the war, from 1938, '39 through the early '40s, our difficulties come not so much from the Nazis but from the war itself. Bombings every time. Other kinds of things. And certain restrictions that the government, in fact, was able to manipulate. We were under the rule of the Hungarian Nazi Party but that's different than being under the rule of the German Nazi party. So our experience is war related more so than Holocaust related.

>> Bill Benson: But in that short period beginning in March 1944, it was an extraordinarily horrific time. And we'll turn to that.

So your family life and your family before the war, you told me a significant story that your mother shared with you along the lines of someone saying one day, well, today you now speak Yugoslavian. What was significant about that?

>> Manny Mandel: That's before my time. That's really after the First World War. After the First World War, Hungary is truncated and some of it becomes Yugoslavia, some of it becomes Czechoslovakia. My mother was raised in the Hungarian part. She was a school kid, maybe 10 years old or third grade. And that's when the war ended, First World War, 1919 or so. And one day the teacher comes in and says, when you come back to school next Monday, we're going to switch language. We have been teaching you in Hungarian to Serbo-Croatian. It has as much in common as the moon and earth. But

they were bilingual. There was no problem in that situation. But Yugoslavia was created so let's use the Yugoslav language which was Serbo-Croatian. My mother's family, brothers and sisters and parents, maintained Hungarian in the home. But in school, it was, in fact, in Serbo-Croatian which I don't speak. I probably know six words. At one time I may have known 20.

>> Bill Benson: Manny, your father was an important cantor in Budapest. Tell us how he got to that position.

>> Manny Mandel: My father -- well, the shorter version is the fact that my father at some point after serving in the Czech Army, he was drafted because this is not Czechoslovakia. He was able to get to Vienna. My father was able to get in a cantor school which was world renowned at the time in Vienna. When he graduated from that school, he wanted to have a job in Hungary with his hopes being a cantor in Budapest. For those of you who don't know, the cantor in the Jewish community is one who leads the services and there's lots of music involves and choirs involved and so forth.

My father wanted to, in fact, be in Budapest which is to him the New York Yankees of The Metropolitan opera of the cantores. He was unable to get working papers in Budapest because he had been a Czech citizen having served in the Czech Army. Not by his own choice.

So he looked around Europe and he was able to find a very interesting and very important position in Riga. We have no Latvian connection or family. We know nobody in Latvia. At least I didn't. And they were then ready to come back to Budapest because he did get an appointment in Budapest in 1936. They waited for me to arrive. As soon as I arrived, within weeks, we moved to Budapest. I can tell you that my father -- some years ago when my father was still alive, my wife and I went to Riga for a weekend visit to see it. It's a nice place. My father said to me, look up "post iela seši." That's Post Street 6. That was their address. That was the only Latvian he knew. We visited the building, and it was and enjoyable weekend.

>> Bill Benson: His father in his journey to coming the cantor in Budapest, there were some important decision points that he had earlier in his life. One of them was when he was in the Army, the Army wanted him to sing for them.

>> Manny Mandel: One of my favorite kind of warm, kind of fuzzy stories, my father drafted into the Czech Army. Now, the Czech Army, as many Armies, don't have various musical kind of things. It was some kind of anniversary of the Czech something. So they put on an opera. For those of you know anything about the Bohemian composer, Bedrich Smetana, he wrote the opera called Prodaná Nevesta, The Bartered Bride. They wanted my father to sing the lead. My father could not read music. He had never seen an opera. He was able to be coached like a trained ape of sorts, and he did reasonably well.

Based on that experience, the commanding musician of the whatever suggested that they have a deal for him. The deal is, after his Army service, which they will cut a little short if he is acceptable and if it's acceptable to him to send him to Prague to a conservatory to study music and to study voice to become an opera singer. My father didn't know what to do.

He couldn't approach his father with this kind of a question. He was reluctant. So he called on his uncle, my grandmother's brother who was a lawyer. And he called the uncle who was kind of the conciliatory of the family to talk to his father. And the

uncle -- my great uncle goes to talk to his brother-in-law and they had a conversation. And comes back to my father and says, this is what your father said. You have to understand where they're living and what the background is, very religious family. I never knew my grandfather. He died years before I was born of smoking.

But in any case, he says, I have seven children. If my son Yehuda goes to sing in the opera and violates the Sabbath and things of that nature, I will have six children. Thus ended my father's opera career.

And the other -- those of you that know opera, he would have been a perfectly good tenor.

>> Bill Benson: One of the other decision points, as I recall, Manny, is that he had opportunities to be a cantor elsewhere including, I think, London, other places than Hungary. Did he ever later express in light of what happened to the family, did he ever express regret about not having taken one of those positions?

>> Manny Mandel: Yes and no. He did not express any kind of resentment upon not taking a position because his goal in life was to be in Budapest. And the other side of the coin is he said, had I taken the position in London, we would have escaped the Holocaust. Interesting where he was, in those days people went on various kinds of -- what they call probers. They were auditions. One was in the duke's place synagogue in London which was bombed during the war. If he would have taken that, perhaps other members of the family, would have been avoided during the Holocaust.

>> Bill Benson: As you said to us earlier the full force of the Holocaust and war did not hit your community in Hungary until the spring of 1944, there were still many difficulties for you once the war was underway in Europe, beginning in fall 1939. Tell us about the circumstances of your family and what you may recall yourself being as young as you were from those first few years of the war, before it really came to Hungary.

>> Manny Mandel: Because I was as young as I was and because of the circumstances in which we lived, I described the fact that I lived very much in a bubble. I was well-protected from much of this. I knew about many things. I recall them. I can describe them. I did not get the impact of the effect that I would have, had I been five or eight years older. If I had been five or eight years older, chances are I wouldn't be.

But I was very well-protected but I saw things. I was very surprised and kind of upset in a way that when we saw the Hungarian soldiers on the street and knew they were Allies with the Germans my parents were upset with that. I could understand that. I understand this is a 5 and 6-year-old talking. I don't know why you root for a hometown. I don't know if you folks are from Washington. But the football team from your home community is the one you root for. In Washington we don't root for Dallas. We root for Washington.

(laughter).

I didn't understand why my parents were rooting not for the local team but for the Allies. That's difficult for a kid to understand after knowing local heros.

Other things began to happen. The Hungarian Numerus Clausus which were the restricted laws were passed in the '20s, not the '30s. You may know that the '30s the German Nuremberg laws came out. But Hungarian laws were passed in the '20s after First World War but not really enforced until much later, maybe 10, 12 years later in the late '30s.

So as a consequence of that, from 1940 or so, my father was conscripted into the labor battalions. Hungarian men were drafted into the Army and fought in Russia. Hungarian Jews were not drafted into the Army but into labor battalions to backfill those positions that Hungarian men had, which had to do with some farming and some mining and railroad repair and road repair. And my father was perhaps like a traveling salesman. After a while it was normal for him not to be home.

But from '42 to '44, I saw him infrequently. I did see him but infrequently. We would get a call or a visit or a letter that said on Tuesday at 3:00, he will be at such and such a railroad station to be gone for a day, a week, or an indeterminant period of time. He would be out for a week, home for a week, out for a day. Always in Hungary. It's not really that big. Anywhere a couple of hours by train. So I had very limited contact with him at that time.

>> Bill Benson: Tell us what the Arrow Cross was.

>> Manny Mandel: The Arrow Cross is the symbol, crossed arrows, is a symbol as opposed to the swastika, is the symbol of the Hungarian political party. In Germane it was a political party that had heavy impact on the Army and the government. In Hungary, it wasn't such an Army. It had less impact. It was a ruling philosophy of an anti-Semitic nature.

>> Bill Benson: And the anti-Semitism began to increase and more and more restrictions were imposed on Jews, what were some of the restrictions you recall?

>> Manny Mandel: The restrictions on a kid were very limited. Let me say it in two parts. Part one would be the air raid that happened once, twice, three times a night, were a major impact. Even I could understand the next morning when I go to school, the building next door to me may be gone. There was significant damage in Budapest. It was bombed early by the Russians and later by the Allies coming from two directions.

But most of the other things did not have impact on me specifically, for example, the restrictions in jobs, restrictions in some travel, restrictions in which you could and couldn't shop, but I didn't do the shopping so I would not have been bothered by that in any direct sense.

>> Bill Benson: You told me, I thought, a very poignant story in that as a kid, like any kid, you wanted a bicycle but your father wouldn't let you have one.

>> Manny Mandel: Well, I had a trike, like an overgrown tricycle. My father said there were two reasons he blocked the possibility. One I will handle, one I will not. What I can handle is what I said, I lived in an apartment building on the fifth floor which was 50 years old. It had an elevator which was also 50 years old. And on many occasions, that elevator had parts that would break down and the parts that were to replace them were manufactured in factories that would do ammunition and guns and stuff. And elevator parts for my building were kind of low on the priority list. So it was out of service perhaps as much as it was in service.

When we had to go to air raid shelters every night, five stories down, five stories up. I could not carry a bike five stories down because in Europe you ride in the park, not in the backyard which you don't have. He was a strong gentleman in his 30s so he would truck the bike down and back up.

But there was a second problem. All of us, one of the restrictions was we wore a Yellow Star to be identified. I thought the star was a major mark of heroism because

after all, I was 6 years old or 7 and I wore a star just like the adults did. I then discovered that it was true this bicycle experience I began to discover that this was not so much a mark of heroism but a target that could be attacked in some way.

My father said to me, if we go to the park and you ride the bike with the Yellow Star and you are out of my sight, someone might have the notion -- because it happened in other place -- to whack you on the head. Not to steal the bike, they don't want the bike, just because you are a target and it's open season on these kinds of things. And for that reason, you don't have a bike. I was very upset by that.

But you have to understand that this heroism notion of the Yellow Star to identify me as a Jew was not a mark of heroism but a mark of targeting for possible mayhem. That was a particular experience that began me to teach what was going on. I can add when we came to this country in 1949, I was 13 years old. And one of the very first things my parents did when I came home from school one day, they said we are going to the department store, something we don't have anymore. What are we going to buy? A bicycle. So I had -- and I treasured that bicycle. I think it lived with my in my bedroom, I polished it four times a year. It was a Schwinn for those of you old enough to remember Schwinn bicycles.

>> Bill Benson: Do you remember going to school? What was school like?

>> Manny Mandel: I went to a parochial school, a Jewish day school which happened to be three or four blocks from my house.

My apartment was on the corner of two streets, this one and this one. And my parent's bedroom was on the corner. From the bedroom, you could see the school. Maybe four blocks away, three blocks away. Yet, I'm told on many occasions, perhaps every day, somebody would follow me to school because that Yellow Star in first grade was an absolute invitation to be whacked on the head. Again, they are not going to rob me of my money or my wallet or my driver's license. But they were going to whack me on the head because it was open season on that kind of mayhem. And it did happen, not to me but it did happen.

>> Bill Benson: In December 1941, your family had a truly horrifying experience while you were visiting your aunt in another city. Tell us about that.

>> Manny Mandel: That was my very first experience beginning to understand particularly in recollection what this was all about. I'm 5 1/2 years old in the winter of '41. As I said to you, my mother grew up in northern Yugoslavia which was southern Hungary. And my grandparents and aunts lived there. My mother had two sisters and three brothers but they were no longer living there.

In any case, we go down to a city called Novi Sad, in those days many cities had multiple names because it depends on which country they belonged in in a certain time. Novi Sad is a Serbian name.

We go there by train. It's about 3, 3 1/2 hours south of Budapest by train. We stay at my aunt's house. My mother's younger sister. It's very nice. I don't remember exactly what we did. But I do recall that my aunt's husband had a cook factory. I was taken to the factory to be given a tour. I was interested to see what kind of products they make out of cork. I'm not sure it's significant. My uncle died and the factory went.

One morning, perhaps three days after we were there, somebody comes up the stairs and says there's something going on in the street. Policeman come up and say

knock, knock, ladies and gentlemen, you need to dress warmly because you have to be outside. We have to do a census. Now, it's winter. It's not bitter but it's winter and it's cold. The Germans or the Hungarians, but the ruling government, was going to count Jews every 20 minutes, I think. Now a census in this country they did every ten years. There they did with great frequency, on the assumption, perhaps a correct one, if you count people and know where they are, you can control their movement and what they do and where they are.

So we were to come outside, my mother, my father, my aunt and we were on the street on the sidewalk. We were told to turn left and start walk can in that direction. We had no idea why. We walked for some time, a couple, three hours maybe. I know my mother carried me, my father carried me and I also walked. I was 5 1/2 years old. I was a little guy.

We walked to a place I recognized. On our left -- on our right was the major street, and on the left was an 8-foot stocking fence. Now, for those of you who may have been in Europe and you may know this, European cities which are not on the ocean or a big lake use rivers to make beaches out of them in the summertime. This city is on the Danube River, south of Budapest. It flows from Germany into the Black Sea through Budapest and Yugoslavia.

I remember the place because that summer, perhaps two months or three months before, I had been there. And inside the fence, about 300 yards away from the fence, are hot pools and cold pools and wave pools and restaurants and amusement parks. A very nice place in the summertime. This is December. The place is shut down because this is -- you know, this is not beach weather.

As we are all marching, kind of walking slowly, my grandparents had arrived. Somebody brought them by truck. And we were huddled together perhaps a dozen people or so and we were walking slowly in this direction. Again, in the direction -- and we notice the gates to this place turn in towards the river. We still have no idea what's going on.

There's some noise which was very identifiable, we didn't know it. As we get somewhat closer -- I don't know how far we were at this point, 50 feet, 100 yards. A policeman is standing on the right and he says to my father, mister, what are you doing here? He says I'm here with my family. He said, that's not the point.

The point is that I know that you don't live here. You live in Budapest and I know that because I'm a foot patrolman in your district. And I have seen you on the street any number of times so I know that you live there. So being here and being counted in this crowd would mess up the numbers. Can't do that. Step aside.

My father and my mother and our little group steps aside. I'm sure it was a matter of absolute coincidence. As we are stepping aside, a minute or two later, literally a minute to two, the staff comes down the road, a uniformed soldier comes out, has a pow-wow with his patrolmen and says the requirement of the census has been met. There is a school over there and you are welcome to get hot chocolate or coffee and go home. If you are bewildered, can you imagine how bewildered we were. We go home to my aunt's house. No idea what happened. The phone calls start to come in. We had phones. My aunt calls and she says where were you, we had plans. We tell her.

The policeman comes to the door and said I would do a census. I would do

what I would normally do. My aunt invited them in and gave them coffee and cake. 17 cakes, 19 coffees, and they had the best breakfast coffee in their life. They asked three questions and they left. And my aunt said, what's going on? I didn't go to the beach. I didn't go to the stockade fence. The experience of those people if I had made that left turn was a much more horrible one.

The government, in fact, took canon with which they cracked the ice in the Danube which was yay thick. All those who, in fact, made a left turn were shot into the river, never to be found again or if they were found, they were found floating underneath the ice in Belgrade about an hour away the next March or whenever the river thawed out. This is a Pogrom, a senseless, useless, valueless experience that people can do because they can do it and you can't stop them.

Something that happened -- this was retribution for that. And 350 people were killed in the Pogrom of Novi Sad of 1941. I didn't quite understand what that meant but I can describe the story I just did.

The next morning, I only tell you about because this is something I do remember and meaning to me. My father calls for a taxi to go back to Budapest. Somehow, folks, when there is a catastrophe around you, what you want to do is go home. My grandparents with my aunts, I was perfectly safe but this was not home. Home was in Budapest.

My father calls for a taxi and a one horse-power taxi shows up. Can you guess what that would be? My daughter. She is cheating. A one horse-power taxi is a sleigh. There's snow on the ground. The regular taxis had engines in them as well. But this is what showed up and that's what I remember because, again, for 5 1/2-year-old that's an adventure. 350 people killed doesn't have that much meaning but a sleigh -- a horse-drawn sleigh to go to the train station is an adventure.

>> Bill Benson: Manny, I'm going to have us jump now more than two years to March 1944 when Germany occupied Hungary and, of course, things changed profoundly, dramatically, and almost instantly. Tell us what brought the Germans in at that stage because they hadn't occupied Hungary up until that point and then what happened from there.

>> Manny Mandel: In 1942 in Berlin, in a place called Wannsee, there was a conference called by the chief SS officer, a general in the Eastern Front of the German war. He called for a conference where they came up with the particulars for the final solution to the Jewish problem. It's a phrase that you should know. Obviously the final solution was extermination.

They appointed a man to be the person who, in fact, run this is project, this issue. His name was Adolf Eichmann. Some of you may know the name. I'll get to some stories about him a little bit later. But Eichmann, in fact, did a very effective job. He is a midlevel officer in the Army, lieutenant colonel. And he, in fact, cleared the Jews from all of the countries of Europe and sends him to various extermination and concentration camps. You know some of the names of Auschwitz, Birkenau and so forth.

Since Hungary is an Ally of Germany, he does not come to Hungary. He comes to Hungary -- well, doesn't come then. He comes to Hungary last. Now, '44, March of '44 is very, very late in the war. You remember the D Day is June of '44. The war is over in May of '45. So this is if you want to talk in terms of, again, football context, this is fourth

quarter.

He comes to Budapest on the 19th of March, 1944. And the significance there incidentally is the fact that today I asked the people in the museum why they asked me to do "First Person" today. They said because the 17th of March today is not reminiscent to Saint Patty's Day, it's reminiscent that the Germans came to Budapest where I was on the 17th.

But in any case on the 19th of March, Eichmann arrives. As soon as he arrives -- I mean, as soon as some issues happen, the deportation from Budapest begin at the rate of 12,000 a day. Now, I don't know where you folks are from, but also when I speak to groups I find people from smaller communities where 12,000 represents the whole city or the whole town or represents their school. And that was the size of the deportation beginning immediately within days of the 19th of March, 1944.

>> Bill Benson: What happened to your family when Eichmann arrived? Actually, what prompted them to come into Hungary at that point?

>> Manny Mandel: It was the last one that had not been cleared.

>> Bill Benson: But there had been some political change in Hungary, right?

>> Manny Mandel: That was perhaps the least significant of the reason. They were coming as a consequence -- and in relation to that, the Ally connection with Germany ceased and the Horthy, the region of Hungary, was no longer in charge and the charge came from the Hungarian fascist government, the Arrow Cross.

But what happened to us is that almost as soon as Eichmann arrives two men from kind of a subgenerated rescue committee, as they call themselves, insist on approaching Eichmann. Ladies and gentlemen, you need to understand you don't just go up to the Majestic Hotel and say I want to speak to Adolf Eichmann. I'm not trying to compare the two. If I was in Rome and I want to see the Pope, I couldn't quite walk up to the Vatican and say "I want to see the Pope." These people insisted and thank God they did.

The leader of this twosome was a Hungarian Jewish attorney from the Romanian part of Hungary, the City of Kluche called Kunszentniklos. Again, multiple names. Who began to discussion with Eichmann a proposition that is about as ridiculous as it could be, this was it.

If Eichmann will release a million Jews, a million Jews from the various camps, they will supply him with 10,000 trucks with certain material, tea, coffee and other kinds of things for the German war. Now, the problem was many fold besides the fact that it couldn't happen. But the point was that Eichmann didn't have million people to release. There were no million people anymore. Most had been killed.

Secondly, these guys had about as much opportunity to have 10,000 trucks. They did have a bicycle pump or a hubcap, not 10,000 trucks.

>> Bill Benson: It was a completely audacious proposal.

>> Manny Mandel: Absolutely absurd. And they knew it. One of the two, in fact, is sent -- he sent through Turkey to go to Egypt to talk to the British High Command to discuss trucks. He's arrested in Syria. Spends the rest of his war in jail in Cairo as a spy, survives the war but nothing happens.

The point of this absurdity at least was the beginning of a possibility. The negotiations continued and continued. And do understand that these negotiations did not

begin with Eichmann. They were all the way up to Goering, Heydrich, Himmler. He was number three in the German government. There was a man name by Himmler, the head of SS. He was directly involved. But the whole thing had to do with the fact that Nazi government leadership kind of smelled the fact that the issues of the war were not going in their favor. This was around D Day already. The only last instance was the Battle of the Bulge. The point was they kind of smelled the end. They were looking to find a way in some way do something for their life after the war.

As a side bar, I will tell you that Eichmann, in fact, is not arrested. He is arrested but he also escapes. And he winds up -- anybody know where he winds up? Eichmann? He was captured by the Israel Secret Service many years later in Argentina. He didn't necessarily go to Argentina with our valuables that were collected because the trucks could not be made available. Money was collected, significant money from all over the world for a group of 1700 people to be taken in the 35-car train from Budapest. I will tell you about that in one minute after I finish Eichmann.

Eichmann and his henchmen and the others used the valuable to establish lives for themselves. You might know Dr. Mengele who did all the experimentation in Auschwitz. He also ends in Argentina. He was captured and taken to Israel and tried and hanged. That's the point, that's how these people found their ways and many others whom they never found after the war with the kind of stuff they would collect from these 1700 people.

The selection of these 1700 people was a very complex issue. Everybody in Hungary certainly whoever had any interest in that land over there called then-Palestine which became Israel held various kinds of certificates for contributions made to the Jewish National Fund. This is an organization which bought lands and which settlements could be started in the early 1900s and through the '20s and '30s. For reasons I cannot explain, the German government accepted these certificates as proof of our being displaced persons during the war. And they served as exit visas for this 1700 group.

Folks, if you have ever seen a three-dollar bill, this is one of them, a three-dollar bill. We were to be taken to a neutral point and dispatched from Europe because Hitler's position was to get Jews out of Germany, out of Europe, and then out of the world. He didn't get to the third part.

We were placed in this trailer of 35 cars. 1700 people, maybe 50 or 60 people to a car depending and transported north. The leadership of this group did not know where we were going and which port we were going to.

As it happens, we found ourselves not far from Hannover in a concentration camp, not a killing camp but concentration camp called Bergen-Belsen. We were told this would be a three-day R&R, rest and recuperation, stopped before we boarded the ships. After six weeks of R&R, about 350 people were taken by the Germans as part of the negotiations and taken to Switzerland. Guess what, I wasn't one of them. I stayed a full 5 1/2 months.

>> Bill Benson: Your father was not with you.

>> Manny Mandel: No, I will talk about that in a second.

My mother, my father -- my uncle and I, my father's younger brother and I were, in fact, taken out of Germany by German troops, Rickety old troop trains and taken to Switzerland. My war was over at this time. This is December 1944. The war ends on

May 8th, 1945. I will comment about that later.

My father is in labor camp as he had been from '42 on. He could not -- because he didn't have the choice of joining us. Had he been able to join us, we would have found space for him. He does survive the war. We meet later in 1946. So from '42 to '44, I see him intermittently. From '44 to '46, I don't see him at all. After those years we had to reestablish a relationship because there's a difference with being 8 and being 12, or 7 and 11 or whatever. So we did meet up.

>> Bill Benson: What were your conditions like because you were part of a select group, if you will, in Bergen-Belsen?

>> Manny Mandel: Because we are part of a celeb group, we were the golden eggs laid by the goose. We were the hostages. If they killed us, they would have nothing to negotiate with. I mean, they would not have gotten the monies which were given in suitcases. The valuables here were things you could carry in a suitcase.

Money was not an issue because the only valuable money that existed in Europe then were the American dollars and the British pound sterling which nobody had. But jewelry of every kind and gold and silver, rubies, whatever else had intrinsic value were the barter, negotiation funds that were used.

If they had begun to kill us or killed us totally, which they could have done, they would not have been able to get this. And that would have been a disaster for them.

As a consequence, although we had all the amenities that Bergen-Belsen provided, we did not go to work. Now, an 8-year-old wouldn't have gone to work anyhow. But we were in these barracks, in these compounds. These were the Hungarian compound where we were all by ourselves. So there was the advantage of having a slightly easier life but the difficulties of the kind of weather in Germany, the kind of daily census we had to do, three, four hours in the mud. The kind of no food or lack of food which was typical for Bergen-Belsen. So the conditions -- the sanitation situation was horrible.

We had showers periodically, hot showers. And we didn't know the hot showers were in our case hot water. In the case of Auschwitz was gas. But what I'm saying is the conditions in Bergen-Belsen were horrible but terrible in the sense that we survived.

>> Bill Benson: I was struck when we first met and you told me about that, about that part of your experience, that there were these attempts to really try to create a sense of normalcy in Bergen-Belsen in the Hungarian compound. Say a bit about that.

>> Manny Mandel: Folks, the will to survive is a very powerful one. When we got to Bergen-Belsen, we had been told to pack some food and whatever for the journey to the boots, which we never got to.

One of the things that some of us knew about, maybe all of us knew about -- I don't mean I but the adults, but when you take tin cans and you use them, you can boil them and clean them and put fresh food in them and take them to a factory that we knew about that could reseal them so they would be somewhat protected from botulism and things like that. My mother had some of these with her. And so did others.

After we used the food, the supplemental food and very carefully rationed, people decided what they should do with these tin cans is not recycle them in the way we recycle but to cut them up and make jewelry out of it.

You take a tin can and you make earrings or bracelets or necklaces because

you have the skill to do it. Now how you had tools to do it I will never know. But, for example, the cobbler had shoe-making repair tools. You could trade a pair of earrings for shoes which you could then trade for two cigarettes for something else. This kind of business and commerce began under the conditions of Bergen-Belsen strictly as a sign of survival. People needed shoes repaired if they possibly could or a haircut or half a dozen other kinds of things that you could do. These were all attempts by the people there to in some way establish kind of a daily life for them that would be reminiscent of the time before this situation took place.

>> Bill Benson: You got very ill while you were there, as I recall.

>> Manny Mandel: Everybody has two sets of lungs. But I had triple pneumonia. I don't know how you do that. The problem with pneumonia, which had to do with sanitation and being outside and bugs and so forth, the problem was there's no treatment available for it. Today pneumonia is cured very quickly. First of all, you have pneumonia-preventing vaccine shot. I just got my second shot two days ago because my doctor said I should. But the point there were no treatments then because the antibiotics which were just being invented, Fleming came up with Penicillin in the early '40s. And I guarantee you the first place it was tested was not in the concentration camps.

So there was nothing they could do. We had 35 physicians in the group. There's nothing they could do except diagnose, yes, you have pneumonia. When you cough, it's going to be painful. All they could do is do some Palliative medicine. It doesn't do a thing but it makes you feel better. They used mustard plasters. Anybody hear of it? My family can't talk.

(laughter).

Well, you get some kind of heavy material -- I know where they found it -- and you get some mustard seed and you soak it in water and you soak this cloth in mustard and you put it -- they put it on my like a dressing. Now, it functions as Bengay or Vick's. It heats the body. It doesn't cure the pneumonia. But while you have the pneumonia, it makes you feel better. That's why it's call palliative medicine. They did that to me about six weeks. Obviously I survived because the body cured itself and I was healthy from that point on. But for six weeks, I was flat on my back.

>> Bill Benson: As you told us earlier in December of 1944, for you, the war was effectively over when you made it to Switzerland to a neutral country. And as you also said, your father was not with you.

Tell us where -- he was in the labor camps. But when he got out of the labor camps, what did he do when he returned to Budapest? And did he know anything about about you?

>> Manny Mandel: Not when he returned. He returned to Budapest before Budapest's liberation, quote-unquote, by the Russians which was a peculiar kind of liberation. It eliminated the Nazis but created other problems.

My father's youngest brother was with us in camp. He was instrumental get can us into the group. His named was David. And my wife and I decided if we have a son, his name would be David. And David is sitting right over there.

My father was -- by the time that we left Hungary, he was no longer in territorial Hungary, he and his group went into Ukraine for similar work. In '44 as the war was moving in reverse for the Nazis, the guards and the other kinds of restrictions were kind

of -- not lifted but they disappeared.

My father and about 20 other men in his particular platoon, brigade, command, whatever it is, decided to walk away. They walked from the Ukraine back to Budapest.

They walked at night. They slept during the day. They stole food wherever they could. They cooked the food in exhaust of trucks. They did what they could to survive. My father is back in Hungary and the Nazis were still there. He had some affiliation with a noteworthy man, Raul Wallenberg who issued Swiss exit visas. He issued these Visas which were about as valuable as a three-dollar bill. But the Germans accepted them. And they used three-dollar bill again for the same reason. And those that could find the way to get out of Hungary were able to survive because of Wallenberg's involvement. For those of you who came to the museum this morning, if you didn't come on the 14th street side but on the 15th street side where the plaza is, that's called Raul Wallenberg place in honor him to have a two-block area. Fifteenth street was renamed Raul Wallenberg in honor of him who was very instrumental.

My father was in peripheral contact with him. He lived -- he found our apartment. And he was able to locate the man who was involved in negotiations. This Hungarian Jewish lawyer by the name of Kasztner. He was able to after some difficulties to get Kasztner to tell him that we were, in fact, are in Bergen-Belsen. Because the group of special nature was traceable through the Red Cross. They knew where we were. Couldn't contact us when we left Bergen-Belsen. And they talked about the fact we went from Switzerland were placed in a children's home, like a boarding school. You saw a picture of it. You had to be somewhere.

My mother was a teacher there. She was assigned to that place because there had to be somebody there who spoke Hungarian to us and could speak German or French to the rest of the administration. My mother had very good German from school and she had passable French. The leadership of the school of the Heiden School was a German Jew by the name of Miller whom we later met in Philadelphia. But the point is she was there, she was able to take some trips -- she was paid a salary. She looked up a colleague of my father's, a cantor, with whom my father studied in Vienna.

As a Swiss citizen, he could make contact. My mother corresponded with him and corresponded to Noi and Noi talked to my mother. That was the contact that established we were alive. We couldn't go to where we were and he couldn't come to where we were. He did say when the opportunity came up, we should come back to Hungary which my mother refused. She said she will never set foot in Hungary ever again and she didn't.

She decided this is the original notion of the trip was to go to Palestine on these boats. That's what she would do. She had no idea what Palestine but that's what she would do. We went to Palestine in September 1945 on a British troop ship. We were living there. My father joined us there in 1946.

>> Bill Benson: The war ended on a significant date.

>> Manny Mandel: You want my comments on that?

>> Bill Benson: Yes, I do.

>> Manny Mandel: Maybe there's three very important reasons for existing. The war ended. It is the birthday of the President of the United States in that year. You recall who that was? It was not Roosevelt. Roosevelt died in April and the President after

15 minutes becomes Harry Truman. I don't remember the year he was born. But we have the war ending on May 8th, Harry Truman's birthday and, of course, my birthday is on May 8th. The three important reasons for celebration of the war, Harry and I.

(laughter).

>> Bill Benson: So your family got reunited in Palatine, in Israel. What did your family do to try to resume life?

>> Manny Mandel: My mother got a job being kind of a caretaker for a child. My father got a job at a cantor. And my father had a particular thought in life. My father, as I said to you before, came from a family of seven. Two of the women died before I was born of various diseases in 1930 or '31.

The third sister came to the United States in 1914. My grandfather who was not very successful decided that if my Aunt Helen, the oldest of his children, were to come to Philadelphia to live with a cousin that would reduce his burden at home. And she did. She came to Philadelphia, married in Philadelphia, had three children. Lived to be 90-some years old and had a very nice life.

But my father's one brother, his youngest brother David, was with us. Two other brothers died during the war. So my father decided that what he would like to do in 1947 is come to the States to visit his sister who he hadn't seen since 1914. It was such a long time but my eldest aunt never met my younger uncle. He was born after she left.

My father came to Philadelphia, visits with my aunt and was able to make some arrangements which gave -- which was an idea that was suggested to him that maybe what he ought to do is stay here and bring us over, which eventually after certain kinds of negotiations he was able to do.

>> Bill Benson: How old were you when you arrived?

>> Manny Mandel: 1913 -- 1913. (laughter).

I was 13.

>> Bill Benson: My last question of you before we have time for a few questions from our audience, 13 years old, all that you had been through in Hungary and then Switzerland and then to Palestine.

>> Manny Mandel: Which becomes Israel.

>> Bill Benson: While you are there.

>> Manny Mandel: I went from war to war.

>> Bill Benson: And now you arrive in the United States. What was that like for you as a 13-year-old boy?

>> Manny Mandel: Well, besides it being fascinating and bewildering, it was also one more adjustment I had to make. And I'll tell you about one part of that adjustment.

I mean, the subway in New York which is where we lived for the first year was unusual. Budapest has the second-oldest subway in the world. Skyscrapers, Venetian blinds, they used to be Chiclet machine in the subway stations for a nickel, that was very interesting.

The one thing that was a major adjustment was that my English was literally non-existent. English was taught from the fifth grade on in Israel, in Palestine until one day the teacher comes in, if you know something about the history, you know that the British were not our friends. The teacher comes in who was trained in England and says, okay, as of tomorrow, we are no longer going to study English. Terrific. We're going to

study American.

(laughter).

So my English and my American was not particularly strong. Left a lot to be desired.

Now, to arrive some place and not know the language is difficult. And I can illustrate by it by something. But there were bright people around. My parents were looking for a school. They thought of a parochial school. That didn't work out because they decided because of my English I should be in third grade. Now, it's not the question of what grade you're in but a third grader and seventh grader and have little in common in many ways. If you know anything about the development of people, the age of third grade and the age of seventh is quite different.

We then discovered that the apartment we had sublet for the summer was a block away from PS number 3 in New York. For you New Yorkers, it's in the village. It's off Hudson Street which is the end of 8th Avenue around Saint Christopher's. We walked to the school. My parent's English was not much better. My father had the best having been here for a year. We talked to the principal about what we're going to do.

We came up with a brilliant recommendation but it was an adjustment. He said, okay, the kid's in seventh grade. We will put him in the seventh grade. We have 7A and 7B. If he was able to pick up enough language in 7B, we'll put him in eighth grade. If not, we'll keep him in 7th grade which makes good sense. However, since we are teaching Spanish in 7th grade, we will excuse him from Spanish and give him an extra study hall so we can learn some more English. That was another adjustment I had to make.

>> Bill Benson: And adjust you did. And here we are today in 2016.

>> Manny Mandel: And I learned some English. (laughter).

>> Bill Benson: Very effectively.

We have time for just one or two questions from our audience. If you have a question, we will have a microphone handed to you so wait until you have a mic. You will make your question as short as you can, and I'll repeat it just to be sure that all of us, including Manny and the audience, hears the question. So I think we can do one or two questions.

Anybody have a question they would like to ask?

>> Manny Mandel: Not all at once. (laughter).

>> Bill Benson: We got one, I think -- there's a hand right there. There we go. Thank you.

>> Do I need to stand up?

>> Bill Benson: No, you're fine.

>> Thank you. I was just trying to see you. (laughter).

Sir, I don't know if you know anything about the rhetoric that was going on in Europe and Hungary and that kind of thing in the 1930s or whatever or if you studied those. Is there any similarities in the rhetoric against the Jews that went on then as to some of the rhetoric that seems to be happening in the United States today?

>> Manny Mandel: I heard.

>> Bill Benson: You heard the question. To the extent that you feel comfortable answering that.

>> Manny Mandel: It's very difficult. First of all, I'm not an expert in it.

I would say this, unfortunately rhetoric sounds similar. But the goals of the

rhetoric are quite different. No place in the history of the world that I know of and anybody in this room -- I would be willing to be challenged -- can talk about the fact that rhetoric was designed for extermination. Now, there's an enormous difference between the goal being extermination and the goal being all kinds of other acts, good, bad and otherwise. What I'm saying is the words may sound alike but the goal of the words was unique to that period of time. And today's words don't have that as a goal. I hope I have responded as well as I could.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you.

I think we may have one more question. The lights are so bright hard to see out in the back.

No hands, I think we're good to go. We're going to conclude the program in just a moment. I want to first thank all of you for being here. Remind you that we will do "First Person" programs twice a week, Wednesdays and Thursdays, through the middle of August. We will soon begin live streaming a number of the programs, I think, beginning in April. So you will be able to pick them up through the Internet and we think that's a very exciting development. Programs will be heard anywhere for that matter. So join us one way or the other. Come back here or listen over the Internet if you can.

It's our tradition at "First Person" that our "First Person" gets the last word. So I'm going to turn back to Manny to close our program. When he finishes, Manny will stay up on the stage here. Our photographer Joel is going to come up on the stage and take a photograph and we'll ask you to rise because he's going to take a picture with you as the background to the photograph. Because we didn't have time for more questions, absolutely feel free when we finish to come up on stage and talk with Manny, ask him another question or just shake his hand if you want to do that. So we welcome you to come up here and do that when we close the program.

Manny?

>> Manny Mandel: In my presentation to you folks and answers to those questions, I said things like this many times. I said I don't know if you know, you should know, you should remember. Working here at the museum for a good number of years now, I find that the knowledge of history is abominable. It's a big ward but that's what it is. What I would like to call your attention the words of a philosopher, historian about a hundred years ago. Remember his words, those who do not learn their history well may be deemed or doomed to repeat it or parts of it. And if any of you remember who that was, I will remind you. It was a member of George Santayana who was teaching in California at the time of Italian extraction.

I leave you with the words that say, folks, since we cannot learn from the future but we can learn from the past, learn the past, learn history, all kinds of history, Holocaust, United States, or anything else because it's the only thing we can learn from to impact the future. I leave you with that thought.

>> Bill Benson: Thank you, Manny.

(applause)