HMS Al Miller FINAL

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**SPEAKERS**

Fred Miller, Jackie Congedo, Al Miller, Bella Ouziel, Barb Miller, Trinity Johnson, Elisha Wiesel, Lisa MacVittie, Sarah Weiss

**Lisa MacVittie** 00:00

I'm the last survivor of the Holocaust in our family.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:04

Behind the words pictures and artifacts in the museum are people whose stories of survival and hope come alive to inspire new generations of upstanders. One by one, these stories stir the soul.

**Al Miller** 00:19

Can there really be hope for us?

**Bella Ouziel** 00:21

 Mine was 40018. My sister was 40017.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:29

Holocaust survivors, their descendants, liberators, champions of justice and courageous upstanders. Ask only this, hear my story, so that the lessons they teach will echo for generations.

**Elisha Wiesel** 00:42

I will never meet someone else like my father. But there are many of us who if we come together, can keep his voice alive.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:50

These stories will change you. They will move you to action, inspiring the best of humanity every day.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:01

I'm Jackie Congedo. And on this episode, we have Fred and Barb Miller, the Son and Daughter in law of Dr. Al Miller. Al was born in Germany, but at only 15 years old, as things got worse for German Jews, he left for Switzerland. When he and his family were able to emigrate to the United States years later, an American immigration officer showed him grace after Al realized he'd misplaced his immigration papers. With newfound gratitude and confidence, Al joined the US army and became a Ritchie boy, one of less than 2000 German Jewish soldiers trained to camp Richie and later sent to Germany to interrogate suspected Nazi war criminals. Prior to his death and 2023, at the age of 100, Al made it his daily mission to impart his story and the life lessons learned to make the world a better place. It's our honor to share his story here. Hosting the conversation is Holocaust & Humanity Center's Trinity Johnson, who is also a longtime friend of the Miller family.

**Al Miller** 01:59

We look at the Statue of Liberty. Is it real? Can there really be hope for us? By that time, I lived in five countries over a period of three and a half years. That's how long it took to become the United States. I lived in Switzerland and Belgium and Holland and then England, Germany of course. And, and in none of those countries was I welcome. Now here the Statue of Liberty. How would our arrival be greeted in United States? We weren't so sure. We were hoping, symbolized by the Statue of Liberty. Okay, so the we arrive in New York and the immigration officer establishes himself in one of the cabins. Everybody goes through that eventually our turn comes. This is the first real American that I'd seen. Ever. And I wonder if they all look like that. He had what it is but let's say what kind of a hat he had on? The straw straw hat flat straw hat okay. And then shirt opened down to here. Cigarette dangling in his mouth. Feet on the desk, very very informal, very, very polite, very, very nice. And it turned out helpful. And we were not used to that from any of... in any country and Europe. None whatsoever. They were all... this one okay.

**Al Miller** 03:44

So he says May I have your papers please? My parents give him their papers and passports whatever was needed. He said everything is fine. The my brother's turn comes and here here it is, the papers and the passport. Everything is fine. My turn comes when my papers please. I reach here, reach here, reach here, reach here. I have - I don't have them. Who took them? Why are they? Where are they? Where could they possibly be? I tell you panic sets ins quickly and powerfully. If my mother's looks could kill, I wouldn't be here. My mother was good at that. So this official of course sees all this and he talks to me and says, "Sonny, relax. In the excitement you probably left all that in your cabin. Go to your cabin. You will find it and then bring it to me. In the meantime, I'll take care of your family."

**Al Miller** 04:54

I run to the cabin. He was right. I found them among some other things. And I bring them to the official again, he says here it is, here it is. And he signs what he needs to sign. I sign what I need to sign, we're ready to go. And he stops us. And he talks to me. And this again, this is one of the things that I probably will not forget. I'm not so sure about that anymore. But I hope I will not forget. And this is what he says, "Sonny, you are now in a free country. You are in the United States of America. Make something of yourself. Get an education. Obey our laws. And if you do all that, we will be grateful to you that you came to live with us."

**Al Miller** 05:57

Let me tell you. By contrast with all these other officials that we had run across this man is a miracle. He just. He's not real. And so I don't know what to say to him. And he said, the time has come to leave and we left. And did he say anything else? No, no, no.

**Sarah Weiss** 06:30

But you talk about how those... how that sentence made an impact on your life? How did that? How did that sentence impact you? That simple sentence

**Al Miller** 06:42

How did it impact me? It made a huge difference. If they're all like that in the United States, what could go wrong?

**Trinity Johnson** 06:54

Thank you both for being here with me today. Fred Miller, the son of Dr. Al Miller and Barbara Miller, the daughter in law of Al Miller, to speak about this absolutely incredible human being's legacy and how he's impacted all of our lives so differently. As we saw in the video, that was a favorite moment of every time he told his story, one of my favorite moments. But before we really dive into that pivotal moment, Fred, I was hoping you could bring us up to speed, kind of with the rest of Al's story. Briefly tell us where he was from how they got to his family got to America. And then tell us about his life in Cincinnati.

**Fred Miller** 07:37

Okay. My father was born in Berlin in 1922. His parents were from Berlin, his grandparents were from Berlin. His family had a shirt factory that they had started in 1871. So it was 50 years in business or so by the time my father was born. My father grew up in Berlin as a child, went to school in Berlin. And of course, the Nazis came to power in 1933. So my father was only 11 and went to school. And it became very difficult for him in school. Because all his friends were Nazi youth, the teachers were Nazis. They made life very difficult for him. All he ended up being the last Jewish kid in the school. And ultimately, he was very stubborn. And he liked to play sports. And the school was big with sports. And he had some good friends who, even though they were not Jewish, and then even wore swastikas, they treated him well. So he stayed for as long as he could, but ultimately became too difficult. And he ended up leaving, and he went to boarding school in Switzerland.

**Fred Miller** 08:49

And then comes crystal night, November 8, November 9, 1938. His family, his parents had to flee their apartment. And it was a very difficult time for them because they had no place to live. His father ended up having to go went to the hospital in Berlin. He was not sick, he was not injured, there was no problems. But he went there to a Catholic hospital and said, "I need surgery." He did not need surgery. But the people at the hospital knew that one sentence or that phrase for code, which was "Shelter me." And at that time, the Nazis weren't rounding up people in hospitals and so the hospital performed unnecessary surgery on my grandfather. They took out his appendix. And unlike today, where you go in for an appendix and you're in one, one minute and you're out the next, then, it bought you two or three weeks, and then he had a second unnecessary surgery after that, I think something with his nose, and I bought him a few more weeks.

**Fred Miller** 09:56

Meanwhile, my grandmother was scrambling to get all the papers so they could leave Berlin, which she ended up being able to do. And my father met them at the train station in Belgium. That was December or so 1938. Then ultimately they went to... settled in London, England. In London at that time, my parents were or my, my grandparents were classified as enemy aliens, because they, they were not English, obviously, they were not allowed to work. No adults were allowed to work because of the economy. And it was difficult for the English themselves to earn a living much less having people come from other countries and take away jobs from the English. Big loophole was that if you were under 18, you were allowed to work. And so my father ended up getting a job at Bausch & Lomb, grinding lenses and ultimately that, that defined his career because he became an optometrist, oh, and later year. My grandmother took in sewing, she wasn't allowed to work, but she did this on the side and on the sly and brought took in sewing and they managed to cobble together somewhat of a living for the family.

**Fred Miller** 11:19

They lived in London for a year and a half. They had, my grandfather had a cousin, first cousin in New York, who had agreed to sponsor them because you couldn't just go leave England and go to another country. So he couldn't go to the United States, which had a strict quota. Plus, you had to have a sponsor, meaning somebody who would be financially responsible for you. Because, again, you didn't want people coming into the country and then being going on welfare, or we're having to rely on the government for assistance for people who are not even Americans. So you had to have somebody who was financially responsible. And my father, grandfather, his cousin agreed to do that. But it wasn't so simple. And that took quite a while to get all the paperwork together, get the approvals. The English government had told my grandparents and my, my father and his brother, already gave him a date certain I said, if you don't have anything by such and such a date, you're going to be shipped off to the Isle of Man to set out the rest of the war.

**Fred Miller** 12:29

The Isle of Man was a windswept barren island in the Irish Sea, where the refugees were housed. It was not a very pleasant place. By sheer luck, by sheer coincidence, by sheer miracle, the day that they were to be shipped out to the Isle of Man, the paperwork came from New York that the sponsorship came through and my parents and grant, my father and his brother and his parents were able to go to New York. So they sail to New York. And actually, there's a funny story with the people that watch the ship come in, and they're everybody's milling around on the dock. And my grandfather was yelling to somebody he needed to get ahold of his cousin, who was an attorney in New York. And so he's yelling over to people, "Hey, does anybody know such and such here? His name was Corran. Does anybody know this person?" And somebody yelled up, "I do. He's my lawyer." And so they were able to connect and like they were able to meet up with his cousin. My father's brother had been in the nation. And he hooked up, somebody got to got a connection with somebody who's in Mount Vernon, Ohio, who was also in the Masons. They had my uncle went to visit him and seemed to like what was going on in Ohio and ended up getting a job in Cincinnati at the Mack Shirt Company.

**Fred Miller** 14:03

As I said, my father's family had a shirt factory in Berlin and my grand, my uncle had been groomed to take over the operation. So he knew pretty much all aspects of everything that's on the map, cutting the shirts and behind the scenes and the business. So he ended up getting the shirt at the max Shirt Company. He liked it in Cincinnati. And so he told my grandparents and my father and they ended up joining him in Cincinnati. All later, my father went to optometric school... in Northern College of Optometry and Illinois in Chicago, became an optometrist. And then he also joined the United States Army.

**Fred Miller** 14:53

He was still a German citizen. He was not a United States and American citizen so they had to hurry up. He couldn't be in the army without being a citizen, so he had to hurry up. And usually it takes a long period of time to to become a citizen, but they, they rushed it through, so he could be in the army. And then ultimately he was they were training him to be a medic. He was a staff sergeant. And one day he was part of his duties were to drive a Jeep and drive somewhere and saw somebody of higher rank around, maybe a major, I don't know what the person's rank was, but somebody who he was not allowed to talk to him was only allowed to drive him around. My father knew that he had this talent of knew German perfectly, of course, and knew the German mind and so on there, but he didn't know... nobody was had asked him about it, nobody had sought to make use of that.

**Fred Miller** 15:55

One day he was driving this major around, and the Jeep shut, broke down for whatever reason. And my father, not very mechanical, well, and I have taken after him with that trait

**Barb Miller** 16:10

as your brother.

**Fred Miller** 16:11

And both of my brothers and none of us are mechanical. But the major said, Hey, soldier, you have to get this fixed. And so my father didn't know what to do. So he went to the... opened up the hood and tinkered around a little bit with stuff and just touching and pushing and pulling. And didn't know, so he puts the hood back down, gets back in the jeep, turns the key and thank God it started and started right up for reasons he has no idea no didn't know why. And he the major said, damn good job soldier. And my father, who was it was strictly forbidden. You don't you do not talk to superior officers. But my father thought, Well, now's an opening, maybe take a chance and say, you know, major, whatever. I'm German or come from Germany, and I have a knowledge of the German culture and so on. Of course, my father didn't know anything about the Ritchie boys at that time. He just said maybe you might want to make use of take advantage of my knowledge and my abilities, and got the major didn't say another word, and nothing happened. But then a few months later, my father got notice to report to Camp Ritchie, which is where he ended up learning counter espionage, and map reading and interrogation techniques.

**Fred Miller** 17:40

And he, my father always liked to say, I remember initially, they... he was a medic, and they taught him how to save people. Then they gave him a gun, and they taught him how to kill people. And so he became a Ritchie boy, which was this secret camp in... Ritchie, Maryland, near Hagerstown, near the Pennsylvania border, where people were recruited, who had knowledge of Japanese and Japanese because their Japanese were also recruited for similar version, but for the German culture, and counter espionage and recruited to go back to Germany and assist the American forces and the and the British forces to go over tattered documents and secret code, and try to figure out what the Germans were up to from these documents, and try to explain to the Americans and the British in terms they could understand what they believe the German mentality was doing what the Germans are up to. Now, my father didn't go to back to Germany, he was sent back to Germany after the war in 1945. Still a Staff Sergeant. And his job was to interrogate prisoners.

**Fred Miller** 19:01

And he always liked to say, one minute before the war ended, everybody was a Nazi, one minute after the war ended, nobody was a Nazi. But so it was his job to try to ferret out people who have they're telling him the truth that they really had nothing to do with anything other than being recruited as a soldier, or did they have are they more complicit in what was going on? And he had 15-20 minutes to write a report, pass it on to his superiors with his recommendation that this person needs more interviews or just let let the person go as a regular prisoner of war. It was interesting because he was a lowly Staff Sergeant, which is pretty low on the totem pole. But they gave him a uniform that had no insignia whatsoever. So you couldn't tell from his uniform what rank he was, because it would not be unusual for him to interrogate higher ranking Nazis or higher ranking German soldiers, who if they knew that he was a Staff Sergeant, they wouldn't bother to talk to him even though they were had been captured, and were prisoners of war. So they didn't know that he was really a Staff Sergeant. And so that was one of the techniques that they use to get them to talk.

**Fred Miller** 20:19

Later after he left the army. He ended up meeting my my mom, it was a blind date. They had met each other 5, 6, 7 times before they got married in 1951. It was a true match made in heaven because they ended up being married close to 70 years before my mother passed away in 2020. They ended up moving to Hamilton, Ohio, where I was... I wasn't born in Hamilton. I was born in Toledo. But my two brothers were born in Hamilton, I have a brother Randy, and a brother Ron, who were, we grew up in Hamilton. And it was a very nice childhood, very nice life that my parents had made for us.

**Fred Miller** 21:08

In Hamilton, my father, who was the ultimate outsider coming from Germany, integrated and my mom as well too, so I don't want to... She was very part and crucial part of it. They integrated themselves very well into Hamilton society. My father became a member of greater Hamilton Civic Theatre, which he was one of the founding members in the late 50s. put on plays and he active in any number of plays, and would be at work behind the scenes as well as my mom, for the theater, and my father was very active, and my mother in the Hamilton synagogue. At the time I was growing up there were actually two synagogues in Hamilton. And now there's one. And they were very active with that.

**Fred Miller** 21:55

And they raised the three boys. So me and my two brothers, and we have all become very successful. And they did a marvelous job with us, ultimately, and my father made the ultimate sacrifice as I, as I shared, my mom, she was 95. They had, they were still living on their own. They moved away from Hamilton, but to Mason which wasn't far away. They were living on their own. They were both driving, they lived in a condo, and they were doing very well. But my mom had fallen and broken her hip. And she had to have an operation. Everybody was concerned that she had a she had a weak heart, everybody's concerned that the operation would kill her. It didn't. But she had to go into a nursing home for rehab. And this was in the height of Covid. This happened in October of 2020. And my father, who was perfectly healthy, nothing wrong with him, went into rehab with with my mother and a nursing home so that he could act as her eyes and ears and assist her with everything. Ultimately, my mother got Covid while she was in the nursing home, and she passed away. In December 2020, my father got Covid as well. And he was definitely sick and he had double pneumonia. Fortunately, he recovered, and he lived another three and a half years or so. And he died a couple of months shy of his 101st birthday, in August 2020.

**Trinity Johnson** 23:33

Such an amazing life and both having known Janie and especially being as close as I was to Al, they're just both so missed and such a big hole and all of our hearts to not be with them. But that's why I think something like our conversation today is so important to keep that legacy alive and keep these lessons that they both taught us through their stories. So thank you for sharing that. And actually, I wanted to get back to that video. But now I have a separate question. Because you mentioned Al marrying Janie, who was also a Holocaust survivor and his family came here. And Barb you married into this family? A little bit about what was it like meeting Al and Jane the first time? Learning kind of this family history and how did that impact you over the years?

**Barb Miller** 24:28

Well, first of all, it was wonderful to marry into his family. For me it was just a very loving warm family with all the right values and from the get go. I loved both of my in laws. My father in law what I remember the very first time that Randy brought me to their home in Hamilton. He sat me down in the family room on the couch and really I thought he was using his- now that I know -Richie Boy tactics because I was definitely being interrogated... wanted to know everything you possibly could know. And but I but I got it I understood and totally Randy's mom also phenomenal interviewer she could have been a Barbara Walters I think. You could sit with my mother in law and talk to her for hours and hours about everything. And but in a totally different way total complete opposite demeanors, in my opinion. But no, and then as through the years as I certainly learned their stories. I honestly and Fred, correct me if I'm wrong. But Randy always tells me this. It wasn't until I arrived on the scene that I was the one who started asking them questions.

**Barb Miller** 25:47

So I think having three sons and you know, I just it was a fascinating experience for me to hear and learn about their remarkable lives. I knew both grandmothers. When I got married, both were alive. I also heard their stories and heard their versions. They told me and and just this past year was able to return with Randy and Randy's younger brother, Ronnie, we actually went to Vienna, and actually went into the apartment where my mother in law lived and saw the town where she spent her summers. So it's been a remarkable journey. And you know, I think it their lives were so rich. They were so complete. I mean, I really it's that's a hard statement to say about most people. But they had a marriage that to this day, my daughter keeps looking for that marriage. It was a perfect marriage. And they balanced each other. And they were just incredible parents and grandparents.

**Fred Miller** 27:01

I don't want to neglect my mother's story. Well, I told my father's story, I'll just touch on my mom. She grew up in Vienna, Austria. And of course, it was very difficult... life became very difficult in Vienna as well. So my parents, my mom and her brother and her parents had to escape and they ended up going to Prague. And then from Prague. They ended up in Cleveland, Ohio, where they hated... that there was a family and other relatives took them in. And it was very generous of them. But it was a large family and they're taking in four more people. And so it was very crowded and very difficult for for, again, the outsiders. So they didn't last very long in Cleveland and ended up going back to New York. Later my mom met my father and like I said they moved to Hamilton.

**Trinity Johnson** 27:55

And it's very, it's amazing. They both had different escape stories, right, Al and Jane and found each other and married. I met Al through my work at the Holocaust & Humanity Center as a member of our speaker's bureau because he would share his story with one person, 10 people, 1000. It didn't matter how big or how small that audience was. But Janie didn't share her story publicly. And I'm wondering, what do you think it was about Al that made it so important that he took on this mission of making sure we know about the Holocaust and about his experience?

**Fred Miller** 28:36

My... neither of my parents wouldn't not talk about it. They talked about it to us as children, I Barbara said, we were young and dumb and didn't really ask many questions. But it wasn't that my parents were trying to keep it from us because they were not. I remember clearly, a lot of the stories on my father told later and as well as my mother, I was very young and I... My mother told me the story in Vienna how the Nazis had thrown dirt and whatever on the sidewalk and rounded up the Jews to make them make them clean it up with toothbrushes. And that included my mother's mother and my mother's brother, who was just a teenager at the time, and this Nazis, or not the Nazis, the German the Austrians would stand around and kick them and mock them and laugh at them and throw more dirt and just totally humiliate them. And my mother talked about that. When she when she was when I was young.

**Fred Miller** 29:35

My father also told many stories. So I haven't mentioned any of them yet today, but there were many stories I heard growing up. But he didn't formally give talks until much later in life until after he had retired. He was an optometrist until he would, I don't know how long he practiced and 40 some years I suppose. And it wasn't so until the last 10 or 15 years, that he became more and more vocal about speaking about his experiences in the Holocaust, I suppose I know Werner Coppel who was the first to, to bring it up. And my father has had known Werner for many years they met in Cincinnati. Years ago, they played soccer together, and they were colleagues. So maybe my father was inspired a little bit by what Werner was doing. And then it took on a life of its own. And he spoke well, until not long before he passed away, he would speak two or three times a week, and was energized him and gave him life and gave him spirit. And he enjoyed very much, not the fact that that to help himself physically and mentally. But he wanted to impart the message of what what happened. And he always said, I don't care. I think Barbara mentioned, I don't care if there's 100 people in the audience, I don't care if there's one person in the audience, if what I say can make an impact, then I'm happy that I've done my job.

**Trinity Johnson** 31:05

Yes. And to that point, I met Al when he was kind of at the height of his storytelling, and that two and three times a week, and even that wasn't enough, he would call me and want more and more speaking engagements. And he had such an impact on everyone who heard from him. What do you think it was about Al or his story that speaks to people so deeply?

**Barb Miller** 31:31

Well, I also think it was the timing as well. And I think we when Al did start speaking, we were living, are living, in remarkable times. I think much of his what he experienced and his message resonates with many things that are happening today. So I think that was highly impactful. I also think that Al had a way of framing things. I mean, there are certain things we can all remember certain phrases that he, you know, you I just and everyone else hung on to - the Holocaust didn't start with bullets. It started with words. And I mean, how how an absolutely true, that is about most ways war starts. I would argue that, you know, he was, you know, do not do to others what you don't want done to you. I mean, there are certain things, certainly his telling of what the immigration officer said to him when he arrived. They don't leave you. He had... his words were were well thought and, and hit right to the heart too.

**Barb Miller** 32:48

And I would say that the two of them didn't know a stranger. So once you met him, you were invited to their house, you were having them for dinner, they were having you for dinner. I mean, it was amazing to me in the last 10-15 years, how many new friends they made, many of which came through Al's speaking engagements as well. And that too, was something that I believe was such a blessing for them as well that the Holocaust center actually offered Al and Jane this incredible, I think and last chapter to look back at your life and to be able to share it with so many people so I, I think that was really beautiful for them. I really do.

**Trinity Johnson** 33:41

And and I knowing Al and also Janie as well as I did. I think you're completely right. They immediately made you feel like part of the family. You both do as well. I mean, the warmth that comes from the Miller clan is incredible and has always made me feel like a part of

**Barb Miller** 34:01

a family. You were and you were a granddaughter... regards you as a cousin.

**Fred Miller** 34:08

It's a story about my mother not knowing a stranger. I went to college in New Orleans, and she came down to visit me in my senior year in 1975. And she flew by herself. And I didn't have a car. So she was gonna have to take a taxi from the airport, which was 30, 40 minutes away. And all of a sudden there she was, but she didn't come in a taxi. She came in a private car. I said, How did you get here? She said, Oh, I made friends with a flight attendant and she brought me from the airport to that was the essence of my mother.

**Barb Miller** 34:41

True. Very true.

**Trinity Johnson** 34:43

Not surprising at all. They were both just absolute gems. You mentioned the immigration story, which again, I think was always a part of Al' story, as serious as he was, I mean and there really scary escape their daring escape. But that provided a moment of brevity. Right? In his talk when he was talking about kind of the informal nature of this first American and his feeling of relief and feeling freedom upon arriving, but then this small act of kindness or the showing of kindness, that was the first time someone had shown him that, and he talks about how much that changed his whole outlook, that simple moment of kindness. And I'm wondering if either of you can share how you saw that play out, and his his life?

**Barb Miller** 35:39

You know, it's interesting because I, I didn't grow up with Al and Jane as my parents, but when I initially met Al, and I would describe him as an introvert. And particularly compared to my mother in law, who was not at all. But he loved the stage, and he loved to act. And the minute you gave him the stage, he was an completely different so it's an interesting who is very well read, I think if you gave him a choice of going to a party or reading a book, he'd probably prefer reading a book where she wouldn't. She liked to read, but it had been out there in every social thing. So it's different. You know, but again, the his ability to speak publicly and to command an audience was incredible.

**Trinity Johnson** 36:45

Yeah, the theater, the singing, even a poet write poetry started

**Fred Miller** 36:51

with us. I don't want to stay wet anger over starting with my brother and Barbara's wedding. My father wrote a pretty Oh, we had always written poems and his father had written poems. That was not unusual. But he started a family tradition with their wedding with the Mazel Tov songs from Fiddler on the Roof a blessing on your head. Mazel Tov, Mazel Tov, or he wrote a whole series of rhymes of poems, set to that song and had everybody in the audience singing along with the refrain, and then started with their wedding. But then it morphed into every family event, he would write a song to that tune, and everybody would join in. And now we have carried on that tradition. My brother Ron had a surprise 65th birthday party in Dallas in November. And Barbara and my wife and Randy and me went down to surprise my brother, we performed that song for we, we prepared it and performed that song for him to just to carry on that family tradition that my father had started.

**Trinity Johnson** 37:59

And I don't know if it was the first time but for Al's 100th birthday, I know the family perform that song for him. I'm not sure if that was

**Fred Miller** 38:08

my daughter, Lauren, like that. So for my father's 100th birthday,

**Barb Miller** 38:13

that was what is also quite remarkable, again, to the way this family, to me the very idyllic family. Every birthday they ever had each son, and I have them got poems. Every single birthday, Al wrote a poem to them, whether they were seven years old, eight years old, nine years old, 10, and on and on, it went that they're beautiful. And they're, you know, they're so heartfelt. And the other thing that you know, after al passed away there, you know, he saved everything. And was a shoe box filled with single spaced typewritten letters, love letters to Jane, just beautiful. So he he expressed himself so beautifully with words with poetry. I believe his father wrote poems, but I also believe, as mother's father was an author and a writer, and he too, so somehow this, you know, putting things down with the pen was really important to him. Yeah. Which

**Trinity Johnson** 39:25

is so interesting, because the way he shared that immigration story in that moment where he had been such an introvert and that they basically gave him the permission to be a strong, independent person, because that's the person I knew. I knew the extrovert Al. I knew that theatrical well poised and spoken performer really and,

**Barb Miller** 39:52

and you know, I also think of the time he tells the story of when he got caught in the school that he loves so much wearing the swastika pin. This teacher sees him, you know, he was... all the other kids were wearing it. So he put it on and forgot it was on and teacher sees them. And, and just says words to him that he never heard and just said basically said to him, if you want to go to a concentration camp, I'll be happy to get you there. And how that destroyed him. He often talked about that, and in comparison to the immigration officer who uplifted him. So again, his point of words do matter. And I think that often to be a 12 year old boy, or however old he was at that time, and to have a teacher say such horrific things to you. I mean, you know, and to know that you, you, you have to hide yourself when you're walking through the streets of Berlin. I mean, I can't imagine how that plays on your psyche.

**Fred Miller** 40:54

As a child, he always said he had been before coming to America, he had always been introverted and quiet and shy and not didn't want to speak up. And this this one sentence from this immigration officer, changed his entire out and and lifted him up, as Barbara said, and made him proud and made him not necessarily extroverted, but told him that explain, told him that he didn't have to be so shy and introverted. He was somebody and he did make something of himself. And a lot of it is thanks to this unknown unnamed immigration officer.

**Trinity Johnson** 41:33

I think it's interesting that he could have stayed silent, he could have chosen never to share a story you shared that one of his friends. Locally, Werner Coppel was sharing his story and his experiences during the Holocaust. What do you think was kind of his turning point, because my understanding is, there were many years he didn't share his story. And at some point, he did start sharing his story more, and you alluded to maybe it was retirement. But I also can't imagine a time ever where our wasn't willing to share this story. And I'm wondering what, what you think, change that and hence,

**Fred Miller** 42:14

or I can't answer that I know, he became more and more involved with the Holocaust Museum. And the former director, Sarah Weiss, became very close to him, and certainly help move him in that direction.

**Barb Miller** 42:32

I also think that you're in Hamilton, Ohio. And I think there was a desire to be as, like everybody else. He was trying to establish a good career as an optometrist. He was active in civic, you know, things throughout the city, he was active in a synagogue, I think I could see where this would not be a priority at that point in life. And I I also think we didn't have a holocaust center. I really do believe that the Holocaust center here gave owl this platform. I mean, as I said earlier, I just think this was what a wonderful opportunity. This provided him and his

**Fred Miller** 43:31

time, there was no mechanism for nobody to set up a schedule and plan and set set anything up. It just wasn't talked about that wasn't talked about that much. But there was no formal or even informal way of organizing these speeches, till they started developing through the Holocaust center. I agree.

**Trinity Johnson** 43:54

Wow. And I was honored to be his, his manager, as he would call me to schedule him. But I, you know, I never scheduled him enough. But I think it's interesting because his story has impacted us in so many different ways. Barb, you're a docent. Fred, you're also a museum, docent and lead tours. And Fred, you've actually started sharing our story in kind of a speaker's bureau format like Al used to, and I'm just wondering, what is that mission inside of each of you? What is that like to carry on his words, his lessons for audiences today?

**Fred Miller** 44:39

A couple months ago. Barbara's one of Barbara son Jeremy is a teacher in Oak Hills. My father used to go every year to talk to Jeremy's class sixth graders. And my father obviously isn't doing it anymore. And Jeremy asked me if I would go and I went a couple of months ago and talk there must have been 206th graders, and I thought, well, they're going to fidget. And they're going to play with their phones, and they're going to poke the next person next to them, whatever. Not whatsoever. They all sat in attention, and listened. And they were very interested in what I had to say. And they asked good questions. But the touching moment to me was afterwards and I was standing around talking to Jeremy, before I left, one of the girls in the class came up to me and said, Mr. Miller, Do I have your consent to give you a hug? And of course, I did hug her, and she hugged me and, and that was very touching. And that made everything worthwhile. And I got through to her, and who knows how many other people I got through to so that that really says it all to me. What about you?

**Barb Miller** 45:59

Well, first of all, I think the work of the Holocaust centers, so critical. And I think all generations should, as particularly as the Holocaust survivors are not with us anymore. Need to be speaking out right now and sharing their stories as best they can. I think that when I talk to students, it is remarkable how insightful they are the questions they ask, they can identify with a young child who might be at school and who you know, is a soccer player and who's living a wonderful life, and perhaps things turn upside down, or even if they think about being bullied or things of that nature. And I think it's great to see their wheels start spinning. So I think it's important, these are remarkable human beings who went through a lot. And I think their stories can't be forgotten. And I think, again, I will go to the times we are living now it is more than I can't, in my lifetime, I can't think of a more important time to be sharing these stories. As long

**Trinity Johnson** 47:09

thank you both for the work you are doing and raising awareness of anti semitism and hatred and, and keeping our story alive and keeping this legacy and these lessons in the forefront for students, community members, book clubs, you name it, because you both also have I see and hear that willingness to share with anyone. And that really is just amazing for me to see and get to work with both of you. At the center. As you both know, we talk a lot about character strengths, you know, these 24 innate strengths that we all have that at any moment we can use to affect change. And we hope that we're inspiring each individual to use those strengths to make a positive impact on the community. If you had to strength spot out. What what do you think his strengths? Were? I mean, we all have all 24 He definitely had all 24 What do you think his top strength? Were as a person?

**Barb Miller** 48:13

Integrity? I really do. Yeah. Humility. I think it was Ronnie Fred's youngest brother, who told me that Al had put, I wish you maybe you know it, a sticker on Ronnie's bedroom door. That was all about. Don't ever think you're, you're too great at anything. You know, Ronnie talks about this? I think, honestly, he has a 24. If you ask me, it would be hard not to argue that but I tap on the list is integrity, and was very

**Fred Miller** 48:57

humbled for all his accolades and all his extroverted, talking and on the stage. He didn't want to fuss he didn't want. He didn't care about awards. He didn't care about a fuss, or being interviewed or on TV this, let me tell my story. And let me go home and read a book.

**Trinity Johnson** 49:18

Yes, and I definitely think love of learning. Because I remember his library at both homes and just filled with books, which is actually a really good segue to something that that recently happened. Your family donated the rest of Al's personal documents and photographs and artifacts, that we're so very grateful that you entrusted the center in our archives, you know, to preserving and keep those safe and be able to exhibit and use for research and an educational purpose. And I'm just wondering if in the process of going through because, as you said, kept everything which is true. Based on the boxes I saw come in. Were there any new learnings both for owls, owl or even Jane's experiences, but then also just pieces of of him that you maybe weren't aware of until you really saw the wealth of the things he kept? Well,

**Fred Miller** 50:24

Barbara was calling me on the right here today. Yeah,

**Barb Miller** 50:27

I think one of the most fascinating letters I found. So here all these years, we've heard the story of how Al's parents escaped from Berlin and went into the hospital, as Fred said, and, you know, were able to meet Mrs. So and so on the street and regards from Herbert and get the documents needed to get out into go to Belgium and then Holland and then England. I found a letter written by Al's father, written while he is in Amsterdam temporarily, to I believe it may be Mr. Corn in America, explaining to him everything he went through while in Berlin, including going to the hospital how the doctor clearly understood their predicament, without having to say too much. And then basically how his wife, Grandma missa, managed to get them out and meet people on the street. So that to me was this sounds crazy, but it was like, Oh, my God, this is the firsthand experience. This is him telling it. Al was second generations experience, if you will, from that particular story. He This was his father's story. And then as I shared with you, years ago, I had interviewed grandma missa, Al's mother, and I forgot about that. And it was typewritten page after page after page. And she's telling the story. And she's the one who had to go underground and meet all these people to get these basically forged documents so that they could get out and who she had a meet with. And again, it was fascinating to me. There's our story, who's the child, there's the father story, who experienced it and his wife story who experienced the mother. So of all the things that I found related to this specific story that was the most incredible, but then, to your point to where all these documents that show how many generations back the Jews were living in Germany, all the way back to a document that indicates Napoleon gave them citizenship. These are generations. And how did this happen? How did this happen? And the only other thing that always makes me it's hard to understand. Al had photographs of his grandfather's apartment. This apartment is a palace, huge oil painting chandeliers, massive grand pianos, beautiful furniture, what happened to all that? What did they leave behind? And what did Germany lose? I mean, so seeing this, I don't know how many survivors have these kinds of things. We can't figure out how they got them. How did

**Fred Miller** 53:42

you get all these documents out furniture out China out silverware out one thing after another, we will start Tomes, yet they left with nothing. So I never could

**Trinity Johnson** 53:55

have not a little bit more because as you said, they owned a successful shirt factory. The apartment was exquisite. Always shares how much they arrived to America was

**Fred Miller** 54:08

turned over by the Nazis. And I don't know how many people are employed. 50 psi 500. Okay. My grant the Nazis made my grandfather pay their salary, even though there was no longer any factory. And I don't know how long that had to go on for but it broke them. Because who can afford that when there was no income? What was your question? And

**Trinity Johnson** 54:36

then they arrived to America with two suitcases.

**Fred Miller** 54:40

My grandparents age brought one suitcase and my father always told the story of what it was like at the train station. Getting into Belgium of the last stop in Germany. Here come to Nazi soldiers onto the train. And they grabbed me by my grandparents suitcase. They said they weren't allowed to take any valuables, no good clothing, no nothing. dollars. And they did. But to not do the Nazis, the SS didn't know make sure that nothing was hidden, which there was nothing hidden. And actually, then they took, my grandparents took my grandmother in one direction, my grandfather in one direction. And they searched them thoroughly, to make sure that they were not hiding anything on their bodies. And my father always said to my grandfather, no big deal. He was in the army, he's used to that, who cares? My grandmother, very private person to talk about humiliation that was very difficult for her. And she never talked about that to me. I only know about it through my father. But they each had $5 in their pocket, they had clothing that was strewn. They got the Nazis defined, let them go at the train station. But of course, by the time they got back together on the platform, the train was long gone. Somebody who worked at the train station said, I understand what's going on. Just wait here, there'll be another train, you can get on that. And they did. So they were able to finally get out of Germany. But with only two suitcases and $10 total. You know,

**Barb Miller** 56:19

we don't we don't know

**Fred Miller** 56:24

about how they anticipated getting it out. And they shipped it ahead of time. But where it was shipped to how it was paying for who started How did it get to America.

**Barb Miller** 56:35

I do know with Jane. She had she had a or who she called Crowley, which was kind of her nanny. And when those had to leave in the middle of the night, and leave everything behind and Vienna and go to Prague Ramana took all their stuff. She lived in the countryside. She packed everything up. And then once they had a permanent residence in New York, she then sent their stuff to them. That was how their things were protected by this nanny who lived with them. But Al we can't we don't understand that and we will go down mohkumat

**Trinity Johnson** 57:19

What do you think there? There's one thing when he used to speak he spoke about a couple incidences where miracles happened. And one of them was the postcard this I'd get go give regards to Herbert right. Yep. But one that we haven't yet touched on is an upstander that we highlight in our museum. Lottie Bachman, and I'm wondering if one of you because really, I think that owl was not there when this happened during Kristallnacht, and if not for this upstander. Who knows what would have happened. I mean, Al's father most likely would have been arrested like other Jewish men and sent to a concentration camp. Can one of you share the story of Lottie Bachmann and just how pivotal that moment was in their story

**Fred Miller** 58:04

years later, she was a good non Jewish friend of my grandparents and she was very good friend of theirs, and they had to leave their apartment on Crystal night and they weren't, they couldn't go back. It was too dangerous, and they had nowhere to go. This friend Laurie Bachman took them in for the night and say Here you must come and stay with me. Terrible risk to herself terrible danger. Because if she was found or caught harboring Jews, her she was on her way to the concentration camp the next day. But she without a thought without any concern for her own safety. She had them stay. And then the comes the next day she wanted them to stay longer. They wouldn't do it. They said we cannot risk your your safety, we'll figure something else out. Which is when my grandfather went to the hospital, the Catholic hospital that took him in and my grandmother actually did return to the apartment because there was a woman and there was not as quite dangerous ban and then how to scrambled to get the paperwork. But Lottie Bachman is what we absolutely call an upstander somebody who, without regard to their own personal safety or comfort, risks themselves to help others. Now I met her years later in New York. I have only a vague memory of her but my father always talked about what a tremendous typist she was, she could carry on a conversation here and talk to you and be typing something else entirely during that entire conversation. So she was a remarkable woman and we are eternally grateful for what you did for our family.

**Trinity Johnson** 59:51

And I think one of the things that's interesting based on the the documents and all of the artifacts that that you recently donated Mmm Is that we found out it was Al's mother who came up with the idea for her husband to go into the hospital to have the surgery.

**Barb Miller** 1:00:10

Yeah. And also I really, whoever this doctor may have been, he was an upstander, too. I mean, he really understood their predicament without them really having to say great.

**Fred Miller** 1:00:20

Yeah, they were just talking code. Yeah. So I need surgery.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:00:24

Yeah. Because in in that writing, I believe she said he was very understanding of our situation. Correct. And I think that's amazing. He definitely no, maybe advised him on what would be the less invasive types of spared unnecessary steps. Just amazing.

**Fred Miller** 1:00:43

Yeah, are certainly my Well, my wife couldn't go because she had broken her foot. But Barbara and her wife, my brother, Randy, and my brother, Ronnie, and his wife, Tracy, and my parents, all went back to Berlin 15 years ago, whatever, some some years ago, and we went to that hospital. So my father's apartment we by my father went back to enter the apartment, we, Barbara and Randy and I were somewhere else in Berlin visiting other parts of the city. So and we went to the shirt factory, which is, of course it's no longer a shirt factory. But we've saw all the places What is it now today? It's apartments, apartment loft apartments. And Barbara was saying how wonderful the apart my father's apartment was. My father learned how to ride a bicycle by driving it in the dining room of his apartment

**Barb Miller** 1:01:34

where they had a sit down dinner for 80 people. So you can imagine.

**Fred Miller** 1:01:40

All gone? Yeah.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:01:42

That that is actually one of the questions I had. Because we know owl did go back to Germany as part of the US military part of Ritchie boys and interrogation. Was that family trip? The only other time that that you returned to Germany? And

**Barb Miller** 1:02:00

you Ross it was okay, but not for Al.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:02:04

Are you aware of were there any feelings of apprehension or anger or anything? Was it hard for owl to go back to Germany after so many years

**Fred Miller** 1:02:15

individually? It was a good trip that we went on we there weren't gonna be problems. But I have an interesting story from that footprint.

**Barb Miller** 1:02:23

Can I Can I just do one thing? Well, the reason we went though, was because owl was asked to speak to high school students at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. And what we didn't know was that these students, by communicating with owl here, had created an exhibit to owl and his parents and to the shirt factory and the contributions that his family had made in Germany, and it was incredible all came through.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:02:56

Right, you didn't know they're

**Fred Miller** 1:03:00

walking through the museum looking at the different artifacts, not really a holocaust man, just the history of the Jews and German attributions Jays made. And I'm walking in all of a sudden, oh, my god, there was my grandfather and picture was a picture I've seen a gazillion times on the on the phone, an old fashioned phone, and other artifacts that I had grown up with her they are in a museum and Berlin had knocked me over. It was so incredible. We, during that trip, we had gone to the symphony. And we we were Americans, and fairly we dress like Americans, we act like Americans have been talking English. And in our mission, we were just standing around among ourselves talking to each other. And some man very well dressed with his wife or girlfriend, who equally well dressed, comes up to us and says to my father in German, Are you American, while? Clearly we were American? That was a no brainer. Had but then he asked my father, Are you Jewish? And my father was somewhat taken aback at that and didn't know the answer. What would she say? But he said, Yes, we are. And then the man said, I want to apologize. I'm so sorry for what we did to you during the war. My father said, Look, you weren't even born then. You have nothing to apologize for it. So I appreciate it. But don't worry about it. My father didn't say but he thought. Now I don't want to ask what your parents did. Or your grandparents. I don't know. I'm not gonna ask what level of complicity they may have had. But he let this man off the hook completely. But there was another encounter with them. I don't think I was there on on a bus or on a on a tram, where people similarly similar situation happened where people apologize to my parents, who again, let them off the hook. So the German Since at least then, certainly not white washing whatsoever what, what what they did and of course, there were memorials and statues and, and artifacts all over Berlin and I suppose suppose all the parts of Germany.

**Barb Miller** 1:05:17

I do remember though on that trip both parents to different times had a visceral reaction to anyone their age. I do remember that. And I remember being at breakfast and a couple walked in wearing the country folk were that one I forget what it's called, you know, the German two liter hose. Exactly. And my mother in law did not like that at all. I remembered the two moments of that on that trip. So it was it was not about the younger generation, but in their generation. I remember them vividly stating,

**Trinity Johnson** 1:06:00

and how did he ever describe what it was like to go back to Germany so soon after the war? I mean, I know he was there on official military business. But did he ever share any experiences of how he was treated or received by by Germans?

**Barb Miller** 1:06:21

What is he he was in the American section of Berlin because he was there as an American soldier. And what I do remember him saying the only time he actually felt ashamed to wear the American uniform, was when he saw Jews behind barbed wire on a DP camp. It really bothered him. And I guess they were in the American section. And he that I remember him saying that he thought that was terrible. And other than that, I and the other story that I vividly remember him saying was when he would tell a family they were given orders, you can tell a family to leave their house, a German family, you give them I think it was three days notice, I'd say it was two or three days notice. And I remember him saying, you know, I said, Well, how'd you feel about that? You know, you're evicting people from he goes, Well, we were only given, you know, 10 minutes. I mean, so there was this right of taking over a house because these guys were stationed all over in Germany. And Bowser, there's two stories I remember him telling about going back I remember that it was bombed badly. I mean to America, the Allies. really bummed Ferlin

**Trinity Johnson** 1:07:43

but I do remember him sharing about his best friend toss though and how special that relationship. Duck Tazza, the dog as we see in that photo, and, and how sad he was that he couldn't bring him back right. After the military, what was our life like? Did he get right into that next chapter of his life? No,

**Fred Miller** 1:08:08

no, he went to college. He was in Oklahoma. And then he ended up in a crash said the Northern Illinois College of Optometry I think is what it was called on and became an optometrist guy. He had the background for lenses that he started an abortion lawman in London. And then like I said, he ended up moving to first Toledo where I was born and then to him.

**Barb Miller** 1:08:36

When did you learn that he was a Ricci boy, was it when the book camp

**Fred Miller** 1:08:40

go before the hacker was maybe 10 years or so ago, he had a whole box that he gave me. I borrowed of all his reports, how he got these top secret reports out is beyond me that he had all the reports all this interrogation, and everything with his recommendation, I find I believe that you he needs in further interviews or let this one go note out a big deal. He had a whole box the law that he talked about 1015 years ago when that's where I first found out

**Barb Miller** 1:09:15

that I needed but that's

**Trinity Johnson** 1:09:16

an interesting point. When in your life, did you realize your parents were Holocaust survivors? I know you said they were always very open to speak about their experiences with you. But when did you make that connection?

**Fred Miller** 1:09:28

Obviously, there was a turning point who I didn't know one time and didn't know another time I had grew up with it. I mean, I always knew we always were Jewish. And I knew my parents were German and Austrian and they always talked about the Holocaust or having to escape Germany and Austria was it was never a secret. So there was never any one. One turning point where I'd learned it one all of a sudden.

**Barb Miller** 1:09:54

And I think it's interesting too, because don't forget they lived in Hamilton, Ohio, but their parents He's lived in New York. So when you would go to New York and meet your grandparents and their friends, and they're they were blind, they're all right. Everybody

**Fred Miller** 1:10:08

what they called refugees, right? One doctor worldwide, my grandparents, on both sides, my paternal grandparents, one lived in Riverdale, in the Bronx together lived in Forest Hills and the Queen and queens, and all their friends and acquaintances and other relatives. Were all German Jews.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:10:30

When the final couple minutes that we have left, I'm curious how our experiences or even his mission later in life to educate about the Holocaust, how has that impacted both of you.

**Fred Miller** 1:10:43

I'm sitting here now talking to spread my father's story to hopefully inspire other people and educate other people. This is far from over. And in fact, life is becoming worse daily, as we all know from the news. So I take it as my personal mission to propagate my father's story, and to let people know what what what has happened, and what could easily happen again.

**Barb Miller** 1:11:16

And I also think, both Fred and I are grandparents, which is a new chapter for us. And I think, you know, yes, it's important to speak to schools and to students, but it's also within the family, I think, how do you impart from generation to generation, what your family's heritage is, what your legacy? Their legacy is, you know, what are the lessons to take away? What does it mean to speak up? What does it mean to be an upstander? What does it mean to be in this world and try to make it better? And I, I hope that one day, my grandchildren inherit, many of ours qualities. I have two grandsons, and I would be thrilled to know that they can live up to his, which might be tough. But

**Trinity Johnson** 1:12:13

and that is a perfect segue to the last kind of question, but it's actually more of a statement that I hope you both can respond to. So when, when people hear my family story, I want them to remember, and can you fill fill in that sentence?

**Fred Miller** 1:12:34

I want them to remember. Like I said before, what has happened, and that can happen again.

**Barb Miller** 1:12:42

And I would agree 100%.

**Trinity Johnson** 1:12:46

Thank thank you both so much for taking the time to speak about owl and also Janie and that legacy and thank you both for the work you're both doing to keep that alive and keep Holocaust awareness in the forefront and teaching those lessons to others. So thank you again, thank you.

**Barb Miller** 1:13:09

Thank you for everything you're doing. Really great work.

**Jackie Congedo** 1:13:14

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