

**Howard Margol**

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### **Abstract**

Howard Margol was born February 22, 1924 in Jacksonville, Florida with identical twin Hilbert, an older brother Melvin and a sister, Bernice. His parents came from Lithuania and married in the US. They spoke Yiddish and English and went into the retail business in a black neighborhood in Jacksonville, Florida. The family lived in a Jewish neighborhood and the boys attended public school. After the twins graduated high school, they entered the University of Florida and joined ROTC. Their unit was activated and they were split off in early April '44 as Howard was ordered to a unit in the Mohave Desert and Hilbert was sent to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division in Oklahoma. President Roosevelt granted the twins' wish to be together. While Hilbert was visiting his sick mother, Howard arrived summer '44 and, at first the unit thought he was acting crazy as did not realize they were twins. Around January '45 their ship arrived in Marseilles. On April 29, 1945 they headed for Munich and were ordered to pull off to the right side of the road in a wooded area. The twins smelled a strong odor and investigated the area and found the concentration camp of Dachau. Howard took photos of the inside of the boxcars where there were dead bodies. After the war ended, Howard was given the duty of checking IDs of passengers taking trains and later took survivors to a resort hotel in the Austrian Alps. He was affected by the survivors' insistence on stopping 30 minutes early as their Sabbath was starting when they are prohibited to travel. Howard and his wife visited Dachau on the 50th anniversary of its liberation.

### **Summary**

00:00 Howard Margol was born February 22, 1924 in Jacksonville, Florida with Hilbert, a 10 minute earlier identical twin, three years older brother Melvin (not living) born around 1921 and a sister, Bernice Wolf who lives in Tampa, Florida. His father was born Morris (Moishe) Margolis in the small village of Pushalot (?), Lithuania around 1887 or '88 and his mother was born Sarah (Sorka) Bernstein in Lithuania. The first time he went to Lithuania in 1993 they never heard of Pushalot (?) so perhaps it was Pushalotus (?). His father left Lithuania in 1906 and lived for a year in London with his older brother and younger sister.

05:00 There he learned English and came to the US in 1907 to live with his cousin, Coit and his wife Anna in Norwich, Ct. There he became a Hebrew teacher as he graduated from the Pongees (?) Yeshiva. In 1914 the synagogue in Jacksonville, Florida sent a request to his father to be their Rabbi and he responded that he could be their Hebrew School teacher. They told him to come so he took the long train ride to Jacksonville and found that he

was not needed. He decided to remain and became a peddler of expensive ladies' clothing and dresses. He had the best territory, the red light district in Jacksonville. Then he opened a retail clothing store in the black downtown district when his friends said his name, "Margolis" sounds too Jewish. He changed it to Margol which is Polish.

- 10:00 Their store was at 207 Davis Street across from Mr. Robinson's restaurant, the only restaurant in town where black people could eat. Next door to the store was the only hotel in town where black people could rent a room. At an early age, Howard learned to respect other people and nationalities as he got to know Mr. Robinson and the owner of the black hotel. Howard's mother was born in a small town of Lithuania near his father's town. She came to Baltimore at the age of three with her parents in 1903. She learned English and knew Yiddish as spoken by her parents. In 1917 she went to Jacksonville to spend the summer with her cousin where she met Howard's father and did not return to Baltimore. Her father brought her all her clothes. They got married and their four children were born in Jacksonville. His father sold general clothing.
- 15:00 Howard's parents spoke Yiddish and some Russian. They did not talk much of their families as left a hard life. His father's youngest sister, husband and three children were living in Lithuania in '41 and were murdered by Germans and Lithuanians. It was a frustrating event for him. There was no documentation of the event as the Germans did not record their names. They just decided to kill a certain amount of people one day. Howard sent their information to Yad Vashem. He learned Yiddish by speaking it at home. The family was orthodox and kept kosher.
- 20:00 There was a large Jewish community in Jacksonville. There were 30 families in 1930 from Peshalot (?) who later moved to Miami, New York and Chicago. There had been about 100,000 Jews in Peshalot (?). Most of the Jews in Jacksonville were from Germany and not ultra-orthodox. The Lithuanians were more orthodox. There were two synagogues; a Temple for the Germans and a synagogue for those from Eastern Europe. The address was 317 or 217 Jefferson Street where they lived in the middle of the block and B'nai Israel was on the corner. His father took the twins to synagogue for the minyan (need 10 men) and took them to the New York Yankees Exhibition Baseball game. The team stopped in Jacksonville for spring training. It's too bad that he was not interested in autographs at the time as he saw famous players including Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig which would be worth a lot today. There were two cliques: one German and one East European.
- 25:00 His friends were from the latter. Those from Germany were not his friends. Howard attended a public school. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade he lived at 7812 Silver Street and walked a mile to school and a mile back. When World War II started, they were better prepared mentally and emotionally for the Army than present day soldiers. When he was 14, two of his friends skipped school and went hunting. They rode bicycles and slung their rifles across

their handlebars. The friend on the left hit a bump and the rifle accidentally fired and killed the friend on the right. It was sad but they went to school the next day as learned to deal with adversity. Today they bring in grief counselors if such a thing happens so children don't learn how to deal with adversity. He attended Beal in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. There were both Jews and Gentiles in his school.

- 30:00 The students knew he was Jewish and there were opportunities for anti-Semitism. His best friend Clayton Johnson, a gentile, had an argument with him one day which ended up fighting and beating up each other so they got bloody noses. He went home and his mother said to get in touch with Clayton's father but Mr. Johnson came over and apologized for his son's behavior. He was liberal and not anti-Semitic. His father opened his store in 1917 and changed his name to Margol. There was no discussion about Hitler but when he came to power, they had an idea of what was going on. Though Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, there was no immediate input until '42. Howard was at a Jewish fraternity meeting, AZA (Hebrew letters Aleph, Zadok, Aleph) when he learned that Pearl Harbor was attacked.
- 35:00 The twins thought of going into the military and joined ROTC at the University of Florida where they were told that if they join the Army they could remain at college. Their ROTC was horse-drawn artillery dragging 5mm. Howitzers and fake guns made of wood. Just three weeks later, they were drafted into service and separated. The law was to separate brothers as previously two brothers were together in the Pacific and both died. Howard was placed in the Mohave Desert and underwent infantry training in 104<sup>th</sup> Division and disliked it and his brother, Hilbert was sent to Oklahoma. Howard wore an undershirt during the day and slept under blankets in his tent as the nights were cold.
- 40:00 The Company Clerk was Jewish and said that President Roosevelt would make an exception in the case of twins on separation. Howard called his brother and told him that their mother could request they be placed together. Their mother wrote the President and he replied, "The matter will be taken care of." A few weeks later, his captain said he could transfer to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division in Oklahoma and asked if that would be acceptable. Howard replied that he was happy and would comply with Army orders. He was sent to headquarters where he was told to refuse the orders and he replied that he is following the orders. When asked if he knew anyone in DC as his orders were changed and replied that he did not. The following morning he was taken by jeep to the train in Colorado Springs. He was placed in a private car in a streamline train and was chased out 30 minutes later. It was an 18 hour train ride to Kansas City, MO and he had to change trains to get to Oklahoma.
- 45:00 Six marines who had just been discharged from a California hospital demanded the military police get them a private compartment. When Howard arrived at the barracks at Oklahoma, the men said that he had left the day before for a two-week emergency leave.

The Red Cross could not find Howard as he was traveling and sent his brother, Hilbert, to visit their mother. The unit did not know Hilbert was a twin and gave Howard dirty details including latrine duty for two weeks. They thought he wanted to get out of service on Section 8 that he was mentally disturbed. When the Army clerk looked at the record and saw Hilbert was #778 and Howard #777, he thought they were the same person and eliminated Hilbert's record. If Hilbert did not return from emergency leave, they would not have missed him during the entire war. They were shipped to Marseilles, France about four or six months later in December '44 or January '45. They were camped outside Marseilles for three weeks in two-man pup tents and cleaned their guns while awaiting combat. It was a cold winter so they nearly froze to death.

50:00 They left Marseilles for the small village of Louisville where they spent two weeks and then to Wigand Sakoda (?) on a river that looked like a creek as you could step from one side to the other. Wigand had a glass factory and the mayor in appreciation for liberating their town from the Germans, gave each man a service of 12 glassware. They were not allowed to accept the glassware but one serviceman sent it home and some of it broke. He could take it to a crystal store when he got home as it was famous "Aleeg" (?) glassware. After fighting in Wigand a few weeks, they crossed the Rhine River and went to a small village in France. It was January '45 when they saw two women on the corner and asked for directions.

55:00 One said she does not speak American but speaks English as she came for a summer but Hitler invaded and she could not return to England so spent the war in France. She gave them directions. Later they encountered German POWs. At the time, Howard never heard of concentration camps. Dachau was created in '32 by Hitler to get rid of political opponents so it was like a prison until '41 when it changed to a concentration camp. After crossing the Rhine, they captured a major city. They went through Wurzburg, Frankfurt, and then Nuremberg where they stopped at a German air force base outside the city

60:00 There they found parachutes made of white silk and used bayonets to make them into scarves which they wore around their necks to keep warm. After three or four weeks, the Army would not permit them to be worn as not Army issue. The Executive Officer, Lt. Davis, had been a window dresser at a 5 & 10 became a 90-day wonder. He had spent 90 days at OCS (Officer Candidate School) to become a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. The twins had turned down OCS as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants could not serve together. The men in the twins' unit felt that Lt. Davis had no common sense and ran things strictly by GI rules. They wanted to get back at him. The twins used 105 mm. Howitzer and one was #2 and the other #3. Sometimes they were close and could talk to each other and other times could not see each other. They told the Lieutenant that the German patrol was nearby so had to be on extra alert. The gun sergeant called Lt. Davis that one man was throwing up at the bombed out house and he should come to determine whether he needs the Medics.

- 65:00 They stationed men between Davis and the guns and threw a rock. He walked 15 yards to the rock and whipped out his 45 pistol. He lay on the ground 15 minutes and walked and someone threw a second rock. The Lieutenant crawled about 100 yards. When he reached the gun position, he was notified that all was under control. The men felt they got their revenge on the Lieutenant. The unit did not know about Dachau. Their mission was to capture Munich. They pulled to the side of the road where there was such a smell that they thought there was a chemical factory. Howard thought it smelled of burning chicken fat like when his mother waved chickens over a gas flame.
- 70:00 Kenny Engels from Kansas City, MO announced that there was a strange camp nearby and thought the odor was from there. They walked through a wooded area and saw the entrance to the camp that read, "Arbeit Mach Frei" (Work sets you free). They walked into the camp and it was quiet. There were prisoners in the barracks. This was April 29, 1945, the day after Victor Myer of the Red Cross arrived and saw the SS had fled. They had fled taking 2 or 3,000 Jews on a death march. Howard thought the Germans would have fled to Switzerland or Italy rather than taking along the Jews. The men saw the ovens and realized where the odor was coming from. They did not know whether there were other camps like that. They saw bodies stacked up waiting to be put into the ovens.
- 75:00 The twins were with the 1100 men in their battery and remained 30 or 40 minutes. Then they returned to their unit as their target was capturing Munich. There were Americans a mile away who did not see Dachau. The 45<sup>th</sup> Division claimed they liberated Dachau. Both the 45<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Divisions kept claiming the honor. They presumed all the prisoners were Jews but they were of many nationalities. Howard returned on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Dachau with a small liberate college from New Jersey. He went with his wife after spending a weekend at the college. Later, he came across Jewish survivors of Dachau. Dachau had 35 small work camps where these survivors had been placed so they could not tell about the liberation of Dachau. When Howard got to the camp, he had already experienced death and destruction so it did not affect him much.
- 80:00 The war ended May 8, 1945 in Europe. Howard had liberated a small Agfa brownie camera with a few rolls of film and took some photos. Outside the main gate were 30 to 35 railroad box cars. The guys broke the locks and slid the doors open on the freight cars and found 30 to 35 dead bodies. It was three weeks since they left Poland so they perished. The train tracks had been bombed out by the American and British Air Force so it took them a long time to arrive. When the doors were opened, an arm or leg flipped out and he took a photo and later sent to the Holocaust Museum when it opened.
- 85:00 Howard attended the weekend celebration of the liberation of the camps and gave the Museum a copy of the photo but they claim they do not have it. At the end of the war, Howard was in Rosenheim, Germany near the Austrian border and had occupation duty

in Salzburg, Austria. Before that he was in Kutzheim (?), Austria where he was instructed to check all people taking the train to Switzerland, Austria, Germany or Italy though he had no interrogation training. He just looked at their papers which might have been fake. He did not know the difference between a genuine and a fake document. That might have been how Nazi officers escaped to Brazil and Argentina. After Kutzheim (?), he did occupation duty in Salzburg. He had to take some survivors to Bagerstein (?) in the Austrian Alps. It was the finest area in Europe where the hotels had piped in hot mineral water which was supposed to heal but did not. You simply felt better.

90:00 They claimed the water could cure cancer as well as broken toe nails. Before the war, it was a resort area. There was a former German army camp in Salzburg. 5,000 survivors of all nationalities including Jews and Ukrainians were placed there. They were told not to drink from the tanks of German jet fuel outside the camp as it could kill you. Some Russians thought it was vodka so climbed over the fence and drank the fuel oil and died. One Friday there were 200 Army vehicles transporting 2 or 3,000 Jews and suddenly late in the day they started screaming. They all stopped and the Jews got out and sat on the side as the sun was going down and soon it would be Shabbos, the Jewish Sabbath when you can't travel. If they traveled just 30 minutes more, they would get hot baths, food and clean clothing. For years they could not observe their religion but held on to their faith which helped them survive. The Army gave them blankets, prepared hot food and the survivors slept under the blankets.

95:00 When the sun set Saturday night, they traveled 30 minutes to the hotel. This event affected Howard more than liberating Dachau. His parents did not talk about Lithuania and their family left behind as it was a hard life. The Germans invaded Lithuania but it could have been the Lithuanians who murdered the father's sister and family. Some murdered by the Lithuanians were forced to walk 20 miles. After the war, the family learned about the father's sister and her family.

100:00