

NATHAN KORNMEHL
BORN 1923
COLOGNE, GERMANY

Nathan Kornmehl was born 1923 in Cologne, Germany. His father was a Hebrew teacher and also sold linens and other household goods; he died in 1930, and Nathan lived with his mother and four sisters. The parents had come from Poland and planned to go to the United States and therefore never became German citizens. He attended Public School and a Jewish school until 1937 when that was no longer possible. In 1938, he, his mother and one sister were shipped to the Polish border as non citizens. They could take only belongings they could carry. He did not want to stay in the camp where they had to live in stables and talked to the engineer of a coal train into taking him to Posen, about 50 or 60 miles away. There, he found support by the Jewish community and was given a ticket to Cracow, where he had some relatives. He got a job and worked until the beginning of the war in 1939.

Then he went into hiding and managed to go alone to Riga mostly by walking. While going from there to the Ukraine, all his clothes were stolen and he was left with the clothes on his back. He got to Lemberg (Lwow) where he worked for a few months. The Russians offered him a passport but he would not take it because he planned to return to Germany after the war. As a result, he and thousands others were sent Siberia. People who accepted a passport could stay in Lemberg but later were killed by the Germans. In Siberia they had to wear special winter clothing when the temperature dropped to -40 F but there was no wind and the barracks were warm. He encountered no antisemitism and everybody received the same food rations. He had no contact with his family and did not know what went on in the war. He took care of a horse and had to deliver water and wood to various people. A Russian General, who supervised a group of Germans from the Volga region, taught him to bake bread and in 1944 he was cooking for the prisoners.

After the war, he was shipped back to Wroclaw, Poland, and smuggled by truck to Berlin. His mother and sister had died in Auschwitz. In Berlin, he worked in the post office for 1 3/4 year and met his future wife. He shows a photograph of a group at the displaced-persons camp and for half a year was a judge for the camp court.

Later he came back to Cologne but did not want to stay and in 1947 came to the United States where he had an uncle in Buffalo and one sister who had managed to get to New York. Another sister, who had fled to Belgium later also came to Buffalo.

He feels that without faith there is no life, and that hope and belief are necessary. One should not depend on others and people should be good to each other; one never knows what the future will hold. If you have faith in God, everything will be alright.