

WILLIAM KOENIG ~

Phoenix, Arizona

11/10/87

oOo oo b. July 31, 1922 in Lwow

Father: shot in the street by Nazi
Mother: died of cancer before the war

oldest of 4 children

Sisters: Simma (ph)

Hancha (ph)

Brother: Mark or MaX

~? ~

O~ ~ I Mother had three brothers: 1 in US, two in Czech. One of
brothers in

.ech. died during the Holocaust, one survived. William's sisters survived the
war as they were given gentile birth certificates by a friend of his father's.
They moved away from their own town and worked as ma~i~s. Now they are both
living in the US.

~:0 ~ Great Grandfather on~Father's side died before the war; Grandfather died when
NAZIS invaded in 1941.

0 0 3 Father had a transportation company; owned 7 or 8 pair of Belgian horses. He
worked for a Polish baron who had a leather goods factory, his father would take coal
to the factory; and finished goods to the trains; his father was the only Jew with a
permit to own a gun because he handled money.

CkO~ Wm had to stop his schooling when he was twelve because of his mother's health; he
had to care for her and the younger children.

0 0 5 Prior to the war, Jews were mistreated as a common occurrence; Wm had to fight
often, father had taught him not to be afraid and to protect himself.

0 0 6 Father drafted to fight for Poland against Russia, but their city was beaten by
the Russians in short time. The Russians instituted communism in the town and wanted
Wm's father to work as a manager but he refused, the Russians tried to take everything
away. But Wm.'s father got another wagon and kept working because there was still a
black market.

o o 7 Wm. would visit his sisters and brother. His good friend became a policeman for
the Russians and came after Wm. (sic. Wm had to kill him)

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o;o ~ Wm. was one of the first Jew to be picked up by the Nazis. He was put into Camp Janowski (ph). He has never met another survivor; it was a destruction camp.

Near the camp there was a Jewish cemetery; he was part of a work crew taken to tear up the headstones and use them to pave a road by the Nazis. He had to do this to his mother's gravestone.

One day he was put to work on building large cement sewer parts. They were huge, it was difficult work; there were many beatings as a matter of course. There was one Nazi in charge but the rest were Ukrainian guards, Nazis, Most of the guards gave brutal treatment

0 11 but once in a while, someone would bring a prisoner a little something to eat.

0,~ There was a system, whereby if a prisoner escaped ten of the other prisoners would be shot; this was to try to keep people from escaping. He remembers one instance, there had been an escape of 3 prisoners and thirty were shot; they were lined up in rows of five and the guard would walk along between the rows and put a bullet in the back of the head of whomever he selected. He remembers the spurt of hot blood all over him and he vowed he was going to escape even if it meant others would die.

o ~3 There was a group of 10, Wm, included, who decided to escape; they cut the wires along the fence, they were grouped together in bunches but all of a sudden there were sparks and the Nazis started shooting as Wm and his friends started running. William was hit twice in the leg and lost consciousness. He woke up sometime later in a pile of bodies near the camp and realized he was alive. The voice of his mother came to him and said "You've got to get up, you can't stay here." So, he was able to drag himself into the camp without being seen. The next day he got some friends to carry him along to the work site. He escaped from there and went back into the ghetto. He was wounded, crippled. The ghetto (of LWOW) was in the process of being liquidated but there some people still ~ ~re. He had to

1~ be careful, he still had a mohawk haircut they gave him in the camp.

The ghetto was on the outskirts of the town; all Jewish families had been forced to move~ to a bad section of town.

He went from place to place in the ghetto trying to find a place
o 1~ to spend the night, it was cold and it was December. People were afraid to take him in but he was lucky, he found a cousin of his mother's who took him even though it would mean great danger for them. As it was, however, two days later the area he was in was liquidated and the family he was with was taken by the Ukrainian

8 guards. Wm. was hiding under a table of some kind and miraculously
· was not seen.

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His relatives, he later found out, were taken to Treblinka; he knows

~9 because he heard from a cousin who jumped from the train and rolled down the hill and came back to where Wm. was staying.

Wm took off again, on the run, working for farmers, there were small work details of Jews sold like slaves/ He did this and got some food; fed what the pigs got; beaten frequently.

He escaped to Lubachizna (ph) a very thick, dense forest. He was looking for some Jewish partisan s. He found instead some Polish Nationalist, called Akoftza (ph). They were very anti-semitic. They were totally against any group; they wanted just Poland for the Poles. The leader was a little bit sympathetic to Wm., because he had a

0:~ Jewish girlfriend. The group decided to keep him and see what he could do. He was very sick and they let him recuperate with them.

In the meantime, his brother was killed on the streets of LWOW. He 0:~3 had never gone to a camp, pretended not to be Jewish but someone in the town fingered him. His brother had been a valet to a Ger~n_ and was under his protection but then the Germ~n moved on.

The Polish fighters would requisition food from the farmers and kept thinking they would get support from England. They gave Wm. an hand-fashioned gun of wood covered with black shoe polish and he went with them to a Ukranian police station and killed the guards
~-- ~ and took away their weapons.

~;~ ~ The Ukranians were really brutal murderers, worse than most of the Nazis. They thought the Germans were going to give them a country of their own. The Ukranians who lived in Poland were the worst anti-semites.

.~ Then Wm. got typhus and the partisan sent him to a farmer to be cared for where he slept on the oven at night and then had to go to the barn to hide during the day. He was almost well when Nazis came to accuse the farmer of giving to the partisans instead of to the Nazis. They started going through the haystacks in the barn with pitchforks so Wm. came out.

o,~ He was taken to a command center and beaten and questioned. He was asked if he knew a Dr. Oranstein - he lied, yes he did. So the Nazi who had been beating him, took a rope and tied him up and walked him over to the office of this doctor.

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By talking with the Nazi, Wagner, Wm. found out he only spoke German so that when they arrived at the Doctor's office, he could speak in English to tell the Dr. to pretend he recognized him, which the Doctor did.

It turned out that the Doctor had cured the Nazi of venereal disease and in gratitude the Nazi had allowed the Doctor to be protected along with about 150 people remaining in the area after most Jews had been driven off.

While William was there he went with the others and would do work for the Germans in the restaurants, shops, etc. in the area. One time they had to bury two newly killed Jewish babies.

One day, some SS men came to ask for some strong men from this area and put them in cattle cars, told them they were not to be gassed; the train passed Maidenak (ph), ended up in Budzig (ph). In this camp were some Jewish-Polish POW left from 1939 (It was then almost 0 ~° 1943). They had fought the Germans with the Polish Army

While in this camp they worked for the Henkel Co. (ph). and in fact Henkel saved them on at least one occasion. They were put to work in the munitions factory; Wm also worked on Sundays for some of the Ukrainian guards and they would beat them and f}~a sometimes give him

0:~ food.

One night they were surrounded by Ukrainian Nazis talking about killing

o y~ all the Jews in the camp. Suddenly, a big car pulls up and Henkel jumps out and argues with the Ukrainians, telling them "These are my Jews, they are working on the Messerschmitts (ph) and Germany needs them.~So, then, the Jewish workers were told to strip and run two miles in the cold to the Ukrainian barracks, where they were told to shower and given s~lped uniforms and put in cattle cars to be moved.

OS~J They went to another camp where they got tattooed on. It hurt and you had to be very still. He saw one guy shaking badly and so the guards laid him out, put a boot on his throat and gave him his number on his forehead..

0 ~ While in this camp had altercation with Nazi while riveting plane and was given 125 lashes; unconscious for 3 days, friends helped him and he recovered.

While in this camp, he was taken as part of a work group of 10 to o~ dig three large holes; stayed in a Ukrainian jail in the meanwhile had good food and treatment. ONe day they were taken to the holes in a panel truck and found that the l~ work was to cover the mass graves of about 10,000 people in each hole. They had to pour whitewa~ over the bodies and at one~point a guy in the grave spoke to him and said he was

alive. So Wm. told him to lie there, he would

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cover him with a little dirt and later he could crawl out. But then one of the guys working with Wm started talking to the guy aND A Ukranian guard over heard and came over with a shovel and beheaded
oi~2 the guy in the grave. Remembers awful moving graves.

He decided they would be killed next so they escaped to the old ghetto - to Dr. Oranstein - although they didn't tell him they were there.

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.~y ~In They were traveling on cattle cars but had food and water. At night the cars would stop and let people empty the latrine buckets. They went to Budzig. It was a prisoner camp. There were Jewish POW's with their Polish uniforms left from fighting the Nazi's in 1939. By now, it was 1943, almost.

56 They had been a group of 400 when they were gathered to be put on the cattle cars. Some were women and children and he doesn't know what happened to them. Perhaps they were left of at Maidenak (ph).

s7 When they arrived at Budzig, a German came over and asked Wm to
~g work for him; It was William's job to oversee the food requisitioned from the local farmers; Jews died from sickness but it was not a
~q killing camp.

:~ Some of the inmates were taken to dig graves for thousands of Jews from the surrounding areas - he doesn't know; they were families;
63 babies to grandparents. As he was covering up the bodies a man spoke to him saying that he was still alive. Wm. said he would cover him
6~ just a little so he could escape later - but a Ukranian killed the man in the grave with ashovel.

~5 When he was in CAmp Janowski (ph) the guards would shoot people in the prison yard just for the sport of it.

:~1 At Camp Janowski, there were two young men whowere twins and one day asked if they could relieve themselves and the NAZI shot them both for the fun of it.

One rainy night while he was lying in his bunk, he could see lights outside the camp and he could hear Ukranians talking about killing all the Jews in the camp;
then a big car came, civilian guy asking
· ~ what is going on; saying "These are my Jews. Germany needs their work"

q~ Wm. worked for some of the Ukranian guards on Sunday, cleaning their clothes and he would get food sometimes.

· ~ Anyway, that day Henkel (ph) came~they had to strip and they were chased to the Ukranian barracks and could shower and dress.

,~ They were loaded into cars; they came to Mialitz (ph). It was
· gg still a work camp;Wm. was working on riveting airplanes and working
· with a Nazi one day the Nazi accused him of "sabotage" and so he
:8l was given 125 lashes; 3 days unconscious; friends helped him and g~ after a while he returned to work. Camp was closed and they were ~ moved in cars to Valeechka (ph) - a salt mine- stayed a week.

.~ Next was shipped to Flossenburg; given a steam bath and only a blanket and for a whole week lived up on a hill over the
:q~ crematorium. Could smell it at night. After one week, shipped to Leitmeritz (ph).

(Was given a SS Reichmarque as a souvenir
"qJ~. in Flossenberg).

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~a ~)n. Then he was brought to an international camp; there were Russian prisoners and people of all nationalities. One Russian came to speak to him, discovered they were from the same area; he was ~3 the one Ukr~nian that Wm was able to trust. The Russian told him that he would stay with his group instead of the Jewish prisoners and be protected by him; the Russian was a kind of officer l~ and had some of his men with them..

~3 As to the different groups and the way they were fed - the Jews were fed from the top of the soup pot, the Russians next and last the Germans.

,G He worked for a time helping two very old Germans in doing dynamite ~7 work; they treated him like a human being.

As Russians approached the camp the Jews were moved but William's Russian friend wouldn't let him go. As the troops came closer his
|~3 Russian friend ran out to meet his comrades and was killed by a lone German.

~5 The Russian troops allowed the inmates to be gone for 24 hours to
~0~ bring their captors to justice; held a court; the Ukrainians had completely disappeared but they did find some of the Nazis to try.

His Russian friend had been raised like a son by a Jewish couple.

og ~1~. After the camp liberation Wm. went over to Teresenstadt to see what Jews might be alive there; met his later-to-be-wife there and took her back to his camp where they could use the officers barracks. ;

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Father ~ Issac - Killed
Mother - ~ied of natural
causes~6~C;~brQ~
Brother Mos,es Killed

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B L b ff Poland in 1922 Sisters: Hannah, Si~nna,_survlve

Father was killed on the streets of his town as he was walking with a Gentile woman who had helped him to obtain Christian birth certificates for the two daughters. The friend fulfilled o~o ~ ~;n the mission and gave the certificates to the claugnters, who were subsequently raised in a Christian home. The sisters surv~ed the war and have returned to Judaism.

Brother was killed on street by Ukranians as he was roaming around the streets. By this time, Mr. ~oenig was already in the concentration camp.

The Ukranians were worse in their anti-semitism than the ~azis; even people he had known all his life and gone to public school

o:oLt with. ~ Q' lOrlS ~t~ ~k~,ro~ s,

Father worked for a Baron; had trucks, delivered to tannerys, was the only Jew in the town able to carry a gun, because he handled money. O~SC~IP~;~ a\$ ~-s ~
~ ~

0-0 q In 1939 when the Russians came in, some Jews were sent to settle further into Russia itself, ultimately they were better off than those who stayed and were killed. He was in Camp Yanasof (ph)
0'~0 and knows of no one who survived that camp.

O~ While in the camp he was slave labor; he did cement work. That '~ area was in a valley, surrounded by hills and it needed huge man holes which he worked on producing; they were big eno~gh
o l~ around for three men to walk through; he escaped through them at one point.

The Ukranain guards would "run" the workers from the camn
0, ~ to the workplace. There would be one German for every t~n Ukranian guards. The guards would hit, beat and kick the rnen. He was there for 3/4 ofa year. The only way to escape was
o:l~ during the work detail, but if one escaped, then 10 prisoners would be killed as the result. One time three men escaped and as a result there were 30 men shot; the guards lined up everyone and started shooting in the back of men's heads. Mr. Koenig stood with others falling all around him, feeling 7 the hot blood spurting over him.

. ~ 18 He was one of 10 who escaped using wire cutters, he was the only survivor, they were all shot at; he was shot in the leg;
0-lq he heard the voice of his dead mother telling him he had to

, O getup and get away. He dragged himself back into the camp and
~'~ his friends dragged him to work the next day from which he
o ~ escaped into the ghetto in the town. He found men's clothing
,~ on a clothesline. He found a Jewish Vet who attempted to treat
~.~ him using hot wires to extricate the bullets. While he was
° there there was an Aktion. He had found a cousin who was

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o ~ able to hide him. Her family was taken even while William hid in her apartment.
6h~*o ~ ~ ~d~

0:~ Subsequently, he went to a Polish farmer that he knew, his leg
~2 was still very bad. The farmer sheltered him, fed him.

o~2q After leaving the farm, he traveled into the forests. He found a group of Poles
who were fighting against all who
~ were not for pure Polish ideas. These Poles fed him, planned
o 3u to use him in some way. They had him participate in a raid
o~3~ against a Ukranian station, using a fake wooden gun. Later the Ukranians looked in
the forest for the group, and Mr.
o ~r Koenig had to face them with a sawed-off shotgun, which he did. Subsequently, he
contracted typhus and was left by the
38 others with a Polish farmer who helped him recuperate.

~ During the time he was recuperating Ukranians found him and
°~7/ took him to the Gestapo, where a Nazi named Wagner beat him. He was taken to a local
ghetto and pretended to know the Doctor there, a Dr. Ornstein. The doctor saved his life.
The ghetto there was a small remnant of the original Jewish city. There were only 200 Jews
left and they were under the protection of the Doctor by virtue of the gratitude given to
the Doctor by the Nazi Wagner. The Doctor cured the Nazi
0:~ of a vene~l disease.

o~ While under the protection of the Doctor he was part of
· a work detail which the Nazis used in different ways, in restaurants and
bakeries, even burying corpses of Jewish babies

°~1 One day, the workers were required to begin digging huge holes - which they did
for s,everal months. At the end, they realized that the hole~were to be mass graves.

0'~g People were brought in groups of 10,000 and killed and thrown into the
graves. Koenig and his companions realized they would also be killed and so used
steak knives to kill their Ukranian guards and then the group returned to the
C~55 little ghetto and were hidden in the houses .

oo58 One day all the men hidden were gathered and marched to a lake by the Ukranians
and Nazis. They were forced to walk into the lake up to their chins and their
pictures were
°~9 taken. Then they were put on trains, but with food, water,
0;61 air. They were taken by Lublin, Maidanek~

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v~ After he left Mialetz the ghetto was liquidated. He describes how he and others were saved by a German industrialist named Henkel (ph). He and the other people from his original group were at Vialeechka)ph). There was a small salt mine there, the only one in Poland.

Subsequently, he was moved with 150 men to Flossenburg, in cars with no food or water, people survived by--sharing. They were packed into cattle cars not as if they were going to be killed, i.e. the guards did not hit them with rifle butts to make people move in order to pack in a greater number of people.

At Flossenburg they were given beds over the crematorium, saw loads o~61 of bodies but didn't know where they were coming from. After a week they were shipped out again, this time to Leitmaritz. The prisoners had triangles on their jackets, the Jews yellow ones and every one else got red triangles. c): ~

While at this camp he met a Russian officer who was there with his men as POWs. He was from the same town as Mr. Koenig and became his protector. Told him to take off the yellow star. While in this camp he worked on tanks

0 ~ Several days before they were liberated by the Russians all Jews were moved to Thereisenstadt. The Russian officer refused to let him go with them

When the Russians liberated the camp they gave the prisoners 24 hours to round up the Nazis and the Nazis were tried and killed

His Russian friend was killed running out to greet the Russian troops. 0 '7~

~ There was dynamite all underneath the camp in caves and at the last C~ minute the Nazi commander of the camp disconnected it and his life was spared.

After liberated he never went home, he married a woman from Thereisenstadt and they were in a dp camp for a while then came to Chicago.

Mr. Koenig has two daughters and fiv e grandchildren.