

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Sol Mackler, conducted by Gail Schwartz on December 28, 2009 in Rockville, Maryland.

That's right.

What is your full name?

Sol, S-O-L, and my last name is M-A-C-K-L-E-R.

And where were you born?

Poland-- in Jedlnia, in Poland.

In Poland, and when were you born?

January 5th, 1921.

Let's talk a little bit about your family. Your parents, were they from that town also?

That town also, they--

They were born in that town?

Right. They were born in town where I was raised, in that town.

What were your parents' names?

Jankel.

Mackler?

Mackler, and my mother was Esther.

And did you have any brothers and sisters?

I had [? Jarma ?]. That's the oldest brother.

OK.

My sister was two years older than me, her name was [? Fela, Feiga Fela. ?]

And any other siblings, or those were your two siblings?

I don't remember them. Yes, we had them.

You had other siblings?

Yes.

Yeah, OK. And what kind of work did your father do?

My father was a butcher. And I was also the same thing.

Yeah, well that was later on?

Yeah.

We're still-- you're still in your childhood. So did your mother work, or was she home?

No, no, she was home.

She was home. And what about grandparents and cousins? Did you have what we call extended family?

Extended family, we had my grandparents.

Grandparents?

Yes.

On both sides?

No, just on my father's side. His name was [? Morris. ?]

And what did he do?

Also was a butcher.

Butcher, OK.

Yeah.

And were you close to your cousins and aunts and uncles?

I was too young.

OK. Was your family a very religious family?

Yes, devout religious.

Very observant?

Yeah.

And how did you celebrate that? Did you celebrate Shabbat?

Shabbat, Shabbos, and all the holidays, yes definitely.

Yeah. And do you have any special memories of any of the holidays you want to talk about?

No. Just, you know, the regular Rosh ha-Shanah Yom Kippur.

And you went to the synagogue?

The synagogue, yes.

Tell me about the town itself? Was it a small village or a big town?

Very small village. All together maybe about 18 families.

18 Jewish families?

Jewish families.

Yeah, and were there non-Jews in the--

Oh, plenty non-Jews, yeah, Gentile.

OK, and what part of the town did you live in? Did you live in the Jewish section?

In the middle of the town.

Right in the town center?

Yeah.

Were there non-Jewish neighbors?

Neighbors, yes.

And did you experience any antisemitism from the non-Jewish neighbors?

I was too young.

OK. Was your family Zionist?

Yes. I can tell yes.

And so they talked about Jerusalem and Israel--

Yes.

--and Palestine, yeah. Did you have any non-Jewish friends growing up?

Yes, in school, yes. I had non-Jewish people.

Let's talk about your school. Do you remember, was it a public school?

Public school.

OK.

Yes, I was in the seventh grade, that's all I remember.

Which grade?

In the seventh grade.

Seventh grade, oh, OK.

That's it, the war broke out.

Oh, OK. And so you were born in this town. You had non-Jewish friends. And then you went to school. Were you interested in sports at all?

I was too young.

OK, and did you like to read?

Yes, I tried to read Jewish newspaper.

Jewish newspapers, OK. Even when you were young?

Even young, yes.

Right, so what language did you speak at home?

Yiddish.

You spoke Yiddish?

Yeah.

Did you know Polish at all?

Oh, yes, Polish I know. I forgot already.

No, no, no, I meant-- I'm talking about when you were younger.

Yes, Polish.

Because when you went to school it was in Polish?

Right.

Yeah, OK. So you started school, and what's your-- you were born in 1921?

Yes.

So Hitler came into power in 1933.

'39.

He came into power in '33. And did you know anything about when you were 12, 13, 14, 15, about a man named Hitler?

Yes, we know about that.

How did you-- do you remember how you knew?

Remember this, the newspapers, the radios.

Yeah.

He tried to liquidate all the Jewish people.

Right, so you knew--

You knew all about it, yes.

Yes, so you knew about that. Did your parents talk to you about it?

Yes.

Do you remember what they said?

No.

Was it frightening for a young boy?

It was frightening, yes.

Were you able to have a bar mitzvah?

No.

Because? That would be 1934.

Yeah.

And why not?

We didn't have bar mitzvah like we have over here in the States.

No, I know, but did you have any marking?

Marking, yes. I'd say the [INAUDIBLE] and the Torah.

OK.

And then they invite all the people home. And we had a--

Yeah, so you did?

--lunch, a lunch.

You had a bar mitzvah?

Yes.

Yeah, oh, well that's wonderful. Not like here.

No, nothing like here.

No.

Well, that's wonderful. And so then Hitler comes into power. And then did your life change between 1933 and 1939 when the war started?

No.

You were just going to school?

Just school and you know.

Were you helping your father out at all?

Yes, definitely, yes.

What did you do?

Just help him as a butcher. And I was very strong. I do all the chores which has to be done.

Did you-- were you athletic? Did you like sports?

No, I did not like sports.

You didn't?

No. I was too busy to help my father.

Did you belong to any youth groups?

No, they didn't have-- we didn't have any.

In the town?

In the town, no.

When you were-- before 1939 when the war started, were you able to go to other towns or other villages?

Yeah, we went over just to visit.

What others towns did you--

Jedlnia, no-- was born in Jedlnia.

Yeah.

And I was going over to Radom.

How far away was Radom?

About 17 kilometer.

And how did you get there?

By horse and buggy.

So you had a horse and buggy?

My father had one.

Yeah, no car?

No.

[DROPS SOMETHING]

Oopsies,

Little time to do it. So you say you did not have a car, you went by horse and buggy? And what did you do in Radom?

We had family there, uncle and aunt. So I stayed there overnight and come back, back to Jedlnia.

Yeah, you had cousins your age? Were there--

A little bit older than me, but--

Yeah.

Yeah.

OK, and so life goes on in the 1930s, 1934, '35, '36. Do you have any special memories of that time?

No.

No, OK, then comes the beginning of the war in September 1939. What is your memory of that?

Oh, plenty.

Can you tell me about it, please?

Yes, first of all, the Nazis came into the town.

Into your town?

Yeah.

And you are now 18 years old?

Yes, 18, yeah. And I--

Were you still in school at the time?

I was in school.

Still at 18, in high school?

High school, yeah.

OK.

They come to town and they separate-- they didn't do us any harm yet, but they separate us.

Separate the Jews from the non-Jews?

Jewish from the non-Jews.

From the non-Jews. Did you have to move?

Ghetto, yes.

So you got a ghetto in your town?

Yeah, they call it a ghetto.

Yeah.

Yeah. So we were in ghetto until two, three years.

OK, let's talk about life in the ghetto and what you remember of what the living conditions were. You moved out of where you were, out of your house?

Yeah.

And were there other family-- did you move into another house, or another apartment?

Another apartment.

And how many people, do you remember, were there?

There were about 16, 17 people.

People, yeah and what was the arrangement, sleeping arrangements?

Everybody had a bed.

But a lot of people in one room?

A lot of people in one room, two rooms, whatever we can find.

Yeah.

That's what-- that's all about it.

And what did your parents-- how did your parents take this?

They tell me we have not a choice.

And did you talk about this with your parents?

Yes.

And what did they--

We have to listen what they're there to tell you, the Nazis.

Yeah. And so you're in the ghetto. What about food?

Food, whatever you can eat.

How did you get it?

Sometimes my parents sneaked out. My parents sneaked out of the ghetto to get some food from the non-Jewish people.

They did?

The Gentile yes, they helped.

They're very brave.

Yeah, they helped.

Yeah, did you try to get out at all?

Yes, but they told me not to. Because they were very, very for young people.

Yeah.

And strong.

Right, it was dangerous. So you were in an apartment building. Was that it?

It's not a-- we don't have an apartment building.

No, but I meant a small--

Two stories.

A two story private house?

Yes, private house, yeah.

And how many-- and 16 people were in this private house?

16 people in this private house. Some of them slept on the floor. Some of them they-- whatever you can.

And what about bathroom facilities? Not much?

Not much.

OK. So did-- your father couldn't go to work?

No.

And so what did he do during the day?

Same thing.

Just sat?

Just sat.

Yeah. Yeah, and so then what was the next thing that happened? You're in the ghetto, you're in this building. You're not going out, you're not getting much food. And then what happened?

They separate us after two years in the ghetto.

You stayed for two years?

Almost two years, yeah.

Did you ever go outside in those two year?

I went outside, yes. But in the vicinity.

In the vicinity of the house?

Yeah.

Yeah. Were there other young people, young 18-year-olds with you?

Yes.

So what did you all talk about?

What's going on in the world. What's it going to be.

Yeah. Did you have a radio then in the ghetto?

No radios.

No radios. And no papers?

No papers, no.

So you really didn't know what was happening?

What's happening, yes.

So this is 1939, 1940. Then what's the next development?

Then they separate us.

And what did they do?

They take us young people.

OK.

They separate us. And the older people one side, the younger people on the other side.

Where did they do this?

Just outside the building.

You all came out?

Yeah.

How did you know to come out?

They-- because they got the Nazis over there on the premises.

OK, how did you feel as a young man when you first saw the Nazis? Do you remember what your thoughts were? How you felt about that?

You have to listen to them, whatever they tell you. And that's all.

Were you frightened?

Yes, I was. Nothing you can do about it.

Did you tell your parents you were frightened?

They were already separate us.

OK, so now, I was talking about before.

Before, yeah. This was already after they separate us.

So this is what, 1941?

'41, end of '41 to '42.

OK, so they separate the young people from the older people?

Yes, older people.

And where did you go?

They send us into work camp.

And how did you get-- did you say goodbye to your parents?

Sure.

You were able to?

Yes.

And what did you take with you?

Nothing. We didn't take anything with us.

You weren't allowed to take anything with you?

No, just what we separate us to a place ammunition.

To make ammunition? A labor camp making ammunition?

A labor camp, yes.

Do you remember the name of it?

Pionki.

You went to Pionki, OK.

Then--

OK, let's talk about Pionki first. First of all, how did you get there?

They-- we walked over. It was about, I would say about six, seven miles. Six miles.

OK, so the young men and women, or just men?

Young men.

Young men only. So the women--

Only women separated, but they come with us.

Oh, they came with you?

Yeah.

But in a separate group?

Yeah.

OK, so you walk over to Pionki.

Pionki.

And then what happened?

This was-- they gave us a home.

Like in a barracks?

A barrack, yeah.

And these are all young men your age?

All young men.

Strong young men.

Yes, strong men. And working making ammunition.

Yeah.

So they really took out very strong men to lay railroad tracks.

Were you one of those?

Yes. So I was there with another dozen of us. Because they come to Pionki from all over around the vicinity, from

Radom, Kozienice, everything, all the young people in there. And I was working there until I got sick. So they took me out, because in the tunnels.

Let's-- OK, we'll get to that in a minute. Let's talk about, again, what the living conditions were in Pionki. You were in a barrack?

Yeah.

Did you wear a uniform?

No.

No. Did you wear any identifying star?

Identifying stars.

What did you have?

The coats with the stripes.

Oh, you had a striped uniform?

Striped uniform, yeah.

OK, did you have any Jewish star or anything on you?

No.

No.

Just the name of a-- the numbers.

Just your number?

Yeah.

OK, do you remember your number?

Oh, sure,

What was it?

1,058.

1,058?

Yeah.

You remember that. Just to back up, when you were in-- before you were taken away, did you have to wear any star in the town?

No-- yes in the town, yes.

You did?

Yes.

The yellow star?

Yellow star, yes.

So everybody did this before you were--

That's right.

How did you feel having to wear a yellow star?

The feeling doesn't mean to us nothing, because we were right on the side-- outside they are watching us every move, every move you make. So the Germans, stars doesn't mean nothing, so long as you have it. If you were caught outside the getto with no stars, that's trouble.

Yeah, but were you angry that you had to wear a star?

No.

No?

No. I come used to it.

And did your mother sew it onto your clothes?

Yes.

She sewed on the star.

Me, I sew it on myself.

Oh, you would sew it on.

You have to do everything to yourself, yeah.

Yeah. And before you were taken away, you were in the ghetto, but before you were taken away, did you talk things over with your sister?

Yes.

And what was her state of mind?

Same, thing she got-- I don't remember the date, because she was married.

Oh, she was married?

She got married in the war.

Oh, all right, you're now in Pionki and you slept in barracks.

In barracks, yeah.

Did they give you enough food?

They give you enough.

What kind-- what did they give you?

Soup. That's all.

How many times a day?

Twice a day.

Twice a day.

Yeah.

And then you'd go out, you would go to work in the--

To work in the morning, they take you.

Walking to the factory?

Factory, everything is in-- yes, in the factory. The factory is right nearby every-- wherever they have a barrack, they had a factory.

I see.

So you were working in the ammunition factories.

And for how long were you in the ammunitions factory before you went to do the heavier?

The heavier-- so I was in the factory. I was doing the ammunition factory, I was doing for a while.

What were you actually doing in the factory?

In the factory, they are making the--

Do you remember what you were doing?

Taking out the plates of ammunition, because there was plates. There was plates going into our cutting machine, and they were cut.

And then you would cut the plates?

That I didn't.

You would just the--

Taken out from one place to another.

I see. And how did you stay warm?

It's very warm, believe me. We so warm, it's so warm over there in that factory. It's so warm they have to sometimes you have to, what do you call it, it's lightning-- sparks.

Oh, right.

And so we have to run for life behind a door.

Oh, from the cutting and everything?

Yeah, we didn't cut, somebody else cut.

Yeah, you just-- but I meant from the-- yeah. Were you allowed to talk to the other laborers?

Yeah, yeah, we allowed to talk in Jewish. Yeah.

Did you have German guards? The Nazi guards or German guards?

It was not the Nazis. It was the--

Polish?

Ukrainians.

Ukrainians, yeah. But they let you talk to each other?

Not all the time. You have good ones and bad ones.

Yeah, yeah.

They call it [NON-ENGLISH].

Really? OK. And were you ever beaten or anything at that time?

No.

No.

No, I wouldn't say I was beaten. No.

Yeah.

The only time I was beaten I come to it later.

OK. So then you go out to lay track, You said, railroad track sa?

Yes, railroad tracks.

What time of year was this? Was it--

This was in '41.

Yeah, but what season was it?

It was around January, February.

OK.

It was light in the tunnel, and I went. So I got sick.

Oh, there were tracks being put in a tunnel?

Tunnels, yeah. So I was sick. I got sick so they took me out and they put me back into the barracks until I got well.

OK.

And go back to the ammunition factory.

Oh, all right. So how long were you in the tunnels?

Tunnels, I was there about six, seven weeks.

Oh, before you got sick?

Yeah.

Yeah, because you didn't have fresh air? Is that it? Did a lot of people get sick?

No, just me. Just me.

What, you couldn't breathe?

Coughing, breathe, yeah.

Coughing, yeah. OK, so now you're back in the munitions factory.

Back, yeah.

And then you're doing the same job?

Same job, yeah.

And you don't know what's happening in the rest of the world?

No.

OK. So then what's? How long did you stay there for the second time?

I was--

Or what was the next place you went to?

Next place?

Yeah.

We were told you going to be-- you're going to be shipped out to Germany.

Oh.

I escaped.

You escaped?

Yeah. Me and another four, five guys, five guys.

These are young men like you?

Young men, yeah, into the woods.

Oh, now tell me how you planned that? How did you--

Just cut the wires.

No, but obviously you talked about it first?

Yeah, first, yeah.

Was it your idea or somebody?

No, somebody else's. Let's get out of here.

And you agreed?

Yes.

You weren't scared?

Right.

So then tell me there were about four or five, you said. And what did you do? You cut the wires?

Cut the wires, out into the woods, and that's it. And we stay-- it's winter time. And we shovel up the snow a little bit, and lay down and then we kept ourselves warm.

Oh my, OK. So these are the woods around--

Yes. A lot of woods.

And this is 1942?

'42, yeah.

OK, and how long did you stay in the woods? What did you--

All over the winter.

And how did you get food, and how did you stay warm?

We went to the Polacks, to the farmers and got--

And they gave you food?

They know.

And they knew that you were Jews?

Jews, sure.

And you had your uniform, your striped uniform?

Everything, yeah.

So they were good to you?

Some of them do, some of them not. So we know where we can go, to which farmer.

Uh-huh, so did you try to move--

From one place to another?

To another?

We tried it. They split us up.

Who is they?

The Germans.

Oh, then you came in contact with Germans?

No, not from-- they call that Luftwaffe.

Yeah.

They flew the planes.

Oh, the airplanes came over?

The airplane.

So they would fire down on you?

Yeah, they didn't bomb us. But they got close over the woods. They cannot--

And you thought they could see you?

Oh, yeah. They saw us.

Oh, so you all split up?

No, we stayed in a-- we stayed.

You stayed together?

Stayed together.

OK, did you ever see any partisan groups?

That's what the-- we were in partisan groups.

Oh, so you joined another--

Another group.

Oh, you came-- you met another group?

Met another group, and we stayed together with them.

I see. How soon after you got into the woods-- after your escape did you meet the partisans?

They--

It was soon after your--

Soon after. I would say about two to three weeks, and they got to us.

They got to you?

Yeah.

And what did you do for them?

We gave them food.

Yeah.

Because we know the farmers.

Oh, OK.

So we have to get food.

Yeah, they like that, I'm sure.

They like that, yes.

Yes, right.

And then that's where we were for a while.

And did you get new clothes?

No clothes.

So you're with the partisan groups. Did you do anything? Did they do any kind of resistance?

Resistance, we tried to get to Warsaw.

You tried to get to Warsaw, OK.

They split us up.

Did you-- you did get to Warsaw?

No, they split us up.

Yeah.

From that, so we think they had boots there, so we got back. We went back to the woods.

So you never did get to Warsaw?

No. We got ammunition, we got everything. But we never got to Warsaw.

OK, so now you're back in the woods?

Back in the woods.

And then what happened?

A lot of thing happens, because when they caught us.

You got captured?

Captured.

Again?

Again, captured.

These are the Germans?

Yeah. And they sent us to Germany.

Oh, so you were a partisan for what, eight months?

Six months.

Six months?

Six months, yeah.

OK.

And we got all into Germany.

Did they capture the whole part partisan group?

The whole group, yes.

Do you know who the leader of the group was? Do you remember his name? No.

No.

Were there men and women in the group?

No, just men.

Just men. Were there-- no children?

No children.

Just young men?

Yeah.

Yeah, about how big was the group?

Oh, I would say the group was about 60, 65.

65, and these are Polish Jews?

Jews, yeah.

It was strictly a Jewish partisan--

A Jewish partisan.

Partisan group, OK. So then the Germans find you. And how did you get to Germany?

By train. They shipped us by train.

Yeah. When they captured you did anybody try to fight back or not?

No, no.

No, OK. So then you get on the train. Did you know where you were going?

Yes. We were going to Oranienburg.

Oh, OK.

Sachsenhausen.

Oh, dear, yeah.

So we stay there.

So you get to Germany?

Yeah.

Did you know what Sachsenhausen was before you got there? Had you heard of it?

No. It's a barracks, like a camp.

Yeah. So then they got my sister there and everybody there, find my sister. Yeah.

Oh my--

In that camp.

You found your sister in that camp? That's incredible.

All women, children there.

Side B, and we were talking about how you just got to Sachsenhausen with your partisan group. And you were staying in the barracks, and you found your sister. How did you find your sister?

Because--

How did you find her?

She has a two year boy-- a year and a half son, with her.

At the time?

At the time.

Yeah.

And we can tell who is there.

And you saw--

Most of them, they were Hungarian Jewish people.

Oh. So you happen just to see her?

See her, yes. She was shipped out.

Had she been living in Hungary? She was not--

No. She was shipped out to Sweden with the child. All that camp was liquidated, all the--

Yeah, but that was a little-- that was later on.

That was later on, yeah.

That was later on, but earlier when you first got there, was she already there?

She already there.

She was-- anybody else from your family besides--

No, just her.

Just your sister? OK. Well, that must have been an emotional--

Yes.

--reunion. Oh my goodness, oh my goodness. So you lived in a barracks in Sachsenhausen?

Yeah.

And what did you do there?

Making planes.

Planes?

Wings.

Wings for the planes?

For the planes.

And again--

It was torture.

That was very bad?

Shaking, cold, and the--

And what kind of clothes were you wearing? Were you still--

Same thing, same clothes.

The same thing that you had on before from Pionki?

Same thing. They don't give you any--

They didn't give you any other?

No.

So you had the same number?

Number, yes.

From Pionki?

Yep.

Right. Did you have to line up? Did they count you in the morning?

In the morning, every morning, yes.

You stood up in line, and did they do that at Pionki?

Pionki too.

Right, counted people, did anybody try to escape from Sachsenhausen?

No, not from Sachsenhausen. No.

And what again, what kind of food did they give you to keep going?

They give a little better. There is soup and potatoes. There was better food.

Was better food than Pionki?

Pionki, yeah.

Yeah. And how many people were sleeping in your barracks?

We have five or six in the room.

And you had your own bed? Your own cot?

Yeah.

Yeah. OK, and what did you all talk about? What did you prisoners talk--

On the job, you don't have to talk-- you don't talk anything on the job.

You don't talk on the job?

No. And when you come home, then what next thing is what are you going to have for supper. That's what we going to talk.

And you said you were an observant Jew before--

Before.

--when you were growing up. Did you-- could you do anything?

Nothing, they don't-- everybody--

There was no way you could observe anything?

Everybody was having the same thing.

Yeah. So there was no way--

Non-kosher and kosher.

Right. And so here now you're in Sachsenhausen, had you gone to Oranienburg first?

Yes.

When did you do that?

Oranienburg-- we land at Oranienburg.

OK from--

With the train from Pionki.

From Pionki.

Oranienburg and then by train to go over to-- it's not far from Sachsenhausen.

So you didn't stay in Oranienburg?

No.

You went to-- I see.

No.

I had thought you stayed in Oranienburg. No, you went directly to Sachsenhausen?

Sachsenhausen.

Yeah, and you stayed there. And what was your state of mind? And what was your state of health?

Health, you got to be healthy, otherwise you going.

Right.

So state of mind maybe, maybe, maybe, you know, it's going to get better.

You keep thinking that maybe it's going to get better?

Yeah.

Yeah. Did you pray at all to yourself?

No.

No, you just thought maybe it's going to get better?

Yeah.

Yeah, and again, you did not know what was happening in the rest of the world?

The rest of the world, no.

No, OK. And did the other prisoners help each other out?

No.

One man didn't help the other man?

No.

No?

No. Everybody has his own job. Everybody had a family, you know.

Yeah, did you talk about your families to the other men?

Yeah, talking to each other, yes. We were talking.

And they would tell you about their families and their towns?

Yeah.

Did you know any of them before? Were any of them from Pionki?

No.

So they were all newer people?

New people, yes.

OK, and so you stay in Sachsenhausen for how long?

Can you go back for a second?

What would you like? Yeah, any story you have is important.

No, I know, I mean, I forgot to tell you.

That's OK.

Before we came into Oranienburg, we were a group actually, maybe 160, 150 people the same going into Oranienburg from Pionki. And we came to Oranienburg, so they split us up already. Women to the right, men to the left. And so they send us to Sachsenhausen. And the woman stayed there for a while until they get also back to Sachsenhausen, so we were together. Not together, but the same camp.

Did you have any chances to see them, to talk to them?

See them, talk to them yeah, Yeah.

How did that-- can you describe how that happened?

Well, they were talking to us about what happened to them on the way over here.

But you were able to actually be physically next to them and talk to them?

No, through a wire.

Through a fence?

Fence, a fence and a wire.

OK, so you didn't--

Yeah.

And that's how you talked to your sister?

Right.

I see. Yeah. And so a lot of-- so the men were behind on one side of the fence, and the women on the other? And they would talk to each other. So now you are in Sachsenhausen, and you stay there for how long? Until the end of the war, or?

Until the end of the war.

OK, and what was that like? Can you describe that?

Oh, boy.

What was that day, and how did you know it was happening?

I like to go back.

Absolutely, please do, please do.

Then were in Pionki everybody asks me where were the husband?

Where was whose--

My sister's husband.

Your sister's husband?

Yeah, because her and the child and everything. So they didn't know so he was-- he was a tailor. He was working for the Nazis to buy them-- I mean, to tailor suits and everything.

Make the uniforms?

Yeah. So he has a little pool, and he wants to go on over to Radom and bring people in to this camp. So that's what he does. And I took care of the kids-- their kid, my sister's boy. So when we went into Pionki, no children allowed. So I took-- I have an overcoat, and I strapped him with me. And I went to the gate.

And that's it. This was my first experience.

That's wonderful what you did. It's wonderful.

He's alive.

What was the little boy's name?

The boy's name?

Yeah. Or what did you call?

I called him-- they didn't call him by Jewish name. We called him Nathan.

Nathan?

Nathan is his father. And his name was Michael. So he still remembers, he lives. He's a very wealthy man. He's still in--

And he survived in the war--

He survived the war and everything.

--with his mother?

Yeah, his mother passed away about two years ago.

Really? Yeah. And what about his father?

His father passed away about a year later. They both passed away.

Yeah.

They were builders.

OK.

That's why I want to bring it back.

That's a wonderful story. That's a wonderful story, what you did.

Yeah.

What you did, yeah, priceless. So you're in Sachsenhausen, and it's towards the end of the war. And how did you know it was--

How did I know?

Yeah.

We didn't see a German.

So all of a sudden there were no Germans?

No Germans.

And what did you think?

Nothing, just stay there.

You just stayed?

We stayed until we see a Russian guy coming in to the camp. Some woman speaks Russian, I didn't.

Did you speak any German, by the way?

Yes, little bit. Yeah.

That you knew before the war?

No, no.

You picked it up during the war?

Picked it up, yeah. So they saw a German coming in from the woods into the camp. And they ask is any Germans here? So the other guys knew about-- knew the language. We said not yet, no.

So he said stay here, no don't go out until the-- until all the battalions come in, the Russians. So we stayed there for another half a day. And all of a sudden that night or in the afternoon the Russians all over. Some they gave us food and

everything. Stayed here, and if anybody wants to go home you are welcome to go home. So--

Tell me what your feelings were when you realized it was--

Yeah.

--it was the end of the war?

Yeah, those were very good. It was very-- I mean, the end of the war, at least we survived. And a lot of people didn't survive because they eat like a-- start to eat. Fed the other people.

Did you do any kind of celebration? Did you mark the day?

No.

No?

No, we just want to go back to Poland.

Yeah.

And we got back to Poland. They give us a how do you do, a surprise party. They beat the hell out of us.

These are the Polish people?

Yeah.

You got back to your town?

Yeah.

How did you get back?

A train.

You could just get on a train?

A train, yeah.

You didn't need any money?

Any money, nothing.

And you're still wearing your prison outfit?

Prison outfit, yeah. And then later on we got different outfits already.

By then you had-- yeah. And did you go back with people from your town?

Yeah. Two or three people we going back. When they gave us our beating, oh my god. The next day--

You went back, did you go back to your house? How did they find you?

I got back to my house.

And they were-- and people knew you were there?

Yes. So--

What did they say to you?

Get out, don't come back. Get out of here, none come back. That's where they come and they tell us. So the next train--

You left?

I left.

Oh my goodness. Now, what about your parents? What had happened with your parents? Do you know?

Nobody knows.

Nobody knows. And what about your other-- you said you had other siblings? Other brothers and sisters, do you know anything about them?

This is before the war.

Yeah, before the war.

No, I didn't know about them.

You don't know, yeah. So it's only your sister?

Only my sister, yeah. My brother went through underground.

Your brother?

Yeah.

Tell me about what happened with him? He worked--

He was in underground. And he survived.

So he was never captured?

Never captured, he never went to camp, to Pionki.

Oh, OK. And did he stay in Poland during the war the whole time?

War, yeah whole time in the woods. Yeah.

And he did resistance activities?

I guess he was doing in the resistance.

Yeah. And he survived, fortunately.

He survived, yeah.

So the three of you survived?

Yeah.

And then did you get to see him after the war?

After the war, sure, I got to see him.

Where was he?

He came to Germany. He didn't want--

Before you left Germany?

No, then I went to Germany.

You went back to Germany?

Yes.

You went back to Poland, then went back to Germany?

I went to--

Where did you go?

I went to all-- wherever the train take me, then I go.

And so where did you get off the train?

The train went to Bad Nauheim.

Oh, to Bad Nauheim.

Germany.

Right, to a DP camp? A displaced person camp?

Displaced person.

And that's where your brother came?

Then he found me.

He found you?

Because we were looking for relatives. We were looking for-- in Czechoslovakia, we were looking for that. And I find my sister in Sweden.

Because she left at the end of the war to go to Sweden?

They took her to Sweden.

They took her to Sweden, her and her little boy?

Yeah, they sunk ships, five of them. She was on the sixth boat. Yeah. That was something.

So now you're in the DP camp, displaced persons camp, with your brother. And you stayed there?

Yeah, stayed there.

And what did you do, and how did they treat you?

They treat us very good.

With enough food?

Free, enough food, you free. You can go anyplace you want. Yeah. That's a different life. It was a different life.

Yeah, and when did you hear about what happened to all the other Jews during the war?

Ove there after we were liberated.

Then you found out?

Yeah.

We were liberated.

Yeah, yeah. And so at-- did you do any classes, or did you do anything at that Bad Nauheim?

No.

Train you, any job training?

No, no job training.

So what did you do every day?

Every day we were going out to see if you can find anybody else.

Yeah, you just kept searching?

Searching, surviving.

But you didn't have a job?

No, we didn't have a job. No.

And now you're-- let's see, you're 24 years old now?

Yeah. Yep.

And where did you live in the camp?

In the camp.

In another barracks?

Another barracks, yeah.

And people's state of mind was good?

Yeah, they're very good. There was actually they at Bad Nauheim there were a lot of Jewish people who came back. Germans.

Oh, German Jews?

Jews--

Who came?

--came back, and we were there. And now that time, from there we went over to the United States.

So you stayed in Bad Nauheim for how long?

For how long? I would say about a year and a half, maybe more.

And you came to the United States?

United States, yeah.

That was your decision to come here?

Yes.

What did the United States mean to you at that time?

Free-- it's a free country. They treat everybody equal. The Jewish people are going over there. So I decided, let's go to Europe, from Europe, to the United States. And they advised me to [INAUDIBLE] the country [INAUDIBLE].

So you are in the DP camp for a couple years?

Yeah, two years, yeah.

Two years. so to '47 or so, '48?

'48.

'48, OK. And then when the state of Israel was formed, did you know about that?

Yes, I was signed up.

Signed up for what?

For Israel.

You were--

Yeah, but my sister said let's don't that, see if we can go all together to the United States.

She did not want to go to Israel?

No.

But you to?

Yeah, I want to go. So we stay there until I--

So she-- she did she come back from Sweden--

She come back--

From Sweden to Bad Nauheim?

From Sweden to Bad Nauheim.

So you were with her then, I see.

So we were there, and the husband was there, and the little son.

And the boy, the son? Yeah. So she and you and the husband and the little boy--

We all together.

To go to the United States?

To the United States.

Yeah.

And so I had a little bit problems.

What kind of problems?

Problems, I couldn't get out on my name because I was involved in the black market.

This is in the DP camp?

DP camp.

What kind of-- what were you selling?

I was selling diamonds, bringing it in from Belgium into the United States-- from Belgium into Germany. So the--

How did you get involved in that?

I didn't have anything to do. I'm going to do something.

Right.

So I had a car.

You had a car?

Yeah, already a car. So I'm back and forth.

Back and forth to Belgium?

Belgium yeah.

To pick up the diamonds, and then bring them back and sell them?

There was somebody else, not mine. And I was involved, so I couldn't get out on my name.

They knew that?

Yes. They knew that.

The authorities knew that?

So I took a different name, and I get out from here. That time--

What was your new name?

Carl Koch.

Carl Koch?

Koch.

Yeah, K-O-C-H.

So--

How did you happen to pick that?

Somebody gave me that name. That's laughing, it's--

I don't mean to laugh. Yeah.

I said OK, that's it. So that's how you went out?

I went out, and then couple years when I signed up for citizenship I changed my name. I love my real name.

OK, no, you're still-- let's get back to the DP camp. So you're going to United States, you get your new name.

Yeah.

And then how soon after did they give you--

After I--

--permission to come to the United States?

Six weeks or so.

It didn't take a long time?

Didn't take a long time.

Did you come by boat?

Oh, yeah, by boat.

What was that like?

They said it usually takes five days. Took us two weeks.

What--

The worst storm they ever met-- they ever had.

Really?

Yeah.

So when was--

I was the strongest one to get the people from downstairs up to the--

To the deck?

--to the deck. Oh, boy, this was--

So was this in the winter? What time of year?

I left in December.

December of '49?

1949.

OK.

So '50--

So then you come to New York?

I supposed to land in New York.

Yeah.

But no, I landed in New Orleans.

Because of the weather or?

The weather.

OK.

The storm and everything.

Now, was your family with you on the boat?

No, no, no, I was by myself.

Why weren't you all together?

Because I signed up. Because they have a family. They had still business to in Germany.

So they did not want to leave?

Leave-- no

They wanted to stay?

To stay for a while.

But you wanted to leave?

I wanted-- that's enough.

OK.

So I was there.

And so you get to New Orleans?

Yeah. New Orleans.

Did you speak any English?

English, no. I was sponsored.

By whom?

By a winemaker Fromm and Sichel.

From where? Fromm and Sichel, two Germans.

Oh.

They had a winery in California. They had a winery in Saratoga. So they sponsored me.

But you didn't-- they didn't know you?

No.

No.

No, they--

Were they Jewish?

Jews.

They were Jewish.

Fromm and Sichel they sponsored me and another guy. So we were working in the winery over there. We came to Saratoga.

Saratoga, New York?

No, state, United States.

Saratoga is what?

Saratoga, these United States. Because they sponsored me--

Yeah.

--from New Orleans. They have a winery in California. So it has sponsored me, and they paid for everything. I should come over to--

The winery?

The winery.

In California?

California.

Oh, I see.

So we went over there to Saratoga.

In California?

California.

Because there is a Saratoga, New York. That's why I'm--

Yeah we had a barrack they gave us. They paid everything. They were nice people.

And so you stayed in California?

Stayed, yeah.

And you started to learn English?

English, went to school at night. In day time I went to work. They picked us up on a bus.

You went to work in the winery?

Yeah.

What did you do?

Do the winery. I got first of all, you have to light work chemicals, light work. And then later on, and you know this, you gotta go out in the field, and see what happened there. So a little bit heavier work, but it's good.

And did you talk to the other workers?

Oh, yes.

And did they ask you about your experience--

Experience, sure.

--during the war? And did you tell them about it?

Tell, sure, they knew about that, too. It's a lot of them. Most of them, a lot of them were Japanese.

Yes. And by that did it take you a long time to learn English?

No, it didn't take me.

Oh, OK.

No.

Because you were like 29 or 30 by then. Yeah, and were you in contact with your sister and brother and the family still when you were in California?

Yes.

How did you stay in contact with them? By mail?

By telephone, by mail, and then another problem came up. A friend of mine called her up and write her a letter. Said I'm going out with a Gentile girl, a teacher. So my sister write me a letter, said I don't want to know you, if you ever get involved with a Gentile. So I said, OK. I packed my stuff.

You were the one going out with a Gentile?

Yeah.

Oh, OK.

I packed my stuff, go back to New York.

Oh, OK.

I have a car. Stayed-- I became a butcher, back in the butcher business just to keep myself going.

Did you know anybody in New York?

No.

You went to this strange city not knowing anybody?

No. So? So I went over there, and I became a butcher.

How did you know where to go in New York?

New York, as you know, there are kosher butchers. You went to a kosher butcher and they tell you what to do.

But how did you know where to live?

Oh, there were a couple-- I have a few dollars. So I live on my own. And then--

So you became a butcher?

Butcher.

And where did you live?

I lived on Howard Street, in a Jewish neighborhood.

In Manhattan?

No.

In Brooklyn?

Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn, OK.

So that's what the story--

Yeah, and then what happened?

Then becoming a butcher.

Yeah.

And I made a good living-- a good living. It was a good living. And then all of a sudden my brother-in-law, should he rest in peace, he was a builder, said why don't you come work for me over there in New Jersey.

Oh, OK.

That's the reason I wind up in New Jersey.

So now you're in New Jersey with your brother-in-law and your sister and your nephew--

With my sister and their son, yeah.

And then what happened?

That's my story.

That's your story? Well, we have a little more just to talk about. I'm going to change-- A. So you're now in New Jersey working for your brother-in-law?

Yeah.

OK, and how long-- what did you do for him?

Construction. Not interesting.

Yeah, and then how--

Going from one city to another.

Building houses?

Yes.

Private houses?

Private homes.

OK, and did you live with them?

No.

You live by yourself?

I was myself.

OK, and for how long did you do that?

Oh, was for a couple, few years. Yes.

Yeah.

Until I met a girl to [NON-ENGLISH].

Oh, really?

Yeah, you're laughing.

That's wonderful.

Met a girl, and right near where I used to live. Where I was working as a butcher there. Met a girl, and six weeks later, six or seven weeks later, I got engaged, and I got married.

Oh, wonderful.

And then I was on my own.

OK, so you're still working for your--

My brother-in-law, yeah.

So you lived in New Jersey?

Yeah. Then lived for awhile, and then married.

When did you get married?

In this was in--

'55, '56?

'56, yeah.

OK, and did you live in New Jersey?

Yes.

Stayed in New Jersey.

Yeah, and then I was looking for a house because she was pregnant, and we need somebody. So we bought a house on top Scott Street. No, we used to live on top. [INAUDIBLE] Scott Street.

And what town in New Jersey? That's OK. OK, so then she got pregnant?

Yeah.

And then you had your child?

Jack.

And then how long did you-- you're still in New Jersey?

Oh, yeah. I was in New Jersey. And then I still worked with my brother-in-law. And we got bigger and--

And you stayed with him?

Yes.

OK, and are you still working in the construction business?

Still working construction.

You're still doing it?

I'm still doing it.

That's wonderful.

Yeah, still 89, 88.

It's wonderful.

I used to be in construction and heavy work. But now--

You actually did the heavy work?

The heavy work, yeah. But a little bit later I become-- I tell the people what to do. And I am now I'm working four days a week, and giving the people the material to do the work. And that's all. That's what my job is.

That's wonderful, that's wonderful. Let's talk a little bit about some of your thoughts. Have you been back to Poland?

No.

Would you want to go?

My brother-in-law, ask so many times let's go back to Poland, she rest in peace. I said he wants to see his father. I said--

Why don't you want to go back?

I had a very bad memory with the Polacks.

Right.

So that's the only reason.

Yeah. Have you been to Europe?

No.

Never?

No.

Once you left?

I don't want to leave. I don't want to know Europe. Because I had that time such a beating, that time it was unbelievable.

Oh, when you came back to your town, you're talking about?

Yeah. After the war.

Yeah, when they beat you up.

So that time I don't want to go any place.

Yeah. Have you been to Israel?

I'm going to go in May-- next year in May, end of May.

Will this be your first time?

First time.

How wonderful. This coming May?

This coming May, end of May.

That's wonderful, that's exciting. And your sister is where?

She passed away.

Oh, she passed away, that's right.

She passed away.

And your nephew lives where?

With us. Now he's become a-- his father passed away, so he's the boss.

So he's the head of the construction?

He's the head of the construction.

Right, so you're working with him?

Yeah.

Yeah. Does he talk to-- what has he said to you about what you did for him? You saved his life.

He knows. [INAUDIBLE]

What does he say to you about that?

Nothing he can say. But he is very, very worried about me, every time I don't feel good. Right now I live in a--

Retirement home?

Not a retirement-- I live in--

Assisted living?

Assisted living.

And so sometimes I don't feel good. So he said I want to see you. Get dressed and come out to the lobby, 9:00, 9:30. So I get dressed and he will ask, are you OK? He wants to see if I feel good or not.

Yeah. What are your feelings about Germany now? What are your thoughts about Germany?

Very bitter, just as bad as the Polish.

Do you remember the Eichmann trial at all?

I remember, sure,

What were your thoughts then?

They didn't do it-- they did whatever they could. I mean, there are a lot of Nazis over there that are supposed to be executed, and they didn't do it. That's all I thought. Just like over here.

Have you experienced antisemitism in the United States?

Not yet.

Not yet?

Not yet.

Do you think it could happen?

Could happen.

You feel that way?

Could happen, because the way they I see the swastikas over there every time is like a parade or something--

In the United States you're saying?

Yeah, and I see the swastika over there. That's why I say could happen. Not to my life.

Do you think that most of the world has learned the lessons of the Holocaust?

Not the Arabs, but Israel. I go for Israel.

What are your thoughts about Israel?

Israel is the most wonderful place. I don't-- I like to live there, too. They are unbelievable. If they can go and bomb Syria-- I mean--

Iran?

Iran, I give them much credit. Yeah.

Have you been to the Holocaust Museum?

Not yet.

Not yet.

I'm going to go there. I have a cousin over there. He's also a picture in the paper and everything, and picture over there. His name is Manny Weissman.

You're talking about the museum in Washington?

Yeah, Washington.

His picture, where is his picture?

In the--

In the exhibit?

The exhibit.

He's from Poland?

Yeah.

Oh, that's great. And where does he live now?

He lives in Denver, Colorado.

So do you have a lot of family here, extended family, in the United States?

Yes, I have nieces, grand-nieces extended over here, yes.

OK, and do you see them?

Oh, sure. I see them all the time.

Yeah. And these are children of your?

Holocaust survivors.

No, but of your sister and your brother?

Not my sisters, just my brother. And then they are in Chicago. And then the other ones are Michael Kaplan's relatives, my sister's side.

Do you-- are you more religious? Of course, you were young when the war started. Do you think you're more religious, less religious?

I'm less--

Because of what you--

--less religious, what happened to us.

OK, why are you less religious?

Because it shouldn't happen to us. Parents, I should know where my parents are.

So you feel you're less?

Yes.

Less religious. Yeah. Did you, in the 1960s-- of course, you were just getting settled, but there was in the '60s and '70s was the big civil rights movement.

Civil rights movement, yeah.

Were you involved in all of that?

No, I was not.

Because you had lived through so much yourself.

Yes, I was not involved in that. There was one Jewish fellow got killed, I know.

Yeah, right. The young man.

Young boy I know, I remember.

Actually, there were two of them, the two of the three were Schwerner and--

I didn't know.

You're talking about Schwerner and Goodman in the south?

Yeah.

Yeah. Do you read about the Holocaust? Do you read about the war?

The war, yes. I don't know what's going to be over there, but [INAUDIBLE] Lebanon.

No, but I meant do you read-- excuse me, do you read about World War 2?

World War 2, no.

That's what I meant.

No.

You don't read about the Holocaust?

No.

Well, is there anything you would like to say? Anything you'd like to add? Any stories, anything you wanted to--

No.

--say before we close?

The stories I told you about. My nephew--

Yes, which is a wonderful story.

I took him into the concentration camp at the belt.

How old was he at the time?

Oh, a year.

He was a baby?

Yeah and a couple of months. He was so good. He never cry.

He did not cry?

No. Like he would know.

Now, did you tell your son, Jack, when he was growing up about what you experienced?

Oh, yeah. He knows it.

No, I meant when he was younger.

Younger, yeah.

When did you start telling him?

Not until he was around, he was going into college.

Oh, not till he went to college?

Yeah.

You waited?

We waited, yeah.

Why did you wait?

Because you got lot of book, a lot of things to eat, and everything. [INAUDIBLE]

Yeah, enough to do.

Books and everything.

Are there any things that you see or sounds that you hear or smells that remind you of the war and being in the camps?
Do you know what I mean? That makes you think back--

No.

Oh, that smells like such and such.

No.

Nothing reminds you?

Nothing reminds me. I'm going my way. I go to work four days, keep myself occupied, busy. People like me, that's all. I come home, that's a different story.

Yeah.

Lonesome.

Are you more comfortable-- or were you more comfortable before about being with people who had survived the war, as opposed to the Americans who lived here?

More comfortable with survived the war.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And is that still true?

Yes.

And why--

I don't know. That they went through just like me.

Right.

That's all it is.

So when you meet survivors, let's say you meet a new survivor. Do you--

A new survivor, I find out where is he, where was he, which camp.

And you each tell each other story-- tell the story of each other.

Yeah.

Of yourselves to each other.

Yeah.

So you are more comfortable, you said? Speaking, because they understand, yeah. Do you think you were with Jack, were you overprotective in raising him because you had a difficult time in your life, or not?

I have two, two years apart. I have two boys.

You have another son?

Yeah. Mark.

Mark, and where--

He lives in California. Oh, he lives in Miami.

In Florida?

Florida.

Oh, wonderful.

So I--

Is he older or younger?

He's younger.

Younger.

Two years younger. So he's in fact, I have to go over there in the beginning of May for the bar mitzvah.

Oh, of your grandson?

My grandson.

Wonderful.

One was already bar mitzvahed, but the other one is coming in the middle of May.

Oh, wonderful.

And then after the middle of May I go to Israel.

Fabulous. That's a wonderful spring.

Yeah.

Wonderful spring. So when the boys were young you said you didn't talk about your child--

No, because--

What you went--

--they had a lot of reading to do and everything.

Right, they were busy.

I didn't want to interrupt them and everything.

Yeah. But my question is were you more protective of them because you had such a difficult time in your life?

I'm more protective, yes. It shouldn't happen to nobody.

Yeah. Was your wife a survivor?

No.

No, she was born in the United States?

United States, yeah.

Oh, OK.

Yeah, she passed away a year ago.

And did you tell her about your background right away?

Oh, sure. She knows it. In fact, she always reminds me for the candles. Hey, you have to light the candles, have to light the candles.

Oh, OK.

Yeah.

Yeah. Well, do you think a lot about what you went through as you've gotten older or not?

I didn't get it over yet, no.

No, as you've gotten older?

Older?

Do you think more about the experiences you had during the war?

Yes, I would say yes. I wouldn't even all day, I wouldn't survive.

Yeah.

Just like when--

Do you think a lot about it every day?

Yes. Just like my parents couldn't survive.

Yeah, have you tried to find out what happened?

Where?

Yeah, what happened to them?

Cannot. I know they were executed.

You know that?

You know that and--

How do you know that?

Bergen-Belsen.

How do you know that? How did you find out?

Well, that train, that month, the train from Jedlnia was coming and going over to [? Russia ?].

Yeah.

Ukraine.

Yeah, and so they were taken to Ukraine?

Yeah.

And that's where they lost their lives?

Yeah.

And do you know where in Ukraine or just?

Treblinka.

And then you said you had other siblings?

I don't remember them.

But do you know what happened to them?

No they were passed away.

Were they with your parents?

No. When they were very young.

Oh, they-- not from the war?

No.

Oh, I see. I see, yeah. Well, is there anything else you wanted to add before we close?

No. I guess.

Nothing else?

Nothing else.

OK, well thank you very much for doing this interview. I appreciate you taking the time to do it.

Take the time, all of us. So many times people tell me, let me interview you, let me interview you. I want to see the story. It's going to be in the newspapers? No. It's for my own personal use. That's all.

So were you interviewed before? Have you been interviewed before?

Just for half an hour.

By whom?

By a friend, a Italian fellow.

A friend? Oh, OK.

Yeah, Lou Costanza.

Not for an organization or anything like that?

No, no, no.

Yeah. So what made you be willing to do this interview for the Holocaust Museum?

So my son can go over there, take a look, he can read.

Right. Well it will be in the archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

That's good. Thank you.

Thank you. This concludes the interview of Sol Mackler.