

Name: Leon Metzler

Birthplace: Sobernheim, Germany

Birthdate: May 18th 1928

Age: 87

Religious Identity: Jewish

Holocaust Story:

In 1938 November the 10th that's when it started, the Hitler movement. I was in Sobernheim on Nov the 10th 1938 that's when they had Kristallnacht, and I was there on the day of Kristallnacht, I was only 10 years old. When the Nazis came into our house with axes and broke up all the furniture and the windows and then they arrested my father and took him away to Dachau, and we never saw him again. We got a telegram from the Nazis, that he died that from a kidney infection, I don't think it was kidney infection, the way I understand it from my uncle is my father tried to escape and then the Nazis shot him when he ran, and the Nazis killed him. My father is buried in Munich, there are very few Jews that they did that with; he was one of the few who were buried in Munich, Germany. When I was in the army in 1952, 1951 I was stationed near there and I used to go to the cemetery and visit him, in American clothes as an American Soldier it was very hard for me to go to the grave and visit him. I begin this story started in 1938 and I left in 1939, in January I left Germany and went to France and I lived there in France for three years with my uncle, we avoided the French, in 1939 is when the war started with Poland. France, we got out of there and lived in a small town, a polish French lady, there were rooms to live in the house she owned, she gave us rooms and we lived there. She left us in the house it was very nice, we lived there until May 17th 1940, French came and the Germans considered us French they didn't know about Jewish so they put us in an internment camp because we were Germans, we went from a little town, first they were going to put us in jail, which was a cowshed, they put us on a train in 1940. We went to a camp, called Gurs we were there for a few months, we were charged, I don't know the exact date and we left that camp and we went to Marseille and we found a place to live in a Jewish synagogue and we lived there for a few months. May 1941 we left France and went to Spain and from Spain we traveled to Portugal and Portugal we embarked to America and we came over literally in a cattle boat. And we came to America, we had it good here. Leo 1941. It was June or July of 1941 when we came to the U.S. One sister, grandmother we came together. My mother never came over, she couldn't get a passport, my mother stayed back in the house we owned but she never came over, she tried to get a passport and they wouldn't give her one, someone tried to smuggle her across the border for 2k dollars but he never transferred her across the border so she never came here with us. She was arrested and taken to Therezinstadt, near Poland I think. She died in that camp that's the last I heard of her. Whenever I talk about it, I start to cry, it's a bad time I went through, my sister and I went through

the bad times together, my grandmother came with us and we traveled together and we both, the three of us suffered through the same thing. We had a bad time together; I remember the train we were on in France going to a camp in France called Gurs, for months we were interned until we came over back to Marseille. In Marseille we lived, didn't have a room, we had no money, no place to stay. Then I talked to a Frenchman, I could talk fluent French and when I talked French they didn't know I was German. We stayed in a synagogue and that's how we survived, very little bread, all we ate was bread and sardines and chickpeas. the camp in Gurs they gave us chickpeas, it's those big peas, they gave us fish, dried out fish in the sun and made it taste horrible. That was the food in the camp, we had every day and we survived on that. That's how I survived.

What was your first job here, what occupation do you identify with?

Delivering newspapers, we settled in Pittsburgh. I worked for the telephone company. I was the only Jew that worked there in the telephone office, so they used to say to me what are you doing here, Jews are Doctors and Lawyers, and I said I can work just as well as you can. My hands are just the same as yours, and I can work with my hands just as well as you can, and so then they shut up.

When did you meet your spouse, can you tell us about them?

1957 we met, in Pittsburgh, at the YMCA, there used to be dances every week, 1966 was when we got married.

How many/if any children do you have? Do you have any grandchildren?

Just one daughter. And two grandchildren.

What is your favorite thing to do now and why?

I'm retired, I watch CNN. I have my friends on the outside a lot of friends, I used to go to the JCC every week for two classes, one was Yiddish and the other was current events, they used to say to me you speak such good Yiddish where did you learn, and I told them that I learned it from two brothers in the synagogue in Marseille, two Polish brothers and they taught me Yiddish and some Hebrew. That's where I learned to speak Yiddish. German Jews don't speak Yiddish. I can speak fluent, just like the Polish speak Yiddish. I kept speaking Yiddish, and I learned it in Yiddish class, and it kept me busy and kept my mind. The JCC is a nice place to go to, there's all kinds of classes, all kinds of gym classes, workout classes, there's a swimming pool, you could spend the whole day just going through the different activities, so that's where I spent most of my time, we used to go on trips for the day, that's how I passed my time away. But here I'm the only Jew that I know of.

They look at me with a funny face when I tell them I'm Jewish, and I was in the army, did my duty in the army I was over seas in Germany for a year and a half. I spent my career I used to go in the army as an interpreter. Sometimes and then the Germans would say "you're no American, you're German", I said "yea I'm German" then they would say to me "but you're an American, you speak German too good", I say "I come from Germany that's true, but I'm an American now, see my uniform I'm an American now",

the Germans wouldn't accept me because I'm a Jew. That's what they always told me. It's odd for an American soldier as I was for a time, with your father in the cemetery in Munich.