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# Morris Sunshine oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, March 19, 2008

Morris Sunshine (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

**Michael Hirsh:** Hang on just a moment. Okay, first of all, why don't you give me your full name and spell it for me, please.

**Morris Sunshine:** Okay, the name is Morris Sunshine, M-o-r-r-i-s, Sunshine like it is up there, S-u-n-s-h-i-n-e.

MH: And your address, please?

MS: ...

MH: And your phone number is....

MS: You got it.

MH: And your date of birth, sir?

MS: June 10, 1924.

MH: Which makes you how old today?

MS: Eighty-four.

MH: Eighty-four. Tell me just a little bit about your life before you went in the Army.

MS: Before I went to the Army?

MH: Yeah.

MS: I graduated high school, and soon after that I was drafted. I spent about a year at Brooklyn College, and then went into service.

MH: You grew up where?

MS: Oh, I grew up in Brooklyn, and I played musical instruments and I played in a band. I was a musician, and that's what I hoped to be when I grew up.

MH: And did the Army fulfill that, or change that?

MS: (laughs) The Army helped me become a musician after the war.

MH: Really?

MS: Yes.

MH: You mean through the GI Bill?

MS: GI Bill, God bless that thing. God bless it. In the Army, I started bands wherever I was. I'll give you a quick history, a quick background, if you want it.

MH: Sure.

MS: I played in a band, and when I got drafted, I was requested to come to Newport News, Virginia, to play—I played drums and piano—and come to Newport News because that's where the guys I played with were stationed. But I got into this combat engineering battalion after basic training, and nobody was ever allowed to leave it for any reason whatsoever. Nobody went to officer training school, nobody went to ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] at that time; you know, the special college courses that were given. Nobody got out of these outfits. And we happened to be the one that started the outfit; it was started by a bunch of people from Brooklyn and New York City and New Jersey. And that's the way the outfit stood until we got replacements, of course, and then it became an all-American army.

But wherever I went, I had a band in Camp Gordon; I had a band in Nashville, Tennessee; in Mojave Desert I started a group: wherever I went, I started bands and they were all successful. They played the officers' club, the USO [United Service Organizations], and I was hoping that I would be stationed with a band; but since we weren't authorized, that didn't happen. And after the war, I started bands in Germany. I was with the first GIs in Berlin, I started a band there. Wherever I went, I started a band. So, music is very much a part of my life. So, that's it.

MH: So, how do you go from being a musician to having the Army in its infinite wisdom make you a combat engineer?

MS: Because that's the way the Army works. In its infinite wisdom, the Army does that. I mean, they look at your credentials, but most of the time they did what they thought—they used you the way they needed to, not where I thought they should use me.

MH: So, they send you to basic training—

MS: They sent me to basic training, yes.

MH: And then where to?

MS: We went to basic training at Camp Gordon, then Augusta, Georgia; and then maneuvers in Murfreesboro, Tennessee; and then we headed out to the Mojave Desert, outside of Yuma, Arizona; and from there we came all the way back and shipped out of Myles Standish in Boston to England. And we stayed in England—

MH: When did you go in?

MS: The Army?

MH: Yeah.

MS: Oh, God. I think it was February or March—

MH: Of what year?

MS: Of forty-three [1943].

MH: Forty-three [1943], okay.

MS: And then we shipped out just before Christmas, so November, from Boston to England.

MH: Of forty-three [1943].

MS: Of forty-three [1943], right. Forty-four [1944], we were already in England, I guess, and we stayed there just before the preparation of the invasion. And we received training, combat training for the invasion. I had three guys in my squad that landed H-hour with the Seabees on the beach, on Omaha Beach. We were supposed to go into Omaha Beach on the [USS] *Susan B. Anthony*, which was sunk by a mine in the English Channel, and we lost all our equipment. So, we jumped off the boat and went to—the boat was—everybody that was on that boat that could get off eventually jumped off into boats that came around the boat. We jumped into the other ship. I ended up on an English escort carrier. And with no equipment, no helmet, no guns, no nothing, I knew that we weren't going to make the invasion. And we were going to go back to England, I assumed. But that's not what happened.

MH: What happened?

MS: Instead of us going to Omaha Beach, we went to Utah Beach, 'cause Utah Beach was accessible. And they dumped us onto Utah Beach, and that's the way we landed. We were without any equipment, no helmets, and no guns. Our rendezvous point was—

MH: You were on the *Susan B. Anthony* when it hit the mine?

MS: Oh, absolutely.

MH: So, it went down and—

MS: It went down, and—

MH: And you ended up in the water?

MS: No, we—I said we disembarked. What they brought were ships, around the—the captain was fantastic, and he balanced the ship. He had the troops walk back and forth from side to side: so, as the ship lists, he would keep it balanced by the weight of the troops going from side to side on the boat. And what happened, when boats came near the *Susan B. Anthony*, and on the next, we were ready to disembark into the LCVPs [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel].

MH: Right.

MS: Instead of that, we went into these Navy ships. And everybody was in different places, and we had no way to connect, you know, as far as finding who and where our men were. So, whatever men I had with me, we stuck together, and when we landed, we tried to find our area. And that was a chore in itself, but you're not—that's the story you're not interested in. You're interested in the concentration camp, I guess.

MH: Yes, but I sort of would like to know how you get there.

MS: Oh, to the concentration camp?

MH: Yeah, ultimately. But you land at Utah Beach, and then what?

MS: Oh, it took about two to three weeks before we received equipment: you know, guns and helmets and backpacks and all the equipment that we were supposed to land with. And before that, what we did was sleep in the hedgerows, and we picked up German armaments. We didn't want to pick up American guns; it was something in my head and the guys' heads that we thought it would be disrespectful to take M1s from dead GIs.

So, what we did was pick up the German rifles, their Mausers, and burp guns, and we got German armaments. And we started firing the armaments to test fire 'em over the—out into the water, and we were surrounded by American GIs when they heard German firing. They thought we were Germans, 'cause the only thing we had on was our fatigues, but no helmets. So, we had to identify ourselves by telling them who's playing first base on the New York Yankees and who Joe Lewis was, et cetera. And finally, they let us go by. But it took about three weeks—two, three weeks, just before Saint-Lô—for us to get our guns.

But, meanwhile, we had located our captain, we'd located our battalion, and we were building roads for the tanks. We were demolishing buildings that were blocking pathways for the troops to go up to Cherbourg. Then, once we got out of Saint-Lô, we advanced with the troops: we went to Saint-Lô, we went to the Mortain-Falaise Gap, we got to the Seine River. We were always, always first. We were the first bridge over the Seine, first bridge over the—you name it. We did a lot of that. And you know, as guys got hurt and as guys got killed, they were replaced by other people. We traveled, and we ended up in the Hürtgen Forest, and we were in the Hürtgen Forest for three months, pulled back to the Bulge, back to Belgium, and then back to the Hürtgen Forest for another three months, and then on to the Ruhr River and then on to the Rhine [River]. We built the first bridge across the Rhine, and then it was past the Rhine, as we entered Germany—

MH: The bridges you're building are what, the floating bridges? Pontoon bridges?

MS: Yeah, pontoon bridges, Bailey bridges.

MH: What's a Bailey bridge?

MS: Oh, that is—a Bailey bridge was a bridge that was invented by the English, and it was put together like an erector set. They had panels, and you would construct, depending on what the strength of the bridge was needed: you know, for tanks you needed a very strong bridge, for trucks you needed less, for people, for troops, you needed less, you know, of a capacity. The way that was determined is how many panels we used. If you used one panel—the more panels you would use, and they would get three on each side, let's say, was the strongest. And then you'd build them up. You'd attach panels on top of

the panels. And three tiers of those panels was about as strong as you get the bridge, with three wide of those panels. And these were done manually. You'd have a squad to carry these things, and they'd have like two of us to carry these things. And they would get put together by pins. They were constructed very rapidly, and then you would sort of scale them out over the water. They had the—oh, what would you call that?—rollers, and that's the way you'd launch these things. And it's quite an ingenious thing.

They used Bailey bridges—in fact, there was one just removed; they were using it some of the superhighways outside of New York, near the Shea Stadium. And there was a very strong Bailey bridge, and when I see it, I know; it's, like, inbred. And I say, "Ah! Bailey!" you know, and I know the strength that it's going to take. So, they were wonderful, they were wonderful; they were a godsend to us. And so, we built those kind of bridges. And it was when we entered past the Rhine River when—I guess we were stationed—the city before Nordhausen must have been Halle. Somehow, I think that was the name of it. H-a-l-l-e.

MH: L-l-e. It's a name that's come up, yes.

MS: Yes. I know that because that was the place that Johann Sebastian Bach performed in the church; I know it musically. It was such a cultural center and yet these people—what they did was a horror. So, it was after that. As we approached Nordhausen, we didn't know what we were gonna—we didn't know what was in advance as we approached the —

MH: Did you know anything at all?

MS: Not at all.

MH: About concentration camps?

MS: Well, we'd heard stories, you know, but we never saw any. When I was a kid in Brooklyn, there were people we used to call refugees, and they spoke about prisons that they came from, but not in the sense of the concentration camp that I learned about. And I despised—I can't ever forgive them for what I saw.

At any rate, that's how we approached Nordhausen. We didn't know what we were approaching. It was just the odor, the smell of death, 'cause they had the bodies stacked up in hangars.

MH: How far away were you able to smell it?

MS: Oh, I think ten, fifteen miles.

MH: Really?

MS: Oh, it was—when you smell death—I don't know if you know that smell. I mean a dead dog or something that's been sitting for weeks, or months, 'cause they couldn't burn them fast enough. And then they were stacked: they were stacked like cordwood, very neat.

MH: Tell me about the day you were approaching it. I mean, was this in the morning, in the afternoon?

MS: It was in the morning, I think it was. Yeah.

MH: And you're riding in what?

MS: We were riding in trucks. When we got to it, we saw these skeleton-like people, you know, dressed in the striped uniforms. Some of them moved, some of them didn't move. I mean, it was a shocking sight.

MH: They were out of the camp, or they were in the camp?

MS: They were in the camp.

MH: How far off the road you were traveling on was the camp?

MS: Oh, no, it was right there.

MH: Right there.

MS: When we got there, that was it. This was some kind of something that's indescribable, you know. And the smell was such a—you know, it's horrible. It's a horrible smell of death that hasn't been put into the ground. It's unimaginable.

MH: So, you're riding in trucks and you begin to smell this, and then what happens?

MS: Then we come upon it. Now we look at these people, and some of them were begging, looked like they were asking for help of some sort. And the guys that were medics, they jumped off, and you know, everything stopped to try to take care of these people.

MH: Are you in a big convoy, or just a few trucks?

MS: Well, we were—it was one platoon, I guess. It was just a platoon of my company, and then they came up later. Some of this—it was one, two—I would say there were three platoons, so I would say truck-wise, well, looking at—maybe there were six trucks or something like that. Yeah. There was a squad in each truck.

MH: And where were you going at that point?

MS: I don't know. I mean, I don't know where we're going. We're going here, to Nordhausen, I guess. I have no idea.

MH: But you were not—you didn't have an assignment, you didn't have a river coming up that you had to—

MS: No, no, no. We were just advancing into Germany: where we were heading for, which I eventually found out, was the Elbe River, where the Russians were. We were going to meet the Russians. And so, I didn't know—we didn't know. We never knew what we were going to do until we were told to do it, you know. On the Rhine River, they woke us up, they said, "Get up," and we went to the river and then you knew what you had to do. There was no advanced detail; it wasn't like an attack or that kind of thing.

So, we started getting off the truck and trying to help these people. We were feeding them chocolate bars; we were feeding them all the things that we shouldn't be feeding them. Anything we had, we gave them. We had K rations, we had some C rations. Whatever we

had, we gave to these people. And then, we just stayed there. I don't know where the heck we were housed. I'm trying to think of where we were housed there, 'cause we usually went into homes at that time, if we weren't in the woods. But we weren't getting hit by artillery or things like that. We would go into houses. We must have gone into houses in Nordhausen.

I do remember that some of these people got out, and they wandered into some of the German houses looking for food. And I remember being—I was a buck-ass sergeant, and somebody came out looking for me 'cause I spoke Yiddish, which is German, and I was able to converse with these people. And they told me that there were some people in this house, and the woman is screaming. The woman of the house was screaming and yelling and panicking.

I went in. And what the story was, the member of the concentration camp, there was bread on the table and he grabbed it. And she was screaming at him that “This is for my family!” and she was appealing to me that I should get the bread from the concentration camp victim. Which, of course, I didn't have any sympathy for her at all. I mean, I was so angry at what you saw, the depravity, and they were like skeletons. Some of them couldn't walk, some of them didn't have what to drink—whatever we gave them, some of them threw up. It was too much for their stomach to take. But this, of course, we didn't know at the time. We only found that out in a day or so, two days. They were collapsing on us. This is what I remember about that.

I also know a little story about the 104<sup>th</sup> [Infantry Division]. I don't know how I learned this, but Hugh Carey was the governor of New York State. I don't know if you know the name?

MH: Yes, I do.

MS: And he was a lieutenant colonel or a colonel, I think, in the 104<sup>th</sup>. And he came to the same place that we did, but another part of the camp, because the camps were huge, you know.

MH: Right. And there were several of them in the Dora area.

MS: Yeah. Well, that I found out later, you know; I only know what I saw. I saw the camp, I saw these people, and then I saw the stacks of bodies that they had warehoused. I didn't see the crematorium. I didn't even know they had a crematorium there; I learned that later. And then I learned about the underground tunnels much later, years later.

But, oh! So, Hugh Carey saw this, and he was taken by it so much. He was with the chaplain; there was a chaplain there. The two of them went down on their knees and they started praying and doing whatever they thought that they had to do. And the reason he always took the position in New York State that he would never allow—this was how he was feeling—he would never allow the government [to] control the sentencing of life or death, in the government's hands, because of what he saw at Nordhausen. Now, when he was the governor of the state, he would never sign a bill for electrocution, you know, the terminating of a life. But he was part of the 104<sup>th</sup>, I knew that. That's it.

MH: Did you go inside the camp?

MS: Yes.

MH: Tell me about that.

MS: Well, we got into the yard, never into the barracks. We got into the yard because we were curious, you know. First of all, what were these people doing? Then, I was trying to talk to some of them, [ask] who were they, and most of them could not speak. It was kind of an unintelligent gibberish. And they might not have been speaking German. They could have been speaking Russian or—

MH: Hungarian.

MS: —or Hungarian or anything like that. But I didn't know that. I just went at them with my *Deutsch*. So, I spoke what I thought would be—so, we got very little as far as information from them. I did get that they had captured. What happened—the story I got was that the German guards knew that we were coming. How they knew that, I don't know, but they knew it. And they tried to get gasoline—you know, kerosene—to burn some of the camp and burn some of the victims. And somehow, some of these internees, the concentration camp victims, were able to overpower some of these guards, which to me sounds strange, because they had such little strength. But, evidently, something like that did happen. And they beat up on a few of them, and they never got to fire up the camp, to set it on fire. And this, I was told by the inhabitants of the camp.

I know this, also: it must have been the next morning, and I don't know where this order came from. We got the *bürgermeister* out of his home in town, and they rounded up all the citizens of the town, and took them to the camp.

MH: You trucked them there, or marched them there?

MS: They marched them there.

MH: Do you remember how they were dressed?

MS: What, the people?

MH: Yeah.

MS: Oh, like I say, work clothes. They were not—you know, I remember some wearing sweaters. Nothing—

MH: I've just seen some photos at other camps where they were actually wearing coats and ties to do this.

MS: Oh. I didn't see that.

MH: But not necessarily at Nordhausen.

MS: Well, I didn't see that.

MH: So, the American troops marched them—

MS: Marched them into the camp.

MH: Okay. And told them to do what?

MS: To see the conditions. And then—now, I don't know how these holes were dug, but they did—hmm, mass graves. Boy, I haven't thought of this in years.

MH: Were there bulldozers there?

MS: Yeah, that's it, bulldozers. We had the bulldozers.

MH: That's what I thought.

MS: Yeah, we had the bulldozers, right. And we dug the holes, but they carried the bodies to the holes.

MH: Were they protesting, or just—?

MS: Oh, yeah. Oh, my God. Some people, they didn't want to do it. "What is this? We don't know anything about it." You know the usual thing. How anybody couldn't know anything about it, the stench was so terrible. I mean, it's amazing to me that they were able to live with this smell. I can't understand that. But I know that—what were they gonna do? They were probably afraid of the leadership; they were still afraid of the leadership at that time, too. So—

MH: So, they spent how long doing that?

MS: Well, we were there—the third day, we were starting to pull out of there. So, it was—I guess it was that second day when they did it. We arrived one day, and the next day this was done.

MH: How do you keep from getting sick yourself?

MS: That, I don't know. But the anger and—my hate for the German language and the German people is terrible. It's something that I've never forgiven them for. And about—I'll just say this. I think it was about two or three weeks later. I don't know how this worked out. I got to go to Buchenwald, and Buchenwald was then in our hands; it must have been about two or three weeks. Buchenwald must be close by or something. I don't know. But I did—

MH: Dora, I believe, is a sub-camp of Buchenwald.

MS: Oh, was it? Ah, so that makes sense.

MH: So, how did you happen to go to Buchenwald?

MS: I don't know. I'm trying to think. I don't know, but I was there.

MH: And what did you see there?

MS: Well, by the time I got there, it was pretty well cleaned up. There were people living there like it was a DP [displaced persons] camp kind of thing. You know.

MH: So, this would have been after V-E Day.

MS: After Nordhausen.

MH: Right, but almost after V-E Day.

MS: Well, V-E Day came—

MH: 'Cause Nordhausen was in April, and V-E Day was May 8.

MS: Yeah. Right. Yeah, so it must have been very close to it, or maybe after it. Yeah. 'Cause also, in Nordhausen, when we were there, [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt had died.

MH: On April 12.

MS: Yes. I was told that by some German woman.

MH: The liberation of Dora-Mittelbau at Nordhausen was around April 11. Buchenwald was liberated April 12.

MS: Oh, for God's sake. That makes sense. 'Bout time I learned that. (laughs) But I have such a prejudiced view. I can't forgive these people for this. But that's where I am.

MH: I'm just curious. After you saw that—I mean, I've heard stories about the infantry guys who saw these camps and they've said, quite frankly, that after they saw the camps they didn't take any more prisoners.

MS: Yeah. I had a problem with that. Yeah. There were people in my squad that certainly had that attitude. But I couldn't. That's something that wasn't part of me. I just—I thought it was justified, but I couldn't allow it. That drove me nuts. It's cold-blooded killing, you know. Now, I don't understand where the difference is, you know, but—

MH: I've heard stories about that. I've heard stories of them—you know, when they would capture German soldiers, they'd take off their shirt and look for the SS tattoo, and if they found it, they were dead.

MS: They were shot. Oh, yeah. I mean, I know that in the Hürtgen [Forest] we captured German prisoners, and I told these guys to walk 'em back to headquarters. They killed them, you know. That was before Nordhausen, way before; that was before the Bulge. But that went on. I know it went on.

MH: Does—but you also understand it.

MS: Yeah. Oh, I understand it perfectly.

MH: But it troubles you.

MS: Yes. Yes. First of all, I never shot a gun in my life, you know; it was something I learned in the Army. But you got people that came from—they were hunters and things like that, and they came from the South and West. Guns were part of their lives, you know, rifles and shooting. To me, this was a foreign, foreign thing, to shoot a gun. I learned how, and I did very well at it; but to shoot somebody in cold blood? And I saw that, and they did that. When we were—at the end, there were large prison camps. The German army was put into prison camps. And then they were interviewed, and I did a lot of the interviewing. And then there was—

MH: Because you spoke Yiddish?

MS: Yeah. Well, but I learned the difference between Yiddish and German, at the time. I learned how to read it. I was quite fluent. And I would interview the prisoners, interrogate them, and then you would ask them if they have any forks and knives and anything of that nature, you know, to give it up. And then, of course, there were always those that didn't give it up. So, when you searched them and you found them, they had to be punished. Sometimes you took away their shoes; sometimes you made them stand at attention, and all this kind of stuff.

Well, some of them stood at attention for a while, and then they started to shift their legs. And some of these guys just killed them, for moving. You know. This was not part of my being. As much as I despised them for what I saw, I couldn't do that. But, to the other fellows, it was like killing a deer or something. So, it probably has to do with something down in you and where you come from and your cultural background. And I didn't think anything worse, you know, about these guys that did it. It's just something I couldn't do.

MH: Despite the fact that you were intensely angry.

MS: Oh! Oh, I was livid, livid—so livid that it hasn't worn off yet.

MH: Did you ever get into it with any of these people you were interrogating, in terms of —

MS: What they did?

MH: Yeah, trying to—

MS: No, because whenever you got into it, it was always the same response: that they didn't know, and "*Ich kein Nazi*, I am not a Nazi." You know. "I had to be part of the Hitler union," all of this kind of stuff. It was always this kind of—

MH: How do you say "I'm not a Nazi" in German? How do they say that?

MS: "*Ich kein Nazi*."

MH: Say it again?

MS: “*Ich bin kein Nazi.*”

MH: “*Ich bin kein Nazi.*” Okay.

MS: “I am not a Nazi.” It might not be correct German, but, you know, it’s close enough for jazz.

MH: Close enough for jazz, you said?

MS: Yeah, right.

MH: Okay. But this has stuck with you all these years.

MS: Oh, yeah. Oh, very much so. I’ll just tell you: there was a fellow—I can’t think of his name, but I certainly have it—from England. I had been interviewed, and my testimony’s in the Holocaust Museum about the Nordhausen thing, the concentration camp that I liberated. He picked up my tape from the Holocaust Museum, and this fellow was doing a movie about the concentration camps. And he came and he interviewed me and other people, and eventually the movie was made, and it was shown on Channel 2 in England. And he also went down to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., where a presentation was made: it was a forum and a question and answer thing, all about this. It wasn’t only Nordhausen; it was a number of concentration camps that these GIs had liberated. And I learned more when this fellow came to my house. He said, “Do you know what was doing in Nordhausen, what it was about?” I said, “No, not really. I just knew what I saw and I knew what I smelled, and—I knew, you know. And I wasn’t there for that long.” And he started telling me something about underground factories and railroads and all this kind of stuff. And I said, “That is—I just knew nothing about it.”

And, about a year or so ago, there was something on the History Channel on Nordhausen. I sent away and got the tape. And it was there that I learned about the V-1 and the V-2 rockets and Wernher von Braun. I also knew that the guy that was the head of the concentration camp, Rupert—was that his name?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to both Arthur Rudolph and Wernher von Braun.

MH: I'm not sure.

MS: Hmm?

MH: I'm not sure.

MS: Well, I've got it. It certainly is on the tape. He came to our country, like Wernher von Braun, to work on the rockets here. And he was going to be—not Wernher von Braun, but this fellow was going to be awarded the highest civilian medal of honor by Congress for his work on the moon shots and all that kind of stuff. And I guess there were people there that knew about him and protested vehemently, and that didn't happen. He was deported back to Germany because he headed the concentration—what happened is they were looking—the Germans were employed by the factory to make V-1 rockets. And when they tried to speed up the production, and the production wasn't coming, this was Hitler's secret weapon. They got the idea, "Look, we have this slave labor; let's throw them in there." And that's the way that happened. This guy was responsible for that. So, they deported him, and he never received the American award. But he was here, doing—you know, the Russians did what they had to do and we did what we had to do to get our rocket program going. Nobody was with clean hands from that.

But it affected me. When I came back, I brought pictures and books. I wanted everybody I knew to look at these things. But, you know, it's a picture. It doesn't have the punch that the smell would have.

MH: Right. Did you take any pictures over there?

MS: No, no. I had no time for that. But there are people that did, in my outfit. And I'm looking for those—I can't find my scrapbook.

MH: I was gonna say, is there a picture of you over there?

MS: Where, at Nordhausen?

MH: Yeah.

MS: No, no. No, not that I know of. No.

MH: What about a picture of you in the Army in Europe?

MS: Oh, yeah, I have those, yeah. I have pictures of me in the Army in Europe and in my truck, some of that, some of that.

MH: Would it be possible to dig out one good photo of you?

MS: (laughs) I don't know. I could give it a shot, you know.

MH: If you can, I'd appreciate it.

MS: Now, what are you going to write—what are you writing?

MH: I'm writing—well, the book's gonna be published by Bantam Dell, which is a division of Random House. What I'm trying to do—the reason for the book—

***Part 1 ends; part 2 begins***

MS: And there was also a cultural center in Germany. And we got an order in my squad to go to Berlin. We were the first GIs in Berlin, and the Russians were there. So, we drove from (inaudible) to Berlin, and when we got to Berlin, we commandeered houses, which is what we were supposed to do: something for the battalion, you know, when they arrived. Meanwhile, we had one squad, and there were all these Russians. We were surrounded by Russians, and as far as I was concerned, they were okay, you know. They showed me where I got beer, on the Russian side, which later became East Berlin. There were no walls or anything. And I became friendly with them. I like people, and I talk to people. Anyhow, it always paid off for me.

There was a little bar, like a little club, nearby where we were stationed in Zehlendorf, Germany—Berlin. I went in there and a guy said—it was a German guy that ran it. I looked around, there was a piano there, and I said, “Hmm!” So, I said, “Can I play a little jazz?” And he said—you know, we weren't supposed to be fraternizing or doing any of that kind of stuff, at that time. So, I didn't know how to handle this, and I asked him if he knew any musicians. And he said yeah, he knew some guys. And I said, “Well, I'd like to talk to them.”

So, I went and spoke to this piano player, and this piano player, when I spoke to him, he started talking to me about jazz musicians. I looked at him like—that was one of the highest—you didn't talk about jazz in Germany. That was black music and Jewish music; it was strictly verboten. So, I said, "What do you know about this?" And he sat down and he played for me, and this guy played—I mean, he was great. He was playing Teddy Wilson and Fats Waller and—I don't know if these names mean anything to you, but he's playing it.

I said, "Wow! I play. I play drums, I play piano." He says, "You want a set of drums?" I said sure. So, he told me his friend had a set of drums, and they were still packed away in the basement, and you probably can get 'em for a carton of cigarettes, you know, that kind of thing. I said, "Okay, let's take a look at them," and sure enough, they were a set of Slingerland drums. They were great. They were American drums, they were stored away. So, I got the drums, I went to the club, I brought them to the club, set them up in the club.

I had a very—by that time, my lieutenant that was with us, he was only interested in getting laid. And I was his interpreter. So, as long as I can get him a girl, he didn't care what we did, you know. You know, he didn't want us to do anything illegal, but we were free, 'cause the war was now over, and we were setting up something in Berlin. So, I got the drums and I got the piano player, and I said to the piano player, "Look, we're gonna play over here, and I'll get you food, I'll get you coffee, I'll get you cigarettes," you know. He was so happy.

MH: This the German guy?

MS: Yeah. German. And I said to him, "Where did you learn jazz? I knew you weren't allowed to listen to it or anything." He said he used to bootleg records from Italy. And that's where he heard Teddy Wilson, and he heard Benny Goodman and [Count] Basie and [Duke] Ellington and all these guys. I said, "Wow, that's great!" So I used to meet him up there. We used to meet, he and I, and he knew a saxophone player. I said, "Bring him on!" And then I went back to my outfit, and I knew a few musicians that was in my outfit, you know, and asked them if they wanted to play.

So, we started playing at this club, surreptitiously. Every night we'd go to the club and play, and I'd go out and hustle some beer from the Russian side of Berlin. And the Russians were still with us, mixed in our area. They hadn't left our area yet. So, I had some connections, and this club started. Every night—well, I would say five nights a week—we'd play there. All the guys from my outfit would come down. They'd sit there, they'd drink beer, play darts, whatever. And we had a ball. It was great.

So, that was the end of my career in Germany, 'cause I left when I got—I was supposed to go home, with the point system and all that kind of stuff. I left from Berlin. That's where my disembarkment—I went to Hamburg from Berlin. Well, you know what that's —

MH: What'd you do when you finally came home to the U.S.?

MS: What?

MH: What did you do back in the States?

MS: I went to music school.

MH: Where?

MS: In Manhattan, a little music school that opened up called Contemporary Music School. I wanted to be an arranger. You know what that is?

MH: Yeah.

MS: I went to study arranging. One of my idols was a guy by the name of Eddie Sauter, who used to write for Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw and Ray McKinley and Red Norvo. This was pretty—a guy who I admired. So, I wanted to study with Eddie, and I spoke to him. I had become friends with him. He said, “You don't want to study with me. Why don't you study with my teacher?” That was a guy by name of Stefan Volpe, who was connected with this music school with all these very fancy teachers, and I was interested in that. There was a guy from the New York Philharmonic [who] taught conducting, et cetera, et cetera. (inaudible)

So, I started studying with these guys, and then I started to teach at this school. And I loved it. I was in heaven. I went to school, and [at] this school you went in the afternoon and the evening. So, I was available to work in the morning, you know, that kind of thing. And if you couldn't find a job, you got 52/20. You know, you got \$20 a week for fifty-two weeks. Plus, they paid for your school. And if you took a certain amount of credits, you would get a subsistence. And it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I went to

school, I got paid while going to school, I studied with some of the greatest people in the business, and I went there for five years.

I got married, married a girl that I knew in high school, and she worked while I went to school, which I loved. (laughs) And I wrote for some bands—you know, I got into the business, did some things for radio and for acts, whatever. I was pretty happy with it, but that kind of life is really not very good as far as making a living. And my wife wanted—we wanted to start a family. When that came about, I got a job in a music store on 48<sup>th</sup> Street, which is the center of the music world, buying and selling musical instruments. And I worked for probably the most famous guy in the business, a guy by the name of Manny. And from him, I learned the business. Eventually I went into my own business, selling schools and repairing musical instruments, which I still do. I still work, and I still do some of that. And I do it for—it's good for my brains and it's good for my body. I'm not heavy into it like I was, but I made a living from that.

MH: You had kids?

MS: I had three kids, yes.

MH: At what point did you tell your kids about what you had seen in the war?

MS: I always—we talk about that. At what point? I can't tell you exactly. But they all knew that I opened up a concentration camp. Everybody I know knows that I opened up a concentration camp. That was one—that was like a banner that I used to walk around with. I always used to tell them, "Never mind what you see in pictures. The smell of death is the strongest odor in the world, and a massive smell of—massive bodies. That odor sticks with you forever." And you know, I've spoken to people that have also—friends of mine who have since died, and one guy, when he saw concentration camp victims on TV—he was a medic, and I forgot what camp he opened up. He was feeding them chocolate bars that we were issued. And then these people, because this was so strong for their stomachs—

MH: It was killing them.

MS: He was killing them, and they were dying in his arms. And it was something that he couldn't—he was beside himself. So, when he saw victims on TV, he got nauseous, and he very rarely talked about it. But (inaudible) and I talked, 'cause I would open it up. I have to talk about these things. I have to get it off my chest, so to speak. But there are people that can't talk about it, cannot.

MH: There are many, many guys who never talked about it and then have died.

MS: That's right.

MH: There are guys who didn't—the war didn't seem to affect them until they retired, and then they began coming down with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and began having nightmares.

MS: Yeah, well, I can understand that. I can understand it completely. If you've got this stuff stored up in yourself, it's gotta go someplace. I mean, this shock of seeing this kind of outrage, you know, civilian outrage. I mean, I don't know. What term could you use for this? I mean, it's unforgivable, absolutely unforgivable, in my book. I'm very bad; everybody's taken me to task for this, including my wife, my kids. But if I hear German spoken by young people, anybody, my first reaction is this hate. I can feel it in the back of my head, you know, hair standing up. Now, these people might be Jews, they might be Austrian Jews, they might be—and I have that. But my first emotion is this hate I have for the language and for everything else.

MH: Did you ever go see a shrink about it?

MS: Oh, I've done a lot of talking about it in groups and stuff like that, yes.

MH: And?

MS: And they always come up with the same thing: "You gotta forgive, and these children are really not responsible for what their parents didn't do, or did do." And they're very—they're showing me, really, the right way, but that's got nothing to do with my emotions. I still smell that, you see. And I understand; in my head I understand that I'm crazy when it comes to this. But it's there, you know, and I can't forgive anybody for this kind of bestiality.

MH: Did you have relatives die in the Holocaust—that you know of?

MS: No. Well, I didn't know the relatives. There was one aunt that remained, my father's sister that remained outside of Warsaw, in Poland. She never got over here, and she died,

probably in concentration camps. But none of my relatives that I know did. But my son married a gal whose father was a survivor, and he saw his—Mac saw his whole family—his mother, his father, his brothers, his sisters—marched to the chamber, marched to the death chamber. And he saved himself.

MH: What was your family name?

MS: Sunshine.

MH: It was Sunshine?

MS: Sonnenshein.

MH: Sonnenshein. Oh, okay.

MS: That stayed the same. My father came over here in 1908 or something like that, before World War I. And he married my mother; he met her here, whenever. But I was—I had a girlfriend before I ever went to the Army. We went to college together, we did everything together. I met her when she was fifteen, I was sixteen. And when I got home, that's the gal I married and am still married to.

MH: How many years?

MS: Sixty-one.

MH: Mazel tov.

MS: It'll be sixty-two in September.

MH: My wife and I just had our fortieth.

MS: Not bad. Not bad. You know, I know the right and wrong. I've learned that. I've been lucky. I've been blessed. I've had three good kids and great grandchildren—grandchildren, not great. (laughs)

MH: Yes, grandchildren who are great. I got it.

MS: And music is my love. And that's been passed down to the next generation.

MH: Good.

MS: They play music and we play together, and that, to me, is my—I can sit down with my granddaughter, my daughter, my sons, and we play. We swing. No greater pleasure in the world for me.

*End of interview*