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Marcel Kohler Interview

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Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series

Kohler Kohler Interview

Conducted by Interviewer Langer

February 28, 2020

Transcribed by Madison Cosby

Kohler Kohler was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1950, five years after the end of World War II. He is the youngest of three siblings, with an older brother born three years after the war, and an older sister who was a child during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. His family experienced hardships during the occupation, including food shortages and threats to their property by the occupying forces. During the war, they hid their valuables in secret cabinets, and his sister later shared stories with him of Jewish people hidden in the attic. The Kohler family immigrated to the United States in 1955 and settled in Lansing, Michigan.

Full Transcript

Interviewer: So I'll get started. My name is Adina Langer, and today is February 28th, 2020. I'm here at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University with Marcel Kohler to record a Legacy Series oral history interview. Could you please start by stating your full name?

Kohler: Marcel Kohler.

Interviewer: And do you consent to this interview?

Kohler: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Fabulous. Could you please tell me when and where you were born?

Kohler: I was born in Utrecht, Netherlands, in 1950. In fact, October the 11th, 1950.

Interviewer: And before we talk about your childhood, we're going to go back a little bit and talk about your family's experiences during World War II.

Kohler: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Could you please tell me your parents' names?

Kohler: My dad's name is Anton Kohler, and my mother's name was Adrianna Henrika.

Interviewer: And your father, is he still—?

Kohler: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kohler: He passed.

Interviewer (1:13): And do you have siblings?

Kohler: I have an older brother. I have a brother who's about two years older, and then I have an older sister, who is probably—I can't remember exactly, but I think like eight or ten years older.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kohler: She was—I believe she was fourteen years old when the war happened, so she remembers probably more than any of us.

Interviewer: And what are their names? Your siblings'?

Kohler: My brother's name is Johann Heinrich. Everybody calls him Hank, and my sister's name is Antoinette, and we all call her Netty, so.

Interviewer: And what kind of work did your parents do?

Kohler: My mother was pretty much a stay-at-home mom. My dad had somewhat of his own business. He was an upholsterer by trade, but he also had very good carpentry skills, so his main source of income was redoing furniture. Also, he did—like in theaters, he would sew and put together curtains and different things like that. And one bizarre story that my mother told me that certain times of the year—I believe it was like especially in the fall of the year—and this is going to sound really bizarre, but people would accidentally fall into the canals. And they couldn't get them out right away or couldn't find them or what have you, so my dad, as ways of getting extra work, would help—I can't remember if it was a government agency or a group of people that would retrieve these bodies. And my dad would help make coffins or caskets for them, so he did odd jobs, but his primary source of income was upholstery and making drapes, and that type of thing.

Interviewer: And what brought them to Utrecht? Were they always living there?

Kohler: I believe so. I think they were basically born and raised there, to the best of my knowledge. Yeah, I've never heard them talk about any other place other than Utrecht.

Interviewer: What was the neighborhood like?

Kohler: To me, the best way I could explain it is like the old version of condos. You had two, three-story buildings, fairly narrow, townhouses or condos, like, and there was no room between the buildings. They were all attached, and what little I remember of our house—we had three levels, and we had on the back of the house, was a small porch area, with a little—I believe it was a metal railing around it. Just probably a little bit bigger than a window or a double-home window kind of set-up.

Interviewer: And did most of the people who lived in the neighborhood work in trades, like your father, or was there a lot of variety in what people did?

Kohler: I'm not really sure. I know that my mother used to tell me stories about, back then, nobody went to the grocery store hardly. They went to the butcher's shop and got meat, but back—like in the United States, they had people with pushcarts, would sell vegetables and different things. And they'd get a lot of their groceries and stuff from the street vendors that

would come to the house. They had—everybody had milk delivery to the house back then, that type of thing. But I remember my mom would tell me about going to the butcher's shop to get different—they liked rabbit, and back then, horse meat was sold quite readily. And they—everybody back then ate horse meat. And a lot of people over here are pretty amazed at that and disgusted.

Interviewer: Meat is meat.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: So did your parents or your siblings tell you anything about how the Great Depression may or may not have affected your family or your neighborhood?

Kohler: No, my sister really never said anything, and of course, my brother's in the same boat that I am. He was so young that it didn't really sink in, but I remember a lot of times, my mother telling me about how food was difficult to get a hold of and that they basically traded for food. Nobody had any money, so they would trade your fine china—or if you had decent quality silverware, you would trade that for food. I remember my dad telling me that the farmers did well during the war, because they had the food and the crops and that type of thing, and they bartered for it.

Interviewer: And in the years leading up to the Nazi invasion of Holland, was your family thinking about the threat of war or aware of the threat of war? (0:06:59)

Kohler: I can't really remember any conversations like that. It seemed—I don't remember any major issues or concerns or problems, for that matter, before the war. Everybody had a bicycle. Nobody had a car. My dad had two bicycles, one for Sundays and one for the week, running errands.

Interviewer: And how did they get information about what was going on in the world? Were there newspapers, radio, news reels?

Kohler: I remember they had—my mother told me they had a radio, and obviously, yeah, they had newspapers back then. But one of the things that my dad did when the invasion happened, he took our radio and hid it and tried to keep it away from the Germans.

Interviewer: And was religion important to your family?

Kohler: How much time you got? One of the reasons I believe that we relocated to the United States—because basically, of what I would consider a family feud between my dad and my mother's side of the family. My mother's side of the family was extremely religious. They were Catholic, and my dad was a non-Catholic and was not as religious. So during their courtship, there was a lot of pressure on my dad to become Catholic, and he just finally said no and it's not for me. So, my mother's parents forbid them to get married, and back in the '40s, back then, in Holland, you had to have parents' permission to marry up until age 30. So my dad was 30 at the time and my mother was 28, and her parents wouldn't give permission. So my dad took them to court and won and got the court's approval to get married. They got married, and basically, from that point on, my mother and my dad and us got excommunicated from my mother's side of the family. There was a lot of friction between my dad and my mother's side of the family, and I think the other side of that coin is we had already had—my dad's brother was already living in Michigan, and my dad thought it would be a good opportunity to advance, because in Holland,

nobody had a car. Nobody owned their own home. Probably back then few people even had TVs. Middle class people had radios, and it was really a way to improve our standard of living, by coming and living in the United States.

Interviewer: And we'll get into a little bit more of that when we get to the decision-making to leave right after the war. Thinking back to the time before the war, do you know if there were Jewish families living in the same neighborhood as your family? (0:10:48)

Kohler: I couldn't tell you that. I know that my mother and dad did hide Jews during the war. Now, whether they were neighbors or friends of friends, I'm not sure.

Interviewer: What did your parents and your sister tell you about May 10th, 1940, when Hitler invaded Holland?

Kohler: I can't think of—I don't think anything—I don't remember anything.

Interviewer: That's fine. Sometimes the date is really intense and people remember on that day, this happened, but sometimes it's more gradual. How did things begin to change, once the occupation started?

Kohler: As best as I can recall with, there again, the stories that my mother and dad told, that they really had to be walking on eggshells, so to speak, if they were out in public, because there was a large German army presence, and they wouldn't—if you—not to be exaggerating, but if you sneezed and they didn't like it, you got taken away. And it was very—they were occupied—where they were at, there was occupation of the city, and you just really had to watch your Ps and Qs. You had to basically be seen, not heard, and be very respectful because they were SS. They were Nazis. They didn't care. They'd just as soon haul you off and lock you up and ship you off than anything else.

Interviewer: Did they tell you any stories of witnessing direct violence, whether it was round-ups of people or people being killed in their presence? (0:12:54)

Kohler: The only thing along those lines that I can remember is either my mom or dad told me that we had a relative that got taken to a concentration camp, and I can't remember if it was a cousin or exactly what the relation that individual was. But fortunately, he did make it through the war and got out of the concentration camp somewhat unscathed, I think. I'm not one hundred percent sure. I think somehow, he got shot or hurt, but he spent quite a bit of time in a concentration camp, and he was one of the lucky ones that made it out.

Interviewer: And you mentioned how your father hid your family radio.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did they get information once the war began?

Kohler: I'm not really sure. I know that he—from what I've been told, he had places in the house where he could undo the boards and then put valuable stuff underneath the boards and put the board back. I don't know if they slid a piece of furniture on it or what, but he had a way of hiding stuff. Now, the Germans weren't there twenty-four/seven, so maybe sometimes at night or something they'd bring that radio out and plug it in and get some news or something. I don't know, I'm speculating, but I think a lot of it was word of mouth, and I couldn't say for sure,

because I'm assuming that the Germans took over the newspaper and most even broadcasts, most normal means of communication, so it's...

Interviewer: Some people have talked about there were flyers dropped from airplanes by the British, things like that. I don't know if anyone in your family remembers seeing something like that.

Kohler: I don't recall any of that being told, I mean.

Interviewer: (0:15:06) Now, you mentioned that you knew that your family—I'll let you take a drink of water.

Kohler: Alright, we need to stop.

Interviewer: I'll take a drink of water, too. So you mentioned that your family hid Jewish people somewhere in their house. Do you know anything about where that may have been? Was it an attic or a floor?

Kohler: I've talked to my sister about that, and she actually—I never remember anything of that nature, but I've talked to my sister, and she said she could remember upstairs on the third level, there was somewhere up there, whether that was a floor or in an attic or somewhere, where they did hide Jewish people on and off, not all the time, but periodically.

Interviewer: And to do that they would have had to have sort of connections to know who needed hiding and how to get them in. Would that have been both of your parents probably together or one or the other?

Kohler: I would say both. They were pretty much a traditional, old-school couple, and they didn't have secrets. What one knew, the other knew, and they never went anywhere without each other. They were always together type, so I'm assuming that they both knew, and I remember my mother telling me stories. And I probably received more of the stories from my mother because she lived longer and I had more time to talk to her. But I think they were both pretty much on the same page. They were both in the loop, but yeah, I never really gave it much thought, but they would have had to have some kind of communication network with the underground, to be able to—that makes sense.

Interviewer: How did they get food during the war? Did they have ration cards?

Kohler: That, yes, they had ration cards, and like I said, they traded. And another kind of bizarre story that I love to tell is my dad used to raise rabbits. My mother and dad really liked rabbits, as opposed to chickens. But anyway, my dad would raise rabbits, and then there was a black market for food. They would a lot of times get food on the black market, and not to get too gross, but I remember my dad telling me that there was a lot of people or some people—unscrupulous-type people—on the black market that would try to sell you a cat and tell you it was rabbit, because physically, they're fairly close in size. And he had this little trick that if this piece of food he thought maybe was cat, he would take a little piece of it, and if the cat would eat it, it would be a rabbit, and if the cat wouldn't want anything to do with it, it was somebody trying to peddle a cat for a rabbit. And that was their unscientific method of verifying food quality, if you will.

Interviewer: I think that says a lot about cats, as they—

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: So in addition to hiding people, do you recall your family being involved in any other resistance kind of activities?

Kohler: Not that I can remember. Not that my parents have told me. I'm sure there was incidents that happened that they thought best not to tell us and share with us.

Interviewer: And did your family—when Holland—when the first part of Holland was liberated in September of 1944, was Utrecht part of that? Or were they stuck on the other side?

Kohler: The only information I have on that, because again I was talking to my sister a while back, and she remembers when Utrecht was liberated, because there was a big parade, and—excuse me. She was saying when the army came through, they were giving everybody chocolate, and the irony was my sister was allergic to chocolate. I'm sorry. Okay.

Interviewer: So it was this very intense, emotional time, the army came through.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: Were they Canadians? Do you know? Or were they Americans or British?

Kohler: I thought she said that they were Americans, I thought, but there could have been a mixture, yeah, obviously.

Interviewer: And did your family tell you about any really hard time right before liberation? For some people, that time, the months leading right up to liberation, there were tremendous food shortages.

Kohler: I remember the main trouble that they would have is food, and my mother was telling me that they would get a potato or two, and that would be the food for the week. Made soup out of it and add whatever to it and that would—food was a big issue.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kohler: And my sister—I think, probably to this day, has a lot of health issues, and I think—my personal opinion is that because she probably didn't get the proper nutrients and milk that—attributes to a lot of her health issues now, because when you're growing up, you need that to build good bones and all that.

Interviewer: And she would have been right at that cusp, kind of growth spurt age—

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: --during that time.

Kohler: And milk was hard to get, and they—I remember they would get powdered milk. But my sister, too, was allergic to a lot of stuff, so they were really—had to be careful what they got her, and food was really limited. So the food was really a struggle.

Interviewer: (0:23:09) Did they tell you any stories about air raids or blackouts, having to make sure that they were...

Kohler: I don't remember any specific stories, but I remember in general it was very common. The power would go out. There'd be blackouts. Yeah, that would go on quite a bit, and I believe that there's some parts of the city that the Germans bombed, and I can't be one hundred percent

sure, but seems like one of the stories was about air raid sirens going off and bomber overhead, and that type of thing. But I don't have any real specific information, when and where and that type of thing.

Interviewer: Sometimes it's just this general impression that people experience.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: So liberation comes. There's a parade. How did life begin to return to normal for your family?

Kohler: There wasn't a whole lot talked about that. Obviously, there had been a big relief, and I'm not really sure on how quickly after that things got back to somewhat of a normal existence, as far as everyday life and work and getting food. But I can't remember very many or any stories that my mother told me about that.

Interviewer: Well, eventually, things were normal enough that you were born in 1950.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: And so—but your family emigrated to the United States in 1955. Did you have any first impressions of Utrecht? Do remember it at all?

Kohler: I remember a little bit. I remember playing out in front of the house. Soccer was the big thing, and some of it—I remember going to school, but I don't remember too much of it. And my mother said that we went to—there was a Montessori school there and we went to that, and I think I might have been going to school like three and a half, four years of age, and going to school, so almost sounded like a modern version of preschool or the early version of preschool. I think back on that because my dad had learned English in school. My mother spoke really broken English and she struggled with the English language. And my sister—you couldn't tell. She doesn't have an accent, nor my brother or I, and I don't remember taking English lessons in school, but yet, coming over here to the United States, we spoke the language. And growing up, our mother and dad would speak to us in Dutch, and we'd answer back in English, so consequently, I have a reasonable ear for it but I can't speak it. My sister's the only one that can read and write Dutch, but my brother and I were too young to really learn that, both skills.

Interviewer: So how did your family make a decision to emigrate to the United States?

Kohler: Well, I think that's that two-part story I alluded to earlier, that my dad, I think—and this is just speculation on my part—what my gut tells me, that he had enough of being outcast by their relatives, and then like I said, my dad's brother was over here. And I'm sure that he told them about owning your own car and owning your own house, and it's my understanding in Holland, currently, if you want to rent an apartment or buy a house, you get put on a waiting list, and there's so much more opportunity in the United States. And the old fairy tale about the United States was paved with streets of gold. There was a little bit of truth to that, probably, in my parents' eyes, that it was a good opportunity for a new life.

Interviewer: (0:28:01) Do you remember the passage over? Did you go by ship?

Kohler: Yes, we were on the Waterment (?), and it was a two-week voyage. And I remember my mother telling me I did the best because I was only seasick three days, and everybody else was in

bed for a week or more. I do remember bits and pieces of—yeah, I do remember bits and pieces on the boat, running around and getting candy.

Interviewer: There were people there who were generous.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: And was it all immigrants, people coming together? Were there soldiers too?

Kohler: Actually, from what my mother had told me or my dad—I can't remember which one—it wasn't a traditional passenger ship. Part of the ship was dedicated for cargo, and the other part of the ship was dedicated for passengers, so I don't know if all or what percentage were immigrants or just normal people going from Holland to the United States.

Interviewer: So what were your first impressions of America when you arrived?

Kohler: it was interesting, because I started, obviously, kindergarten, and to me, the biggest—what do you call it—shock was Halloween, because there's no Halloween in Holland, and I had—like the week leading up to Halloween, they were decorating the school, and kids were talking about a costume, and I thought to myself they're crazy. They're not going to wear a costume to school. And sure enough, the day of Halloween, everybody had a costume except for me. And another tradition is Christmas. In the Netherlands, you have St. Nicholas, and then you have Black Pete. They ride around on horses, and if you're good, you get candy or a present or something in your wooden shoe by the fireplace, and if you're misbehaving, you got coal in your wooden shoe or in your stocking or whatever. So that was kind of different, too. In Holland at that time, nobody bought presents for anybody. It was just, I think, the parents gave—if the kids were good, the parents gave the kids a reward or a treat.

Interviewer: Did your family carry on any of those traditions?

Kohler: Oh, yeah. We started celebrating Halloween and giving out candy. Same thing with Christmas. We would exchange gifts and that type of thing.

Interviewer: And I remember—and I don't know if it's a tradition in the Netherlands or only in Sweden. There's something—St.—what is it? St. Lucia, or like there's—the women wear candles on their head or—I must be thinking of a different country.

Kohler: I don't remember that in Holland, but the St. Nicholas did have kind of a Pope-looking headdress on. Like—not exactly a crown but kind of a fancy thing—something maybe the pope would wear or clergy.

Other: A mitre.

Kohler: Something like that. I don't know what it's called.

Interviewer: So when you came to the US, where did you come in and then where did you go? Where did you live?

Kohler: Obviously, by that time, Ellis Island was no longer functional, so we ended up somewhere in New York where I'm not particularly sure where exactly, but I remember we got on a train. And from New York, we went to Michigan, and my uncle at that time, when we first arrived, had a bakery on the north side of Lansing, off of Grand River Avenue, and above his

bakery, he had living quarters. So we stayed—he allowed us to stay above his bakery for—I can't remember—the first two, three, four, five months or whatever until we could get a place of our own. But let me back up a little bit before that, that before we could come over to the United States, we had to go through an extensive physical. And I think every shot known to man we got, and everybody in our family has got a minimum of three vaccinations, and I think my sister, I think she's got like six, because they gave her a couple of them, and they weren't sure if they took, so they gave her a couple more. And they gave you a pretty thorough medical evaluation and health screening before they would grant you a visa to come over here.

Interviewer: (0:34:06) And did your parents want to go through the citizenship process early on or was that a goal?

Kohler: I'm not really sure. I can't remember any conversations of that, but the thing that's still kind of amazing to me is—being a—back in 2002, I was a single guy, and the company I worked for transferred me from Michigan to Georgia and basically took care of everything for me. And I'm thinking to myself, to pack up your whole family and move to a different country—I wish I could have communicated that to my dad when he was alive.

Interviewer: It's a hard choice to make, and so much support, that love he had for everyone, wanting to give them that life.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: What kind of work did he do when he got work in Michigan?

Kohler: Well, he had an opportunity to go to work for General Motors at a Fisher Body¹ plant in Lansing, and he should have, but that's water under the bridge. But the interview that he had, the General Motors interviewer said he had too much skill to work on a production line, but in retrospect, he would have had a lot more benefits, made a lot more money, and as it turned out, my dad went to work for a little upholstery shop where the owner worked, and he was the only employee. So he had no medical insurance, no paid vacation, and it put us in some financial difficulty when my dad had a heart attack and didn't have insurance. But that's the balance of life. You do something you like or you do something where you make money, and the two don't always meet.

Interviewer: And when he was working in this upholstery shop in Lansing, did he have clients all over the—was he doing things for—

Kohler: He was basically an employee, so the owner of the company would—had a shop and people would come in and he'd acquire business that way, but basically all the work my dad did was for the shop or for the owner. And I remember my dad telling us and asking my brother and I if we wanted to go into the business and be an upholsterer, and my brother said no and I didn't want to do it, so dad says if you two would have wanted to join and be an upholsterer, he'd have set up his own shop, but he said no sense setting up a shop if you're not going to take over the business. So my brother and I, we didn't want to do that. My brother had the skills. My brother's got that carpenter gene, but I can barely pound a nail in, so it didn't make a whole lot of sense for me to be an upholsterer, so.

¹ <https://usautoindustryworldwartwo.com/Fisher%20Body/fisherbodylansing.htm>

Interviewer: (0:38:15) What kind of work did you end up doing? What excited you in school or?

Kohler: Well, not a whole lot. I had—probably in this day and age if I was in school, I would be diagnosed with ADD. I just—I could spend all day in the classroom just looking out the window and daydreaming. I just didn't have an interest, and I—on a very good day, if I applied myself one hundred and ten percent, I was a B student. And I remember my first year in junior high, I got Cs and Bs, and my parents were just elated. They thought I had made the corner, and I was headed down the right path. And then in junior high, you get to know kids, and you get to be more concerned about being accepted and social and having fun. I actually swam competitively in junior high, and I swam competitively in high school, and I set some city records, school records, and pool records. And I was offered a couple of swimming scholarships, and then—but the goof-off I was in high school, I barely maintained a D average, and I barely stayed on the swimming team because my grades were borderline every semester. And I remember—there's a lot of things I don't remember, but I remember I applied at Central Michigan, because they offered me a full scholarship, and I got a letter back. And it was a boiler plate type letter, and at the bottom, it said Mr. Kohler, we're sorry to inform you that you have some inadequate grades in some academic areas. Really, a D average, they were very polite.

Interviewer: Did you have a sense at all with your other siblings and your parents—did they miss home, home being the Netherlands? Did they miss?

Kohler: Yeah, it's because after--it's kind of ironic that, after my dad died, my mother's relatives came out of the woodwork, and they wanted to come over and they all wanted to visit, and I, by that time, I had—I wasn't real happy with my mother's side of the family. But after my dad died, my mother did go back several times. My sister went back, I think, twice, and even my niece, one year, went back with my mother, and I can remember one time when they came back, my mother was telling me that they had torn down our house where we used to live, and it was now a—or it was at that time—a parking lot for a bank. And I don't know if I've told her this, but I was a bachelor for years—we just recently got married like four years ago. So all this time, my mother was always getting on me for being single. And I don't know how many times she said well, why don't you come back to Holland with me and find a nice Dutch girl to marry? And I told her then, I said if I'm going to spend that much money and go to Europe, I'd want to go to Switzerland and go skiing. I wouldn't know my relatives. I want to do something fun or something interesting, but I never did go back. I just—you stop and figure that when my parents got married, my dad was 30, my mother was 28. I have no grandparents left, the majority of my aunts and uncles are deceased, and I wouldn't know relatives if they came up to me on the street. Just—unfortunate. And you've got people that are not family that are considered family, and you have family members that you really don't want anything to do with, so I think it's kind of different for everybody.

Interviewer: Absolutely. Well, the first time I met you, you brought in a medal, and one quick note before I ask you about that, you have a little bit of tissue on your shirt.

Kohler: Oh, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: No, that's okay.

Other: It's not actually showing.

Interviewer: Okay, I wasn't sure if it was, but I wanted to give you the chance to...

Kohler: Thank you.

Interviewer: Sure. So you have brought this medal that your parents had saved after the war which marked the liberation of Holland. What were the family stories about that? Were there any stories that went along with it in your family?

Kohler: Not really, and I think we talked a little bit about it previously that I was under the impression that that was given to my mother and father, and after the research that you did, to me, I question that now, if they might have purchased it. I'm not so sure now that it was given to them, but a couple of times, my mother had mentioned that, because of what they did to help the underground and hide Jews and make life miserable for the Germans where and when they could, that's what it represented, so.

Interviewer: And that's always one of those things, where what it represents is important, what it meant to the family, whether or not they were given it as a gift by someone who purchased it at the post office or whether they were the ones that purchased it, it's the meaning that is important. So how did you eventually come to settle in Georgia? You mentioned that your company transferred you here?

Kohler: yeah, I had the luxury of—back in the '60s, I was able to go to Florida a couple of times on vacation, and the older I got, the less I liked snow and blowing, ten below zero, so I'd been bugging my supervisor to transfer me south. Every year, during your evaluation—where do you want to go in the company, where do you see yourself? And I said I want to go south, somewhere where it doesn't snow, and they offered me a position here in Kennesaw. We had a corporate—a district office in Kennesaw, right off of Chastain, and I actually tried to talk my boss into relocating me in Tampa, because we have a facility in Tampa. And he said no, we want to keep you with the environmental folks and the other safety folks and so on, so I didn't want to push my luck.

Interviewer: Remind me again what company you work for?

Kohler: Marathon Petroleum, and they hired the moving van and took care of all the issues, and it was kind of interesting, because when the moving van showed up at my house, the mover comes in the house and says, "Mr. Kohler, we want you to sit right there in that chair, and don't move. We'll take care of all the rest." And since we've been married, we've moved four times, and we've had to pack and unpack everything ourselves. It's really nice when somebody does all the grunt work for you.

Interviewer: Absolutely. So tell me about meeting your wife. Did you meet her here in Georgia?

Kohler: Yep, I actually met her online, and then we had some online chats, and then we decided—she got brave and figured she'd meet me. We met at Bahama Breeze over here on Barrett Parkway and had dinner, and kind of took off from there.

Interviewer: That's great.

Kohler: I always like telling this part of it. I asked her after a while—I says, well, what about my online profile attracted you? I said my dimples, my green eyes, my smile? And she says no, I saw you like to drink wine, so that's always a plus.

Interviewer: So maybe all that fun that you had in high school paid off in the end.

Kohler: There you go.

Interviewer: So these are questions that I always ask everyone at the end of the interview. What do you think students should take away from learning about your family's experiences during World War II?

Kohler: It's hard to do without getting on a soapbox and preaching and lecturing, but it's just—I get a little irritated when people complain about how bad the United States is. And it's by no means perfect, granted, but going through hard times—and you get the same thing that people over in this country, older folks, that have gone through the Depression. I've known lots of people that—people that still to this day will take a piece of aluminum foil that they've used to cook on, clean it, and then put it back to use it again, or a plastic bag. And it just—I just—if you experience something like that, it gives you a totally different perspective. You appreciate life a lot more, experiencing those kind of things. It's like I said—not to—and I can see that in my own family. When I was 12, 13, 14 years old, I was mowing yards for \$0.50. I was shoveling snow in the wintertime for a quarter, \$0.50, or whatever. I remember my first job, we lived about—I want to say about two miles from Lansing Country Club, so I'd hop on my bike and ride to the country club, and I'd be a caddy. And on a good day, you could make \$3 or \$4, plus the guy would buy you a pop or an ice cream cone, and it was great. And my own nephew, he didn't get a job until he started at Michigan State, and then he was just delivering pizzas for Papa John for beer money, and I just—I sound like an old fuddy-duddy when I start talking this way, so I'll stop.

Interviewer: It's okay. And is there anything I haven't asked you about that you want to talk about?

Kohler: No. I'm trying to think. There was something I wanted to, but I can't think of what it was now. But yeah, we pretty much covered everything. Yeah, I think pretty much all the relevant stuff, I think, we've pretty much covered.

Interviewer: Well, thank you for your time.

Kohler: Well, thank you for putting up with me.

Interviewer: We really appreciate your story, sharing it with us.

Other: What a great job you did. One— (The video kind of cuts out here.)

Kohler: She wanted me to have it. She said, "After I'm gone, I want to know it's in a safe place." But the youngest is always the spoiled one. The youngest of the family is always—can get away with murder, and it's just a natural chain of events. I see stuff my brother was able to do my sister never was, and I had them all beat, because I could do no wrong, I could walk on water. Especially after I had moved out of the house. I remember my mother criticized my brother, criticizing my sister, and I'm thinking why spend time on that? What good's it going to do? It's not going to change anybody.

Other: But he and his mother were very close, and they would sit on the front porch of her house, and she would share stories with him.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: At her house in Lansing?

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: What neighborhood did they live in? (0:52:16)

Kohler: Do you know where—roughly where Mount Hope and Logan Street intersect.

Interviewer: Yes.

Kohler: In fact, we were—growing up, we were two blocks from St. Casper's, if you know where that is, and I went to Morris Park (?) Elementary School, and then Walter French Junior High, and then Sexton High School.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kohler: We basically stayed in that general vicinity. But we moved—we lived in a duplex for I don't know how long. When we moved out of our uncle's place, we moved into a duplex, and we stayed there for years and years and years, and then finally, my parents bought a house on the other side of Mount Hope, on Rondall. Do you know where Schaffer's Bakery was or is?

Interviewer: Yes.

Kohler: Oh, wow. Okay. Because we—Rondall Street runs right next to the bakery, and then it crosses Mount Hope. We were basically two blocks off of Mount Hope, and talk about an enjoyable childhood at night. This was a huge bakery, and they baked bread, and you'd sit on the front porch and you could smell fresh bread. And that sensation, that aroma was just fantastic. One of the advantages of living near the bakery, and we used to go up there, and we'd call it the day-old bread store and buy bread all the time. We didn't ever lack for anything, but we always had hamburgers and chicken. We didn't always eat steak, but basically, traditional middle-class upbringing. A lot of fond memories. And I learned how to swim at Morris Pool. I don't know if you ever remember or know where that is?

Interviewer: Morris?

Kohler: Morris Park Swimming Pool, and actually back in—I think it was '67 and '68, I was a lifeguard there, I worked there. And I think that pool, they need like 1.5M to fix it, and it's—the pool is, I want to say, 100 years old, and there's a big effort to try and save that pool.

Interviewer: Yeah, when I lived there, I remember going by it, because it wasn't open to the public, but it was still there. Yeah.

Kohler: Yeah, it was closed for a couple of years, and then I think they put some money into it. And I think maybe in the last two or three years it's been open, but I think it's on the chopping block again. It just needs a lot of money, it needs a lot of money.

Interviewer: It's alright. But it's fun to reminisce about a place I've also lived.

Kohler: And one thing—and think about it—but that coin I have, I think there would be value if I donated it to you, to a museum.

Interviewer: We would use anything like that for educational purposes.

Kohler: Yeah.

Interviewer: And we have—

Kohler: Like I said, think about it, and I would be honored if you would display it somewhere.

Interviewer: Yeah, and anything that's in our collection would become part of a rotating display, so I don't know if you've been inside our *Parallel Journeys* exhibit. We have currently this currency on display related to Nazi Germany and Jewish life, but we also—those cases are always changing. We're always trying to bring in different stories, and in our introductory exhibit space as well, we talk—I can see this coin telling multiple stories, when we talk about how artifacts can tell different stories, depending upon—

Kohler: So visual always helps.

Interviewer: Exactly, so your—for you, it has this deep familial connection. It's also a story about the Dutch government minting a coin to commemorate this really important moment.

Kohler: Because it's—if you don't put it on display, it's going to end up in a box somewhere, and I don't think any of our kids or grandkids are interested in it, and I'd rather have it here than at Salvation Army or Goodwill or some place like that.

Interviewer: Think about it, because we protect artifacts too. Nothing is ever on display all the time, because otherwise, that's not the best thing for the object either, so when it's rotated off display, we keep things in preservation boxes in our collections catalogue. We always know that they're there. Sometimes we bring things out for a homeschool day about liberation or on a particular topic, and then it might go back off display, but that's how museums work. So things are on display, off display but they're part of the tools that we have to tell these stories.

Kohler: And I can imagine there's a benefit to that, because that way, you draw in more people because it's changing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kohler: You've got different—it's not the same thing over and over again.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you can certainly think about—if you decided that's something you really want to do, we can set an appointment and you can donate it to us. Thank you for the offer.

Kohler: You're welcome.

Interviewer: I know that was a lot of extra stuff—