

SOL MESSINGER

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



Sol Messinger was born Salo Messinger, the only child to Paula and Zolman “Sam” Messinger on June 16, 1932, in Berlin, Germany. Sol’s parents were Polish immigrants who came to Berlin a few

years before the war because of declining economic conditions and the spread of antisemitism in Poland. Sol’s father worked as a tailor.

Sol recalled that when he was six years old, in 1938, he first became aware of the existence of antisemitism because of the dramatic changes in his family’s life and surrounding community. On October 28 of that year, Sol’s father, along with thousands of other Polish-born Jews, was arrested and deported to Poland. A few weeks later, during the Kristallnacht Pogrom, the synagogue that the Messinger family attended was burned down.

In 1939, while awaiting a visa to the United States, Sol’s family obtained a visa to Cuba and departed Germany on board the MS St. Louis. Upon arrival in Havana, Sol’s family and hundreds of other Jewish refugees were told that their visas were invalid and that they would be sent back to Germany. After requesting entry into other countries on their return journey, Sol remembers one day before they were to land in Hamburg, the passengers were informed that Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands had each agreed to allow a percentage of the refugees to enter their borders. Sol and his parents were sent to Belgium in June 1939, where they settled in Antwerp and later moved to Brussels.

When Germany invaded Belgium in May 1940, Sol and his family fled to France and took refuge in the Spanish-border town of Savignac, which later became part of the territory controlled by the Vichy government. In October, Sol and his family were arrested by the French police and taken to Agde, an internment camp in southern France near Montpellier. With the assistance of an underground movement, Sol and his mother escaped on December 24, 1940, and returned to their village to await Sol’s father, who arrived several days later. Sol’s father became the village tailor and Sol attended school in a one-room schoolhouse.

Two years later, Sol’s family obtained documents to immigrate to the United States and in Lisbon, Portugal boarded a ship that arrived in New York on June 24, 1942. Shortly after, Sol and his family moved to Buffalo, New York, where Sol finished his secondary education, attended the University of Buffalo, and obtained his medical degree to become a physician. Later, Sol served as a pathologist in the United States Army.

In 1989, Sol participated in the 50th reunion of the passengers onboard the St. Louis and later became involved in Holocaust education by speaking at schools and taking part in documentaries. At the time of his interview in 1996, Sol was residing in Buffalo, New York.



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