



Karl Salling Møller

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* April 27, 1925 (Nibe/Denmark), † May 2021 (Denmark)

Barber and housepainter; became involved in the resistance in 1943; arrested in May 1944; spent time in prison in Ålborg, Copenhagen, and Frøslev; transferred to Neuengamme concentration camp in October 1944; transferred to Meppen-Versen satellite camp; evacuated to Sweden via Denmark in April 1945 by one of the Swedish Red Cross's White Bus convoys; returned to Nibe in May 1945; worked for the Danish Neuengamme survivors' association, the "Landsforeningen af kz-fanger fra Neuengamme".

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Karl Salling Møller was born on April 27, 1925, in Nibe, Denmark. He attended school for seven years and then trained as a hairdresser in his father's salon in Nibe. It was during this time that Møller experienced the German invasion of his home country:

"On the morning of April 9, 1940, we were woken up by a terrible noise and we saw thousands of those German Junkers planes. They were flying so low you could see the pilots in their cockpits. [...] My mother then lit the stove in the salon, but not many customers came. Everybody was very gloomy."

(Interview with Karl Salling Møller, April 22, 2000, ANg. All following quotes were taken from this interview.)

The family realized then that their lives were about to change. Møller's father spontaneously said, *"Luckily for us, Karl is still too young to become a soldier, and I'm too old."*

Møller later attended business school in Ålborg. Through one of his teachers and some fellow members of his Christian youth organisation, he came into contact with the resistance movement in 1943. Despite warnings that he would possibly face the death penalty if he were arrested, he started to join in the group's firearms training and other activities.

"[...] later, we were to collect firearms from England, which the SOE [the Special Operations Executive, a British covert special unit] would drop over Denmark, and distribute them. I was no hero, more of an antihero, and once or twice everything did work out. But then we were betrayed by a [Danish] building contractor who had helped build the German western airfield. We were able to escape home. Our parents didn't know about our resistance activities...though maybe they suspected something."

The Gestapo arrested Møller at his father's salon and initially took him and his comrades to a prison in Ålborg. On June 6, 1944, the day the Allies landed in Normandy, his comrades were taken to the Horserød camp, while Møller was transferred to the Vestre Fængsel prison in Copenhagen.

There, Møller met two boys accused of the same crime as he was. They had been sentenced to death, but their exe-

cution was suspended due to the general strike in Copenhagen on June 26, 1944.

On August 10, 1944, Møller and his comrades from the Horserød camp were taken from Helsingør to Flensburg on board the German cruise ship Mars. From there, they had to march across the Danish border to the Frøslev police prison camp.

"There, life was paradise. The only thing we lacked was freedom. We were looked after by the Danish prison administration. The food there was probably better than what the rest of the Danish population were getting. I was doing very well because I had a work ID as a barber and was able to move freely inside the camp. Those who wanted a haircut paid me in tobacco. I smoked like a chimney there."

But on September 15, 1944, the first Danish prisoners were deported to Germany, despite assurances to the contrary from the German occupation authorities. Around the same time, a large number of Danish police officers and border guards were arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in the Frøslev police prison camp. On October 5, 1944, Møller and his comrades were woken up at 4 a.m. The camp's commandant and two of his Danish staff read out names from a list of 60 prisoners who were going to be deported to Germany. Karl Salling Møller was one of them.

On the same transport, 141 Danish border guards were also taken to Germany. They were taken on lorries and buses to the German railway station at Harrislee, where empty cattle cars awaited them. 45 to 50 prisoners were locked in each of the wagons. There were no seats, so the prisoners had to sit on their suitcases. For Møller and his group, the journey almost took on the character of an excursion, as for most of their number it was their first trip to Germany. On October 6, 1944, the transport arrived at the Neuengamme concentration camp.

"When we arrived at our destination, the train stopped and the doors were opened. There were SS men standing there with barking dogs, and Thumann [the SS officer in charge of the prisoners' compound] was there as well, giving a speech. It was then we realised that this wasn't Frøslev any more. We had now come to hell."

Because they had arrived with the border guards, Møller and his comrades were treated slightly better than other prisoners. For example, their heads were not shaved completely and they were allowed to keep their cigarettes. However, all their personal belongings were taken away. Karl Salling Møller was given the prisoner number 54573.

The new arrivals spent the first night in one of the brick buildings which were still under construction at the time. There was still scaffolding around the buildings and there were no windows.

The first time they were given the disgusting camp soup was a shock for all the new prisoners. They had to perform hard physical labour despite the constant hunger due to the insufficient rations.

"I had made it a habit to constantly carry an extra slice of bread in the pocket of my jacket to fight off the hunger psychologically. But this slice of bread got stolen, and now I had nothing to hold on to, my reserves were gone."

Karl Salling Møller's first work assignment was to break up bricks from the rubble of bombedout Hamburg that had been taken to the Neuengamme camp.

"On this work detail, I met a comrade from Copenhagen, a bricklayer, who taught me an important survival strategy in the camp: I was working fairly quickly, and after studying me for a long time, he said to me: 'You should only work when somebody's watching you. Only do what they ask you to do and otherwise try to work as little as possible.'"

A particularly terrible experience for Møller were the airraid alarms in the camp, because this meant that all prisoners would be crammed together in the narrow basement vaults of the eastern brick building. On their way into the basement, they would be beaten by the *kapos*.

Later, Møller had to dig anti-tank trenches at the Oortkaten commando not far away from Neuengamme. On this work detail, he experienced more air raids from afar and had to take cover from anti-aircraft shell splinters. One time, a plane was shot down and the American pilot landed not far from Møller's work detail with his parachute. Møller then witnessed the SS maltreating the pilot.

Eventually, Møller was transferred to the Meppen-Versen satellite camp. Due to the hard labour and his insufficient clothing, he contracted pleurisy and TB. Without the food and clothes from the Red Cross parcels, he would not have survived.

"We had a Danish SS man out there, a private or something similar. He didn't treat the other prisoners well, but he helped us. [...] He made things easier for us Danes there and helped us. [...] A work detail was put together to peel potatoes, but again I was the one who was out of luck, as always. I always had to work outside and did not get any work under a roof until the very end, when he had the idea of making me the camp barber."

On March 10, 1945, the first rumours about a possible return to Denmark began to circulate. On March 15, Møller was taken back to the Neuengamme main camp on the

White Buses. He was severely weakened, but despite his hopes, he still had to work:

"I was sent to work, and when I say this, I mean I was carried there by my comrades. They quite simply had to hold me up, I couldn't walk by myself any more. Then it was agreed that I [...] should join those who were knotting reeds and matting – straw mats, straw shoes, that kind of thing. That was in the basement of the building they called the brick building. [...] Everybody sitting down there was more or less mortally ill. That was when I told myself: 'If you have to die, then at least in the open air. You mustn't be sitting down here!'"

On April 20, 1945, Møller and around 4,000 other Danish and Norwegian prisoners were taken to Löderup in Sweden via Denmark on the White Buses. He was even given his suitcase back. On May 18, 1945, Møller returned to Nibe from Sweden.

After he had been cured of TB, Møller went back to secondary school and trained as a painter and decorator. He got married in November 1954, eventually took over a painting business and was an active member of the Danish association of former Neuengamme prisoners the Landsforeningen af kz-fanger fra Neuengamme.

Karl Salling Møller died in May 2021 in Denmark at the age of 96.

Nibe in September 1945, five months after the German invasion. Karl Salling Møller remembers the German occupation of his home town as follows:

"[...] It wasn't until the evening [of April 9, 1940] that German soldiers arrived. Nothing much changed, but it was as if a foreign element had been imposed on everyday life."

(Courtesy of Karl Salling Møller)



Møller's father's hair salon in Nibe, a town of 2,500 inhabitants near Ålborg, where the family lived.

"My father said it was up to me to decide what I was going to do. But after I'd left school, I started to train there and stayed for the next four years."

(Courtesy of Karl Salling Møllerr)



Karl Salling Møller (last row, 5th from the right) on an excursion to the Skal Plantage park with a Christian youth organisation in 1943. Through one of his teachers at business college and two other members of the Christian youth group, Møller joined the resistance that same year. First from the right is Niels Jorg Jensen who was also imprisoned in the Neuengamme concentration camp.

(Courtesy of Karl Salling Møller)



"On the night of May 17, [1945], we arrived back in Nibe. I wasn't very old, you see, I'd just turned 20. When I came home, we were examined by our family doctor and sent to a lung clinic, where they found that I was still suffering from pleurisy and TB, and that I should have been sent to a sanatorium. However, I objected

and said that I had been away a whole year and didn't want to go. I promised my parents I would undergo a certain regimen with very strict rules: I was to sleep until midday every day and get lots of exercise in the open air, eat lots and go to bed at eight every night. This was to go on for around six months."



Karl Salling Møller after his return to his parents' house in Nibe in May 1945.

(Courtesy of Karl Salling Møller)

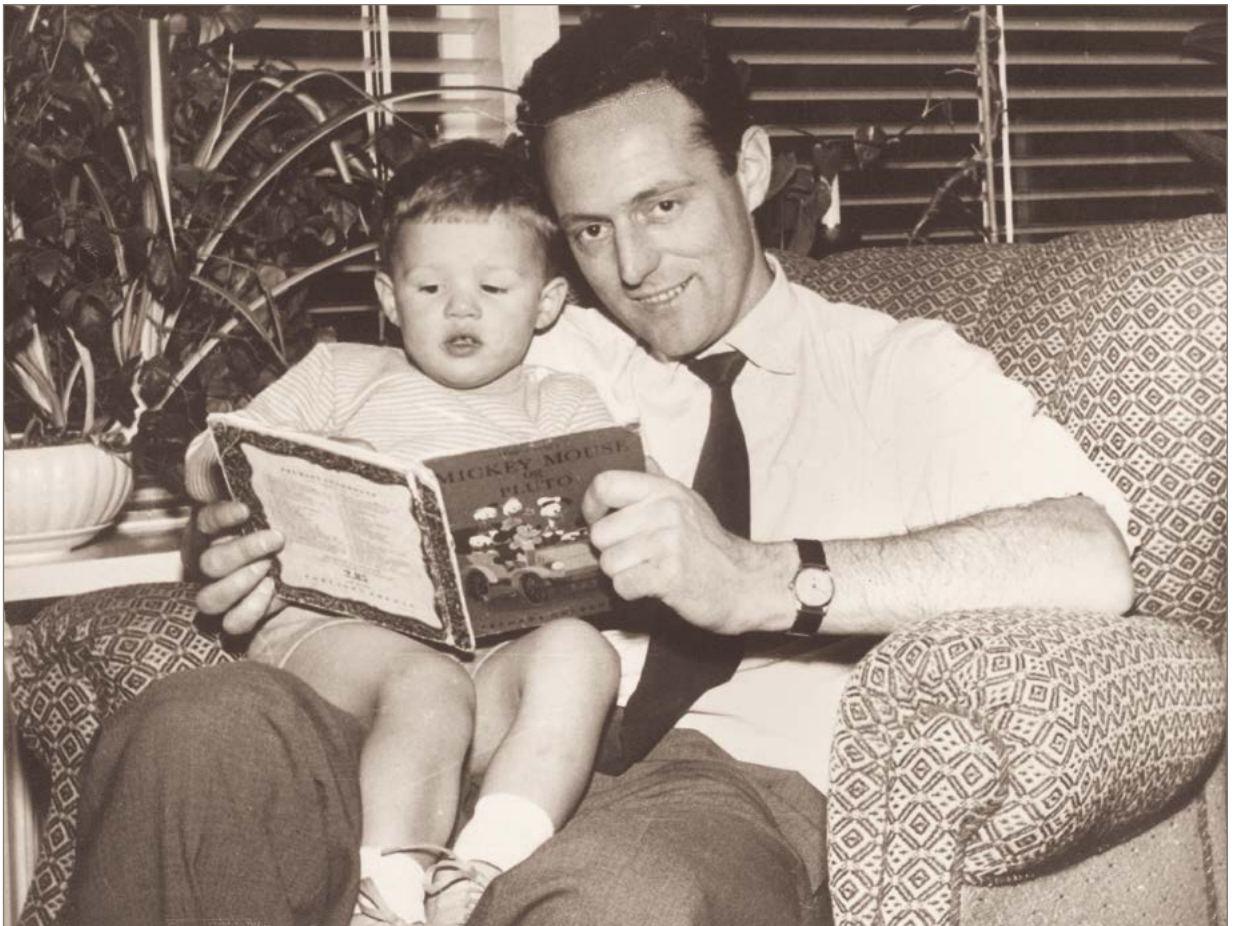
**On November 21, 1954, Karl
Salling Møller married his wife
Kirsten.**

(Courtesy of Karl Salling Møllerr)



**Karl Salling Møller with his
daughter in 1957.**

(Courtesy of Karl Salling Møller)



Karl Salling Møller suffered a stroke and lost the ability to speak. His speech therapist carefully asked him about his experiences in the concentration camp, and by talking about them, he learned to speak again.

*Photograph by Andreas Ehresmann, 2005.
(Private collection)*



