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Summary

John Fink b.8/12/1920, Jewish Hospital, Berlin, Germany, mother died when John was 3 mos.; father (merchant) remarries, giving John half-sister b.1923; with Berlin Depression, family impoverished; public school; bar-mitzvah, happy memories before war; rise of anti-Semitism; Social Democrats vs. Communists; Heidelberg; little awareness of anti-Semitism occurring in other neighborhoods; Jewish youth group; seeing swastika hanging from windows; Night of the Long Knives; Nuremberg Laws; Der Stürmer; roundup of Jews "to go to the East"; by 1938 (18 yrs. old), John had become an electrician as father thought univ ed held "no hope"; Kristallnacht-synagogues burned; protest march by Christian wives of Jewish, later sent to Sachsenhausen; some families receiving in mail, ashes of loved ones killed in camps, under guise they "had gotten sick"; father & mother sent to Auschwitz 2/28/43; sister sheltered with someone holding Palestine papers; Mar 1943, John in Jewish Hospital (appendectomy), roundup, imprisoned at Jewish old-age home (5 days), slept on floor, forced to sign papers "to be sent East"; 3/12/43 "young, old, men, women" loaded in cattle cars (one excrement bucket) sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau; memories-"people in blue & white pajamas," SS with whips, ordered to leave luggage, lines, "Men one side - women, children, old people in other"; loaded on truck to Auschwitz III Buna, "where they planned to build for 25 yrs"-stripped, doused with kerosene, "very painful," head/under arms/privates shaved; long hours in cold naked, beatings; slept 3 to bunk; 10K prisoners, John's tattoo #107821 - patch with same # given to prisoners to sew on uniform; disbelief hearing "Only way out of here is through chimney."; memories of those mourning loved ones, "went to electric fence or shot like rabbits"; 2 years Auschwitz, survived because of electrician trade; slave labor carrying cement, worried appendix scar would burst; John struggles in recalling "people shot like rabbits"; also in forced labor, civilian Polish children, but allowed to return home in evenings; reference to Elie Weisel's Auschwitz-Buna "well-written" because acct is similar to John's Buna experience; bombings; hearing of uprising in Auschwitz; Russian Army encroaching; march out of camp to Sosnowitz, hiding on farm during bombings; John's camp unaware of scope of Auschwitz killings; 1945 Jan 18, march into Blasheimer, seeing for first time, women prisoners (one barracks held prostitutes for German soldiers); seeing people shot; asking civilians "where next concentration camp was because we couldn't mingle with civilians & were hungry"; march to railroad, loaded on crammed, open railroad cars in winter, no food/water, jumping off car to eat snow, SS shootings, bullet flies by John's ear; some taken from cars, shot in front of towns' civilians; John's guilt feeling relief from enjoying more space on car; arrival to Mauthausen then transfer to Sachsenhausen, 5 days in empty aircraft hangar, taken to shower room, thinking "This is it & low and behold, water came out."; loaded in closed car railroad cars (2-3 SS guarding each car), taken to Flossenberg, "more terrible than Auschwitz, Auschwitz had been organized in a certain way, you couldn't have lice but with Bergen-Belsen, nothing but death."; saved by SS who remembered John as Auschwitz electrician, placed in best barracks (for tradesmen); stealing food from dogs; prisoners putting radio together, hearing Roosevelt had died, believing "It was bad for us."; conversation with Elie Weisel; weighing 88 lbs. stealing food from dogs; SS start disappearing, British ambulance arrives announcing liberation, "But we couldn't comprehend-meant nothing to us, we were waiting to die."; abundant food further sickening survivors; General Glyn Hughes "so beloved";

taken to DP Camp; "Took quite a while to become a human being again– until 1945 to get strength again"; looking for relatives/friends; found sister-had been captured-her leg (later amputated) had saved her with doctor continually denying her deportation to Auschwitz; John assisting British Red Cross; 1948 married Bergen-Belsen survivor (married by "The Belsen Rabbi"); assigned work at Jewish Children's Home/Germany, assisting children transport to Marseilles; time in Hamburg; immigration U.S. 1948; closing thoughts on importance of education on genocide.