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Summary

Otto Grenton (Grunpfel) 1/10/1926; Ružomberok, Czechoslovakia (now in Slovakia); one brother b. 1930; father, a sculptor of Jewish monuments, mother (née Steif); extended family included “very religious” grandmother (nee Goldstein), aunt Giza Deutsch (née Steif), husband Heinrich, son; Jewish/Czech schooling; parents not observant, only on holidays; enduring anti-Semitism; expelled from Christian school for challenging God’s greatness; bullied in another Christian school; transfer to German Jewish school; when Nazis take over Austria, family moves to Krakow 1938 for Jewish Committee to possibly assist immigration to Puerto Rico; 9/1/1939, Otto (age 13) when war breaks out, air raid, family told to “walk east” toward Russia or Romania border, Jewish shoemaker provides soles for family shoes, 1 wk. walk “Roads packed with people escaping.” (strong father, had served Austria-Hungarian army); return to Krakow; bar-mitzvah; family placed in a Krakow Jewish home receiving refugees; Otto, good at drawing, earns money changing signs from Polish to German, father joins son in sign work; seeing anti-Semitic signs warning of Jewish diseases, lice; 1941 forced into ghetto, assigned 1 room for 2 families, had access to communal kitchen; Otto/father acquire “blue (work) card”; mother pays Polish family to hide she & youngest son; Otto & father in slave labor building Płaszów (in swamp), guarded by Ukrainians; enduring beatings; 1943 German guards begin softening, fearful of being charged; guard gives Otto & father money, forged papers, & gold bars from stolen goods (from Jews) warehouse, enables escape through sewer (no uniforms in Plaszow so they were in street clothes); return to Krakow, find mother & brother; mother’s landlord assists family on train to cross border; family begins a paid smuggle (Otto refers to them as “Polish hillbillies”) through mountains-also present the Jewish girlfriend of a Krakow Gentile merchant (Gersh) who had aided Otto’s family, also present, a father/daughter (Gutmann) – 7 in all; Otto’s father, lights cigarette, smuggler threatens with hatchet because smell brings attention; one night, smugglers stole all their valuables & disappeared; Otto, having been a scout, used stars to guide them into Slovakia; find work on farmhouse, slept in barn, plentiful food brought but also St. Nicholas Police who “had changed their minds about the Jews”; the seven are jailed for 1 wk but not mistreated (on jail walls, survivors’ notes to loved ones); taken to town square, learned many of town’s Jews were free & working; discussion re: “Working Group” (Gigi Fleishman); Polish priest assists family in taxis to Puchoff crossing into Hungary, were taught Polish prayers to assist their Catholic guise; train to Budapest; (1944) family registers with Polish Police as Catholics, then go to Palestine office/Jewish Committee who were still free & practicing their religion; Jewish family shelters Otto’s family; Otto finds work in building a textile factory, father finds work painting airplanes; Mar 1944, S.S. march into Budapest, mother’s panic, 3 wks later, father caught on street and shot dead; Otto makes contact with someone in shuttered Jewish Committee office (Mr. Horowitz) who provides Otto money; Jewish houses formed, Jewish curfew; Otto spends much time at University reading; Otto & mother thwart Anti-Semites on street by speaking high German; Summer 1944 mother, Otto, brother pay to be smuggled into Arad, Romania; Otto along with 20 other Jewish boys, jailed by Germans, accusing of being partisans; Armistice with USSR: German guards flip sides, boys released; liberation & family returns home, “Everyone was gone,” only an uncle had survived Theresienstadt; aunt, son, mother-in-law “mostly likely taken at Auschwitz”- father’s siblings

killed at Majdanek; in Katowice, Otto studies structural engineering then works in construction until 1954; enduring post-war Polish anti-Semitism, family registers with Vienna HIAS; brother works in graphic arts; family immigrates to U.S. (Chicago), Otto works in hospital worker but switches to commercial art; mother does well in US (dies from leukemia); Otto marries 1960, adopts daughter 4 days old; grandfather to 4 children, great-grandfather; post-war, an agnostic, however believes "Every person is part of God."; contributes "defiance and a little luck" to family's survival & "I never lost hope."; post-war visit to Theresienstadt; "nostalgia" pulls Otto back into synagogue; experiencing anti-Semitism in States; photographs of family