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His father was Polish, and his mother was from a Polish family that had moved to Berlin before World War I. Her father had started a furniture store, and had three sons and three daughters. They were a middle class family with a comfortable life until 1933, when he was about nine. He remembers the Nazi boycott of Jewish shops. Their shop was near Alexanderplatz, in what is now East Berlin. He can't remember the shop's name. He thinks the boycott began in April of 1933. The Nazis would march in front of the Jewish shops and tell people not to go in and buy anything. After the boycott, the anti-semitic activity died down in Berlin, but he knows now that it continued in the rest of Germany, especially in Prussia. His family lived in Gonoffstasse, a Jewish area. Their synagogue was about three houses down the street. Their rabbi was Rabbi Singen. As time continued, many Jews packed up all of their belongings and all the merchandise in their shops and went to Palestine. Some went to South America. His mother and father divorced during this time. He and his brother stayed with their mother, and their father went to Palestine. His mother ran the business with her sons. His relatives began to leave as well. By the time one of his relatives left for Palestine, Jews could no longer take their store's merchandise or even their personal belongings. They would leave in the middle of the night, and try to get to Palestine by way of Czechoslovakia. One relative went to the U.S. in 1937.

They boys could no longer go to public school; they went to a Jewish school which was not far away from their home. This school was behind a large synagogue on Kaiserstrasse. The teachers were all Jewish. There was an abundance of teachers since they could no longer teach in the public schools. They attended the Jewish school until 1938, until Krystalnacht.

On Krystalnacht, they watched their shop being broken into, and all the other shops were broken into as well. Their synagogue was broken into, but it was on the first floor of a building, so it was not burned to save the rest of the building. The benches were ripped out, and the Torah scrolls were taken out, and the synagogue was vandalized.

His mother was very concerned about her sister, his aunt. She lived at Brenstrasse 33. There was a store in the front of her building and a synagogue in the back. She had two small children, ages 3 and 5. They couldn't get in touch with his aunt that night, so the next morning he rode his bike over to her home. There was a crowd in front of the building. The store had been vandalized. He saw that the fire department was there. They were pouring water of the adjacent building so that it would not catch fire from the burning synagogue, but they were making no effort to put out the fire. The synagogue had obviously been burning for hours. He was afraid to ask about his aunt, for fear that the crowd would realize he was Jewish and turn on him. But he was able to surmise that her

family had gotten out safely, so he returned home. On his way, he was that all the Jewish shops had been totally destroyed. Later that day they found out for sure that his aunt was alright.

After Krystalnacht, there was no way to reopen the shop or to earn a living. They wanted to leave Germany, but it was much more difficult now. They had one uncle in the U.S., and another was on his way -- he was waiting in Antwerp for his ship. That uncle told them to come to Antwerp, because the authorities were very lenient towards refugees from Germany in Belgium. They couldn't get a visa, so they came up with a plan. The two boys were put on a train with a ticket to Paris. He was 15, he brother 12. The train was to stop in Brussels, where his uncle would pick them up and take them to Antwerp. The only papers they had were their German ID papers. When asked at the border for their passports, the boys showed their ticket to Paris. Although this wasn't sufficient, the guards let them through, deciding to let the French deal with the boys. Their aunt and uncle met them in Brussels, and brought them to the rooming house where they were staying in Antwerp. The boys were given an attic room.

His mother was supposed to go to Aachen, where she would be met by a guide hired by the uncle, who would take her over the border. But the guide and his mother were caught, and she was sent back to Berlin. The boys had to decide whether to stay in Antwerp or to return to their mother. Their uncle would be leaving for America soon. They hoped that she'd find another guide to take her across the border, but security had been tightened since many people were trying the same tricks they used to get out. They decided it would be best to stay out of Germany.

Their uncle left for the U.S. They had a distant relative in Paris -- an aunt's brother. This relative met them at the French border. He crossed the border with them, and told the authorities that the boys were his sons, and so they go through. They had reached Antwerp in December 1938, and Paris in January 1939. The uncle soon became scare, however, because the children didn't speak French, and his neighbors were beginning to talk. The French authorities were not lenient on German refugees. The relative told them to return to Belgium, where they would be safer. They returned to Antwerp. The Jewish refugee organization there helped them get food and housing. Because they were young boys, they were sent to stay with another Jewish family. While many families were well off, and took children in as a kindness, some took children in to get the small stipend the Jewish organization gave. The boys ended up with one of the latter sorts of families. Their life was hard. They were with the family until May 10, 1940, when the Nazis invaded Belgium.

In the meantime, his mother's sister had gone to London. The sister got an English family to request his mother as a domestic worker in 1939. His mother went to work in Clouden, near London. The boys were in correspondence with their mother. They tried to work it out so that they could trade places with Jewish children in

England trying to rejoin family in Belgium, but the British authorities wouldn't allow it. The correspondence stopped after the German invasion.

After the invasion, thousands of Belgians tried to flee the Nazis. The family they were staying with tried to flee, as did the boarder who lived in their house. The boys broke into the boarder's room and lived there. Food was difficult for them to get, because they needed ration cards, and the authorities wouldn't give them one. They had to beg for food.

The Germans started rounding people up. They started by advertising for young people to go work in Germany in exchange for food and shelter. No one believed them. Soon they heard that those who did go did not go to Germany, but to camps in Poland. They had not heard about the extermination camps yet, but they were beginning to hear about the work camps at this time.

Some people helped the boys get ration cards. They had to depend on odd jobs for money. He got lucky and got a job in a bakery, so he got a lot of bread. It was so cold in the room they had broken into during the winter that he would sleep in the bakery instead. His brother found another family to take him in.

He continued working in the bakery until 1942, when the roundups escalated. Whole blocks would be cordoned off, and the Germans would go house to house, taking all the Jews. He was caught on one such round-up. He was taken to the railroad station, where there were thousands of Jews. He was put on a passenger train and sent to France, to Burlone Soume. The Germans were building an Atlantic wall from Holland to that area of France in expectation of an Allied invasion. They could see the cliffs of Dover from where they were. The Jews were forced to work on this wall. They were dropped off somewhere with a few tents and told to make their own camp. The sanitary conditions were very bad. There was no water except that which they carried in from far away. He soon contracted typhoid fever, along with four or five other young men. The guards were very brutal to the workers, but they were afraid that they typhoid would spread through the camp. They took the sick men to a hospital in Berlone. They were treated in the basement by French doctors. He's not sure how long he was there. They had arrived in the camp in June 1942, and left in October 1942. After they were healthy again, the Germans came and told them they would be going to Belgium. They didn't believe the guards. They were taken back to the camp, where the other prisoners were ready to march. They marched to the train station, where they were loaded into passenger trains again and taken to Brussels. In Brussels, they were taken to Maraline. Later on, this would be the departure point for Auschwitz.

They weren't allowed off the train. A box car train was hooked onto theirs, and then the train went to Auschwitz. The train was overcrowded. They had no food except for one day's ration given to them in France. The sanitary conditions were bad.

Some people passed out. The journey lasted about three days. The train would often be stopped for no apparent reason. There were only young men in his section of the train -- there were women, children and old people in the box cars.

They had no idea of what would happen at Auschwitz. Once there, everyone had to get out of the train. They saw people with shaved heads, wearing strange, prisoner like clothes, working. The people kept whispering, "Walk, walk," but the newcomers didn't know what that meant. The SS men lined them up and separated the men from the women. The SS men told them they were going to a camp where they would work, and they would be given food and shelter. If they would work, they would be treated well, they were told. Then they were told that the people who could walk should go to one side, and the people too weak or too tired to walk should go to the other side. They realized that the prisoners were telling them to go to the "walk" side. Those who could walk went to the walk side, and they were marched into the camp. The ones who couldn't walk were told they would be brought over in trucks. Those who walked later found out that the others were taken to the gas chambers.

They marched into camp, under the gate with the sign, ~"Arbeit macht frei." They were marched to a quarantine block, where they were showered, had their heads shaved, had their numbers tattooed onto their arms. They were in shock; they couldn't understand what was being done to them. They were given their prison clothes -- underpants, a shirt, pants, and shoes. Lucky ones also got socks. The shoes were wooden, and very hard to walk in. One man asked Herman how he looked, and Herman answered that all he had to do was look at him, and he would know how he looked.

The Kappo, their leader, gave them a speech, telling them that they would have to work to get their food; if they didn't work, they wouldn't get any food. No one would get out, he said; the only way out was to die.

They were taken out to work. They had to dig ditches for water and sewage. It was October, and it was getting cold in Auschwitz. Another prisoner told him that there was a class where he could learn to be a brick layer. This would be good to do because it was inside, so he would be protected from the weather. He got into the class.

For food, they received every morning one quarter of a 900 gram piece of bread -- about 225 grams. The bread was dark and heavy. If the Kappo wanted to play with the prisoners, he would throw one piece of bread to four prisoners and tell them to divide it themselves. Of course, they had no knife to cut it into pieces. The fights that resulted killed many prisoners. They also got a half-liter of tea, which wasn't really tea, just hot water that had been brewed with some sort of leaf. In the evening there was a liter of soup -- sometimes it was very watery, and sometimes heavier and more nourishing. With the bread, every other day they got a small pat of margarine, about the size of a restaurant pat of

margarine.

He was in the brick-laying class for about two months. He was then sent to work as a brick-layer. He worked in Auschwitz itself. They went to a factory site. The bricklayers were Poles, not prisoners. The prisoners were not allowed by the Poles to actually lay bricks. Rather, they had to bring the mortar, sand and bricks to the bricklayers. On their rations, they couldn't survive doing such hard labor. People died everyday. The bodies of those who passed out at the work site had to be brought back to the camp so that the daily prisoners' count would be accurate.

Because they got so little food, they had to scrounge for more. The Poles had money, but it was worthless occupation money. They had more food than the prisoners. The Poles needed things like clothing. The prisoners didn't have anything the Poles needed, because they were stripped of everything when they entered the camp. All their clothes were sorted, bundled, and sent to Germany as "gifts of the liberated people." He had a friend who worked in the commando that sorted the clothes. The prisoners referred to this commando as "Canada," because Canada represented to them freedom and prosperity. This friend would smuggle to him pieces of clothing. It was certain death to be caught with these items, because the Nazis assumed that if you were collecting civilian clothing, you were intending to try to escape. But the prisoners would trade these articles for food. Some of the Poles would take the clothes and then report them, but some were OK to them.

At one point, he managed to get three loaves of bread from his training. The trick was then how to get the food into the camp. When they returned at night, they had to line up in rows wide enough that a guard to walk between them, so that he couldn't conceal the food on himself. Part of his job each day required him to run back to the camp during the day to obtain the attendance roster. This roster was necessary because the company building the factory would pay the Germans for the workers from the camp each day. He took his three loaves of bread and put them under his arm. He figured if anyone saw him, and saw that he was openly carrying the food, they would figure that he was doing something he was supposed to and let him go. He had done this before and it had worked. This time, however, a new troop of guards came up to him and asked him what he had. He explained that he had seen a truck leave the bakery. It hit a bump and the loaves had fallen out. He was taking them back to the bakery. The guards took him back to the camp and stood him between the rows of wire. There were three rows of wire -- one about four feet tall, that said you're not to go past. Four feet beyond that was an electrified row of wire. Four feet beyond that was a tall row of wire. Being put between the rows of wire was bad, because that's what they would do to people who tried to escape, so that all the prisoners would see them when they returned from their days work. He was scared that he was done for. The leader of the guards told the camp commandant what he had done. The commandant called for him, and asked him

about the bread. He retold his story about the truck. He didn't know if the commandant believed him, but the commandant told him to get out, so he ran away as fast as he could.

When the factory was finished, he got a job there. Everyone wanted a job there because there they were protected from the elements and also, they didn't have to stand outside for the daily counting. There were twelve hour shifts, 7 am to 7 pm and 7 pm to 7 am, and the workers would go in and come out together.

The first factory was a factory the Germans had brought back from Russia. But the Soviets had bombed the machinery in transit, so the Germans need machinists to fix it. He passed the test to become an apprentice tool maker. The machinery was too badly damaged to be repaired. Another factory was bought. It had made bicycles before the war; during the war they made spark plugs for bazookas.

Once in the factory, there was one group of people who had to work especially hard, tending the furnace. The Germans decided that these people should get special rations. There was a special SS kitchen, where sausage and bologna and other foods were made. The prisoners who worked there could eat all they wanted on the job, but couldn't take any food out. This was controlled by making them strip before they entered and put on special clothes, and then strip again as they left, and return to their old prison clothes. The special ration for the furnace workers was to be the water that the sausages were boiled in. The factory workers wanted to figure out how to get more food out of the kitchen. It was Herman's job to take the kettles to the kitchen everyday and bring them back. The workers were able to construct a false bottom for the kettles that the soup would be brought to the factory in. The cooks in the kitchen would fill these false bottoms with all sorts of meats and bread. The factory workers were able to barter with this extra food.

One day, a man they didn't particularly trust asked Herman if he could go get the food with him one day. Herman said no, that he need a special pass. The man had the pass that was needed. They went to the kitchen, gave the guards the kettles -- they couldn't go in the kitchen themselves. They had to do other things at the camp, and then came back for the kettles. Just as they were being loaded onto the truck, the guard asked to inspect them. He swished around in the soup, didn't find anything, then measured the kettles inside and out. Max, the suspicious man, disappeared. The guard didn't seem to find anything, and let Herman go. They brought the kettles to the factory, but there was no false bottom and no sausage or bread. That night, Herman went to the cooks barracks, and found out that someone had informed on what they were doing. The cooks found out in time and were able to hide the false bottoms, so that they weren't caught. They found out that it was Max who had informed. He didn't come back, "they took care of him.~

In another instance, he was on the night shift, from 7 pm to 7 am. Normally, they had to be ready to march at 6 pm, but he got up early, at around 3 pm. He went down to organize some food. He lived on the top floor of Barrack 13. He was coming down the stairs when an SS Ubersturmbanfuhrer entered the block. He removed his cap, stood at attention and called out, "Achtung!" The SS man seemed satisfied and started up the steps. About halfway up, he turned around and asked, "What is your name?" Herman answered, "Herman Haller." The SS man asked again, "What is your name?" Herman realized what he had forgotten, and answered, "Jude Herman Haller." The man asked one more time, "What is your name?" Herman realized that he was supposed to give his number, not his name, "Jude 72554." The officer told him that he would make sure he'd never forget again. Herman and the officer went up the stairs. Everyone was still sleeping. The officer got the block commander and the orderly. He sat on a bench and had his shoes polished as Herman stood beside him. Then he told him to give him 100 kneebends. Herman started, counting out loud. At about 20, the officer told him he wasn't being loud enough, so he must start again, counting loudly. Herman started again. When he finished the 100, the officer told him to do another 100, counting backwards. He did so. Then the officer told him to lie on the floor and do ten pushups, counting loudly. Herman couldn't do it. The officer got out his gun, pointed at Herman's head, and said that he must do the pushups, or the officer would shoot him. He found the strength and did the pushups. By this time, a crowd had gathered around him. The guard told him to leave. He told the people that he needed to go to the hospital, but they told him that he could go, that it would be the end of him. He didn't think he could make it past inspection to go to the factory, but somehow the people held him up and got him there. At the factory, there was a room that was not used on the night shift. They put him in there, in a cabinet that was warm from the furnaces. That became his hospital for the next two weeks.

One night, as he lay in the cabinet, two German engineers from the original factory came in the room. They were Nazis. He was afraid they would find him. They had come into the room to smoke. They opened the windows that had been painted black because of the bombing raids. They could see the flames of the crematoria from the window. One said to the other, "Can you see the Jews burn?" He was very scared that they would discover him, but they closed the window and left.

He was able to recover in his little "hospital" because he was able to rest.

He was able to move around at the camp, and that was a great advantage. There were women working in the factory, separately from the men. He was able to take messages from the men to their wives and from the women to their husbands. They couldn't write letters, but they would write little notes that he would hide on his person and then take to the others.

Nearby the factory was an administration building. The military was in this building, and this is where the goods were received. There were four cleaning women working there. He met Claire Haymond, who he is still friends with today. Through her, they passed messages from the men to the women and vice versa.

There was a little bit of dynamite used in the manufacturing of the spark plugs. It was stored in a nearby building. A few women worked there. Men working in the crematoria developed a plan to blow up the crematoria and gas chambers. This was in the Fall of 1944. The women would put a little gunpowder in the seams of their clothing every day, bring it to the camp in this way, and give it to the men. Eventually, the prisoners had enough dynamite to blow up the crematoria and the gas chambers. But the men were caught and killed. The guards realized that the only way the prisoners could have gotten the gunpowder was from the four women who worked in the powder room. The women were hanged; the whole camp had to watch the hanging.

He left Auschwitz on January 18, 1945. The Russians were so close to the camp that they could hear the artillery from the front. Auschwitz was evacuated. The prisoners were put on a death march, deeper into Germany. It was one of the most horrible experiences of his life. They started on 18 January with two day rations of food: half a loaf of bread and some margarine. They marched for days. Anyone who fell on the side of the road or who couldn't keep up was shot. They marched to Reichenau, and were loaded onto cattle cars. After several days, they arrived at the camp Grossrosen, near Breslau. The conditions were horrible. Bodies were lying everywhere. Once there, the Germans asked for experienced machinists to volunteer to work at a nearby camp. He volunteered immediately, because he couldn't stand to stay in Grossrosen. Three hundred volunteer prisoners were marched to another camp. They arrived at a camp populated by "living skeletons." The volunteers asked the camp's prisoners where their work was. The prisoners answered that they hadn't worked in days or weeks. They were just there, and were getting no food.

The Germans locked the camp prisoners in their barracks, then took the Grossrosen prisoners to a field and told them that they were to dig trenches. The prisoners realized they were actually digging graves. After the "trenches" were dug, the prisoners were marched back to camp. All the prisoners there had been killed; they had been injected with something. The Grossrosen prisoners had to carry the dead bodies to the graves they had just dug. They had arrived back from digging at nightfall. They carried the bodies to the grave all night. In the morning, they evacuated the camp. All the camp belongings were put in wagons, and the Grossrosen prisoners had to push the wagons. They marched to Hirschberg.

They were put in the camp there. They remained for a few days. Then Russian soldiers could be seen parachuting into the countryside nearby the camp. The prisoners were put on open

railroad wagons. The people died rapidly. When one prisoner would die, the ones still living would take off the dead man's clothes and wrap them around themselves for warmth. The train slowly moved. It would stop often. Several times the locomotive pulling their train would be detached and hooked onto a train moving soldiers to the front. They would have to wait for it to return, or a different locomotive would be attached.

The prisoners could not lift their heads above the top of the open cars. If they did, the guards riding on the train would immediately shoot them. They were on the train for five days. They got water only when it snowed, and then, it was only what snow would fall in their mouths. The train finally arrived in Buchenwald. Only about seven people in his car were alive, all frozen. He lost a toe.

The Buchenwald prisoners helped them get off the train. Buchenwald was different from Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, German criminals were put in charge of the camp. In Buchenwald, political prisoners ran the camp. These political prisoners did all they could to help the newcomers. They had very little medical supplies. They had to cut the shoes off his feet because they were frozen. He was put in the sick block. Their ration there was smaller than the rest of the camp because they were unproductive. They were otherwise left alone. There were doctors there who tried to help them.

He arrived in Buchenwald in March, 1945. On April 11, they were liberated. He remembers lying in his bunk and then seeing soldiers walking around the block with their guns. The prisoners thought these were new Nazi guards, but then they found out they were American soldiers, and they were liberated.

The Americans evacuated the sick people to Weimar, putting them in a school that had been converted into a hospital. They received appropriate medical care. Then the Allies sent people to find out where the prisoners were originally from. He didn't want to go back to Germany, so he lied and told them that he was Belgian. He hoped to return to Belgium and find his brother. The Allies believed him, and on May 5, he was put on a military flight to Belgium. There was a big reception in Brussels, and he was put in a hospital. He told the people there about his brother and his mother. Once in Belgium, he was not worried that they would send him back to Germany. A Belgian friend of his saw his name in the paper and came to help him. They were able to find his brother, who had been hiding out during the war. He had been part of the Belgian Resistance. He was also able to get in touch with his mother, who he found through a joint distribution committee and a Jewish welfare committee. His uncle had been inquiring about his family from America, and he also enquired about his uncle in New York. He uncle sent papers for him and his brother to come to America. His brother decided to go to Palestine instead. His brother had become a Zionist, and left for Palestine in 1946. He came to America in September of 1947. He stopped in London to

visit his mother. She also didn't want to come to the United States with
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