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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with William Klein, conducted by Mira Hodos on October 18, 1993 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's volunteer collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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WILLIAM KLEIN
October 18, 1993

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: The following is an interview with **William Klein**. The interview is being conducted at the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum on Monday, October 18, 1993, by **Mira**(ph) **Hodos**(ph). Okay, could you tell us your name, please?

Answer: My name is **Bill Klein**.

Q: Have you been known by any other names, have you had nicknames?

A: Yes, I had my regular – my real name was **Baylor Klein.**

Q: Mm-hm. And where were you born?

A: In **Czechoslovakia**.

Q: Okay, so we'll stop and see how it sounds? No? What was the name of the town that you were born in?

A: It was called by the Hungarians **Ungvár** and the Czechs, **Užhorod**.

Q: And when were you born?

A: In 19 – March the 25th, 1924.

Q: Tell us about your family. You lived with your mother and father?

A: Yes, we had a big family. There was eight of us brothers and three sisters. And we survived –

Q: Could you tell us their name please?

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A: Their name is – my oldest sister, **Mulvina**(ph), my brother **Herman,** my other brother **Sam,** and my other brother **Sol** and two sisters, **Mulvina**(ph) and **Helen.**

Q: And they were born where?

A: All in **Užhorod**.

Q: All in **Užhorod.** Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood?

A: My childhood was wonderful. The city we lived in it, it was a very peaceful city that was not much what they call abuse, as far as the Jewish people is concerned. We were very good friends with all the neighbors, and that was during the Czech occupation. And when the Hungarians came in in 1938, it was just as good because the Hungarian president defended the Jewish people that they were Hungarians.

Q: Could you tell us about your education? Where did you go to school?

A: Now, I went to Jewish day school til the sixth grade. Then I went to public school, which was considered that time already, high school. And I finished high school when I was 14 years old. Matter of fact it was before even 14 years old, when the rumor got out that the Germans are marching toward **Czechoslovakia**. That was in 1938.

Q: But you were under Hungarian rule by then?

A: Then no, we were then still **Czechoslovakia**. After the Germans occupied **Czechoslovakia**, did the Hungarians take over.

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Q: And did you notice any change?

A: No, we had no problem because the majority of the population were Hungarians.

Q: Okay. I forgot to ask you your parents' name?

A: My father was **Meier**(ph) **Klein** and my mother was **Frieda Klein**.

Q: Did you have friends who were non-Jews and Jews?

A: Yes, yes, in – in public school yes, I had quite a few friends. Matter of fact, we had friends where we lived and we re – we really got along fine, we had no problem.

Q: Mm-hm. How would you describe your family? Middle class, rich –

A: At home we were poor, but we had enough food to eat and clothes to wear, but we were happy because we had a – a beautiful family, a very close and loving family, which we are still that way and so are my children. I taught them.

Q: Did you have an extended family? Cousins, uncles?

A: Oh yes, I had quite a few cousins, which none of them survived, uncles or aunts or cousins.

Q: Was your family religious?

A: Yes, Orthodox.

Q: Did you live in town, or –

A: In town.

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Q: In town, okay. What did your father do for a living?

A: He was a produce man. We were selling produce and vegetables.

Q: Mm-hm. What did you do when you left school, age 14?

A: I was working in a candy factory.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I also learned tailoring, which I still do and that's how I met my wife. She came in to remodel a suit and that's what – you know, what I did, but I also – I was working as a butcher in a grocery store.

Q: That was before 1939, before the war?

A: Oh no, no, no, no, that was all after.

Q: Oh no, I'm interested in 19 – after –

A: And at home, I was in a – I was working – I learned tailoring at home.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I was about nine, 10 years old when I was going in tailoring classes. And in the candy factory, I was working to help the family.

Q: Mm-hm, but that was still in **Užhorod [indecipherable]**

A: Oh, this is still in **Užhorod**, yes.

Q: And did you encounter any anti-Semitism during that period while you were going to school?

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A: No.

Q: Not at all?

A: No, not at all.

Q: When did you notice that things were changing?

A: The change, it started – as far – as far as the people toward us, it didn't change, because even the last minute they were supportive and they even asked me if they want to – if – i-if I want them to hide me in – in so – some places. Which, I couldn't do that because of my parents being old and the rumor was going that we have to go with them to be able to support them. So we didn't know that that was nothing but a false story.

Q: Could you tell us more about that? Could you describe **[indecipherable]**

A: I mean, they came – they came – they – they – first they said that we have to go into the ghetto, which – that was 1944, oh around February.

Q: What happened before 1944?

A: Be a – there was no problem other than working. We had the Star of **David** and we had to be – we could not go out before eight o'clock, nor stay out after six o'clock. That's the only restriction we had. Otherwise, we were not abused by anybody. But we heard about **Poland**, that what's going on there, that they were massacring and – and – and killing, and – the Jewish people.

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Q: How did you hear about that? The radio?

A: Through – through radio, and through what you call rumor in the community.

Q: When did you start wearing the Star of **David**?

A: The Star of **David** started, I – I think, if I'm right about it, it's – either was end of '42, or you know, '43.

Q: So in other words, you wore it for about a year before you were deported?

A: About a year, a year – a year and a half, somewhere around there.

Q: Okay, what happened in 19 – 1940, the Hungarians were there?

A: No, the Hungarians were there, and like I said, we had – our police chief was a local man who lived in **Hungary.** They sent him back to be the chief of the police, and he was a very fine, gentle gentleman that we had no problem, or picking on the Jewish people or anything like that. So as far as that is concerned, we had no problem, and – and – and the people – and the people there were very, very friendly.

Q: Was your neighborhood a Jewish neighborhood?

A: No, it was a mixed neighborhood.

Q: Mm-hm. What happened in 1941?

A: Oh, was just about the same thing, 19 –

Q: The same. So when did things really start to change for –

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A: That's – when they started to change was in '40 – was end of '42 and '43 when – already in – in **Poland**, they were saying that they had the establishment of the **Warsaw** ghetto, and then they were killing the Jewish people in what you call, **Poland**.

Q: That was in 1942?

A: Three, 40 – end of '42 and – and '43.

Q: Right. What happened then?

A: There was – that's when they told us to wear the Star of **David** and we were going to war. Matter of fact, the Germans took over some of the what you call group, and told them what to do and when to do and how long to do it, and not the Hungarians. It was strictly the German – it was not the **SS**, it was the army, so they were not too violent as far as reprimand us or – or beating us. But they told us –

Q: Could you continue – did your father continue in his own business during the period –

A: Yes, yes, he was. He was.

Q: So you all continued to do whatever you were doing, but in addition to that?

A: They c – they took us not only the – oh, my older – two of my older brother was in what they call a army labor camp.

Q: Uh-huh.

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A: They were taken away, they were older. And one of my brother went away and went to **Yugoslavia**, he joined the Yugoslavian partisans.

Q: Which brother was –

A: He was not – he did not survive.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was **Alexander.**

Q: **Alexander.**

A: Wa – you know, they didn't call him **Alexander**, they called him **Sheeu**(ph) **– Shia**(ph), you know what, in – in Hebrew name.

Q: **Mishayel. Mishayel?**

A: No, no, **Shiahersch**(ph), **Shiahersch**(ph).

Q: **Hersch**?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. **[indecipherable]** All right, could you start to describe how things got worse and worse?

A: Now when we – wh-when they took us to the camp –

Q: What year was that?

A: That was already beginning of '44, and –

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Q: When did you get the announcement that you have to go to camp? Could you tell us how you were told that you –

A: They were told – they told us – that was end of ’43, that we will have to move out in one camp. Now, we knew what the ghetto is because we – they – we heard what –

Q: Who told you? Who told you?

A: The – the older people, you know, that they knew what the ghetto was in the old days, that you know, when I say the Jewish people lived in ghetto in many countries. That means combined in one place all the Jewish people, and that’s what they called the ghettoes. But that time I didn't know it, because we never had that.

Q: Are you talking about a ghetto in **Užhorod**, or –

A: N-No, there was – they were talking about what a ghetto is.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But the ghetto in **Užhorod** was nothing but a brick manufacturer – big buildings. So that was not a place that it was living around in a whole area in houses. It was just in a big, brick manufacturing place with nothing but concrete buildings. And that was all over the city like that.

Q: Did you live in that?

A: Oh yes.

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Q: So when did you have to move from your home to this ghetto in **Užhorod**?

A: That was in – in 1944.

Q: Were you allowed to take anything with you?

A: They just said to take clothes and – and – and blankets, because it's – was still cold.

Q: What did you do with your property?

A: We didn't do nothing, you couldn't do nothing. You couldn't buy it, sell it or – or give it. It – we just walked out and left everything where it was.

Q: And that was in 1944?

A: '44.

Q: When in 1944?

A: I'm not sure but I was be – it's either January or February.

Q: The wintertime.

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. So the whole family, except for your brother who went to **Yugoslavia –**

A: Oh no, no, no, I had – the – the oldest brother was in **Russia,** and na – and na – another brother was in **Russia**. Went with the Czechoslovakian army, th-they went to **Russia.**

Q: When did they –

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A: We didn't know it, but that's where they went.

Q: Mm-hm, and when did they leave home?

A: When they left home?

Q: Yeah.

A: They left home in the 40's.

Q: 1940.

A: 1940.

Q: So they left long before –

A: Oh yes, uh-huh.

Q: – you were put in a ghetto in **Užhorod?**

A: That's – oh yes, oh yes.

Q: Can you – do you remember how it was when you moved from your home to the ghetto in **Užhorod**? Can you tell us about it?

A: I don't know how to describe it, but when we walked, whatever we could carry, and I mean carry, that's all we could have. And when we walked in, they said pick a place and that's where you're gonna sleep. And the food was only – people were cooking whatever little they had. And – and – and they were calling for – for breakfast, they calling for lunch, or calling for dinner. What little we had, you know, we tried to divide it with everybody. And some people went out working and

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brought in food, which I did too, because I volunteered to work outside, and I brought in some bread. And I went back to the candy factory that I used to work and I asked them to give me some sugar, which the man gave us sugar, and so I took it back to camp. They did not frisk us, we could bring anything we wanted.

Q: What kind of work were you sup – were you –

A: Oh, I su – gre –

Q: – did you have to do when you were in the ghetto in **Užhorod**?

A: Cre – cleaning – ju-just cleaning the streets, or – or any what you call **[indecipherable]** or b-bricks, you know, or whatever it had to be clean up, that's all we did, nothing else.

Q: Were people in the ghetto in **Užhorod** friendly to each other? Were they taking care –

A: Oh yes, yes, the people of th – each other was very friendly. There was no problem, there was no arguments.

Q: They were all Jews, or –

A: Only Jews.

Q: And how long did you stay in the – in the ghetto in **Užhorod**?

A: Between – we left before **Pesach**, mean Passover –

Q: In other words –

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A: – before Passover. So we were there about no more than maybe two months or t – maybe two months or three months, somewhere around there, not too long.

Q: Mm-hm. How were the conditions, you know, sanitation, sani – sanitary condition, and –

A: Sa – there was no condition, it was wherever you could go, there was a place blocked off with bricks and you use it as a latrine, as an outhouse, and same way e-e-everybody else. And some places they use in – inside tubs for the purpose of – of urinating.

Q: Could you take a bath or a shower, or –

A: No. That's one thing, only u-u-unless you wanted to wash up because there was water faucets, you know, ou-outside, but that's all. But people didn't worry about that, there was more worry about food and what's going to happen to us to worry about the bath, you know, there was no such a thing as baths.

Q: And there wa – they did give you some food, food rations?

A: Yes, some. Not much, but people got along.

Q: Mm-hm. And your family, how was their health?

A: Now, as health is concerned, we had no problem. Thank God our family was very healthy. Was no sickness in our family for years and years, so there was no problem.

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Q: And you were all together –

A: Yes.

Q: – your parents, yourself, your –

A: My parents and brothers and sister.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And naturally, nephews and nieces.

Q: Mm-hm. Oh, you had brothers who had married already?

A: Yes, had a brother and a sister who was married.

Q: Who were married. Can you tell us when you were taken away from the nunk – the **Užhorod,** the ghetto? You said you stayed there for two or three months and around **Pesach** you had to leave?

A: That's right. That's when they came with the trains, what you call cattle trains and they put us in there, and –

Q: Who – who – who – who were they?

A: They was Germans that time who did that.

Q: So the Germans.

A: Yes, but they also –

Q: Did they tell you ahead of time?

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A: No, they al – they – we didn't know what's what. They said, get ready, we gonna move out from **Užhorod.** We didn't know where. They said they gonna take us to a camp, but didn't say where. So when they came they even told us that everybody sha – should stay together, families, because the young ones are the one who will work and support the old families.

Q: Did they give you any warning? I mean, did you have a day or two days in advance –

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no. They said get ready and we going and what little you could take, that's all they allowed you, nothing else.

Q: Mm-hm. How did you feel during that time?

A: How did I feel?

Q: I mean, about the whole situation.

A: I was worried, yet I didn't know what's going on because it – it was not a de – a definite answer on anything we asked. We didn't get any answer what we asked directly, what camp, what place. We didn't know we going out of country. We thought, you know, that we gonna stay around in the area, in **Czechoslovakia**. But they didn't tell us. When we were going and looked out the train, we saw that we crossed the Polish border, so we knew that we – they taking us to **Poland** and there is trouble.

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Q: You had no idea that all those horrible things were happening throughout **Europe** concentration camps –

A: There was – there was no radio information about what's was going on in **Europe** other than people who had radios and then had war stories, but they never said anything about the killing of Jews.

Q: And you felt sufficiently secure –

A: That's right.

Q: – you and your family, that you didn't think of leaving the –

A: No, because I felt that I was strong enough, and my brothers, that we could take care of the families, as far as work is concerned. But it just didn't happen and turned differently.

Q: Right. All right, so you're now going from **Užhorod** to **–**

A: **Poland.**

Q: – to **Poland.** And that was in April of '44.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Where in **Poland** did they take you?

A: Now, they took us – they took us to **Auschwitz**, was **Oswiecim,** you know, actually what they call it, you know.

Q: Yeah. Can you describe the train trip?

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A: Horrible.

Q: How long did it take?

A: It was so full that if you stretched out, you couldn't pull your leg back, or vice versa, if you pull it in, it was almost impossible to put it in there. And every day when the train stopped, they opened the door and threw the dead bodies out.

Q: And how long did the trip take?

A: About three days.

Q: Did you have any food and water during those three days?

A: No. None whatsoever.

Q: So for three days there were no –

A: Water, we – when we got out, people – they allowed you to get out, water we had at – at the train station, but no food.

Q: So the train would stop periodically?

A: Yes, to unload the dead body and if people wanted to go into – in a washroom.

Q: Uh-huh. And how was the sanitation on the train itself?

A: There was no s – there was no such a thing as sanitation.

Q: So in other words you had to wait until you got to the train station where they would allow you down –

A: That's right. Wherever they stopped, allowed me to go down, that's right.

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Q: Uh-huh. How many people would you estimate were in each –

A: Sometimes as ma – as ma – as many as a hundred.

Q: How did the people feel at the time?

A: Nobody talked for the simple reason, the worry was so great that it was no time, no place to say, how you feel or what you think or – or what.

Q: No, no, but the whole situation, I mean, were you frightened, or were you –

A: The whole situation – yes, everybody was afraid what – you know, there was no answer and no question. We couldn't ask because nobody knew anything. Because like I said, there was no information as far as the Jewish people were in – in a concentration – or other than what we heard in **Poland**, which it was close to us, that there is Germans – the **SS** was killing Jewish people. But the **Warsaw** ghetto uprising, we did not her – we didn't hear anything. Matter of fact, I don't think even the free world heard anything about it because n-nobody – otherwise we would have known – the **BBC** we listened, sometimes at night they ha – talking about the war, and we didn't hear nothing. Nothing whatsoever.

Q: Who – who – who – who – who brought those rumors about the – the Germans killing Jews in **Poland**?

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A: Oh, some people, I couldn't tell who, but they were talking about it, what they heard, that people coming from **Poland** over the border that – that they're killing the Jewish people in – special in – they were talking about **Warsaw**.

Q: All right, so after three days on the train you arrived at **Auschwitz**.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us about it, please?

A: Yes, they told us to get out. One who could get out, because there was still dead bodies in the train. And then they said men and boys on one side, women and children on the other side. And as we were going, there were overseers, which we – they called them **kapos** and they were Jewish people and they said, you see that smoke? Do you smell it? And they said, that's gas chamber, okay? We didn't know nothing about it, we never even heard there's such a thing as gas chambers. So he said, they're burning bodies. One who died and one who was killed. And as we walked in on the right side into the camp, we looked back and we saw my parents, my father, my mother and sister with the little children, well that was the last time I did see them. And when we got into the camp, the – well, they call it the living camp. And as – we stayed there a couple days when a **kapo** man came over and he said, when you want to get out of here, if somebody asks for volunteers, say yes. And if they tell you that you want a what – what – you know, what trade, carpenter,

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bricklayer, whatever they're – tell them that you know all of it. You are a carpenter, you're a bricklayer, you're everything. If that's what they ask for it, because they didn't use you what they asked, they just wanted volunteers. And that's when we were shipped out, not that, you know, it was a couple weeks later, they shipped us out to ow – to **Warsaw** ghetto.

Q: Let me backtrack a little bit. When you arrived at the gate, you describe men and boys –

A: Yeah.

Q: – on one side and women and children on the other side, did they take you – did you get any prisoners clothes, or –

A: No, not there. No, not there. There – when we were inside, in the camp, they told us to go in a – a room, and undress completely naked.

Q: But that was not right when you arrived?

A: Oh, it was in the same day.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But it was in the camp when they told us to take off the clothes and just put everything else in there and come out naked. Then they gave us – a little bit later they gave us what you call a pair of pants and a jacket. That's all we had.

Q: When was the last time you saw your parents?

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A: When we separated on – on the train.

Q: When you arrived at **Auschwitz**.

A: When you got – when we arrived to **Auschwitz** and got off the train, that's the last time we see them.

Q: How come you and your father were not put in the male column?

A: Because my father was old and had a beard and you could tell that he was not a working man. He was too old to – you know, to work. He was in his 60's.

Q: So your mother and father were in one –

A: One, and my sister, because she had a little child in her hand. So she was on – on – on the left hand side.

Q: And who stayed with you?

A: My younger brother.

Q: What's his – what's the name of your younger brother?

A: Yeah, **Sol.**

Q: **Saa? S-a-a?**

A: **S-o-l**.

Q: Oh, **Sol.**

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

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A: Only in Hungarian they called him **Zolly**(ph).

Q: And your sister's name?

A: My sister name what – whi-which survived, was **Mulvina**(ph) and **Helen**.

Q: Yeah, I – no, no, the one that –

A: And they were – they – they were also –

Q: – the one that **[indecipherable]** your pra –

A: Yeah, they were also on the left hand side because women were separated from the men right then and there. Well, they went into – further down, and they separated the young ones from the old ones.

Q: Uh-huh, so there were like three lines.

A: The – yeah, there was two lanes, but a little bit further down where the women were, they're not in the same camp as the men.

Q: Where did you sleep?

A: On the floor.

Q: Can you describe?

A: Ho, you see, there was no problem for me for the simple reason, we were a big family and we only had three rooms, a kitchen, a – a – a bedroom, a living room and a dining room all in one, so we slept all on the floor. Only my mother, my father and my oldest sister slept in bed.

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Q: But that was at home?

A: That was home, but we slept on the floor, so I was used to it and – and – and food, what we ate, sometimes there was none, it didn't bother, and that's why we could take the condition, because we were used to it. And let's say this much, that we were not picayune about what we ate. We ate as long as it was food, edible and good.

Q: How many people were in your cabin at **Auschwitz**?

A: Now a – that I couldn't tell you because it was a big cabin and there was hundreds of them in there. So I couldn't tell exactly what it wa – how many it was.

Q: Mm-hm. And how often did they give you food?

A: Now they have – in – in there, in **Auschwitz**, there was not so bad that th-the – the – a few days that we were over there we gave every – you know, everyth – we had sometimes once, sometimes twice a day we had food.

Q: How long did you stay in **Auschwitz**?

A: No, we didn't stay too long. I mean, I'm not sure exactly what it is, but I would say, you know, at least between a one month or two months, you know, that's all. That's why we are not tattooed, because they said that one who is there four or five or six months, they tattooed those people. Now my friend who was from my area in – in **Czechoslovakia**, she stayed there almost eight months. She – they put her to

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work in the crematorium and she got the numbers and she told me that – that she cannot talk to nobody because she saw her mother and father coming down on a ramp, dead, and it – she explained it why I did not have the what you call, the tattoo. And after that other people told me why we don't, but I have the number. I never forget that, it's 88841. And my brother had 8842.

Q: How come you know your number and how come it wasn't tattooed?

A: No, tha-that tha – they gave you the number on your shirt.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But they didn't give it to me on my hand, because like I said, I was a very short time there.

Q: **[indecipherable]** only after six months that they would –

A: Yes, then they tattooed.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Neither my sisters are – two sisters have – are tattooed because they were taken in a different section.

Q: Now what did you do – did you work in **Auschwitz**?

A: Oh yes. Not – no, in **Auschwitz** we didn't work, no. In **Auschwitz** we just stayed in a barrack and always called roll call back and forth just to keep you occupied. No, only in **Warsaw** ghetto we were working.

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

Q: No, let's not – le-let's just stay in – stay on this point. So you didn't do no work in – in the concentration camp?

A: Not in **Auschwitz**, we didn't work, no.

Q: In **Auschwitz**. Were you aware of the bodies being –

A: Yes, we saw it – one, and we were inform by the people already there what's going on. They said look, the chimney, the black, the smoke, the smell. That's where they put the bodies, they're burning it, because there's no place to put them. That's when we knew that that's a death camp. And that's all, we couldn't do nothing, so we stayed there on in the barracks, or – outside we couldn't roam around, only when they called us the roll call, and they called us quite a few times a day.

Q: And you were the whole time with your brother together?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: But you didn't see your parents again?

A: No.

Q: You stayed there for four months?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, just in between one or two months. I'm not exactly sure, but we were a very short time over there, cause we wanted to go what – what

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the **kapo** said, volunteer to get out. So I couldn't say that – no, **[indecipherable]** would say between one or – or – or two months, somewhere around there.

Q: And when did you find out that you were going to be transferred elsewhere?

A: No, when they – when they called out for volunteers and the **kapo** told me to do exactly – go and say you are a bricklayer or whatever it is. And so my brother did the same thing. I had a brother who was a painter, so he said he was a painter, and we were accepted.

Q: And then what?

A: And then, in a few days, they put us on a train taking us to **Warsaw**.

Q: How long was the train ride?

A: No, I couldn't describe, but I think we made it in – i-i-in – in one day.

Q: How were the condition on the train?

A: That time they gave us food before we entered that, you know, the boxcars, and then when we got to **Warsaw**, in be – i-in between there they stopped and they gave us some water and they told us to get out and – and use a washroom, whatever it is and then we had water. That's all we had.

Q: How many people were taken from **Auschwitz** to **Warsaw**?

A: Now on that trip, about 800.

Q: Mm-hm. Only men?

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A: Only men, only men.

Q: And were you still wearing your prisoner uniform?

A: Yeah, by then we had the prisoners' uniform on.

Q: Ah, you didn't get them as soon as you got to **Auschwitz**?

A: Oh yes, that's what I said, you know, we had to be naked. We got that, but like I said, you know, we had it on, uniform, the first day we arrived in **Auschwitz**, they – they changed. They took all – everything we had, civilian clothes and threw it in one box. And then they told us to go outside and we stayed there naked til they called and – and gave you their uniform, striped uniform.

Q: And with these uniform you came to **Warsaw**?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you arrive in **Warsaw**, approximately?

A: It was in – I think it was May or end of May.

Q: 1944?

A: '44.

Q: Can you tell us about it?

A: Oh, we just got with the train and – and – and – and from the train they told us – we arrived there, destination and we walked into the camp. And to – and after the camp they said separate men and go in – in different barracks and take a place

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where we gonna sleep. So there was nothing but wooden bunkers, you just took a – a – a space. There was two on the bottom and two on the top and my brother and myself, we took the bottom part and that's where we stayed til we had to walk to **Germany**.

Q: All right. Could you tell us about the period that you were in **Warsaw**? Did you then learn about the **Warsaw** uprising, and –

A: Yes, there first –

Q: And where was – where was the camp that you stayed within **Warsaw** actually?

A: In the ghetto.

Q: Did you know it was the former ghetto?

A: Well, they told us while we walked in there and you could see the houses all demolished and we learned that already in **Auschwitz** that the **Warsaw** ghetto was destroyed. It was an uprising. So when we walked in there you could tell because every building was destroyed, every one of them.

Q: What was the name of the camp?

A: There was no name, that – that was just the **Warsaw** ghetto.

Q: Mm-hm. And it was a –

A: The only name I know is **Warsaw** ghetto.

Q: And what did you do there?

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A: We were working at tearing down houses and a bricklayer – and the bricks, we pile them in the front and they said they were sending it to **Germany**.

Q: And how were the living conditions, I mean, in terms of food, did you get enough food?

A: Now there they gave us food while we were working. They gave us food. They gave us breakfast and lunch and supper, they gave us there.

Q: Could you describe a typical day there? I mean, what time you got in the morning –

A: Oh, in the morning we got up about six o'clock and then we had to line up and –

Q: For a roll call?

A: – and wait for breakfast. Once you were through with it, within an hour we were in line to go to the workplace, which was – it depends what section they took. Sometimes, you know, about maybe 30 minutes or an hour we – we got there, sometimes two hours, as – depends the distance we had walk, you know, do the cleaning. But I also have – we had good news. While I was working in the house, we found money.

Q: Which house?

A: Go – in a – a – the buildings that was destroyed.

Q: The building in the ghetto that was des –

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A: Not in the ghetto, outside the ghetto, we didn't work in the ghetto. Outside the ghetto. And we found gold pieces.

Q: Oh, can you tell us about it?

A: Yes. It was quite a few thousand gold – 20 dollar gold pieces, but you couldn't take it in because the guard or – there were – law was, when you come in, you keep the shoes and your belt and the clothes you leave it on the ground, and the guard went through with it, feeling what you got in your pocket. So I couldn't bring nothing in til I met a Polish what they call a worker, who was bringing in **[indecipherable]** supplies, whate – whatever it is, horse and buggy. And we stopped him and we ask him can we get a belt, wide and double thickness. And he said oh yes, he said, but it would cost you a thousand dollars.

Q: A thousand dollars?

A: A thousand dollars, and we had paper money, which we u – we gave him a thousand dollars and I put the 20 dollar gold pieces in the belt, which went in 40 dollars at a time. 40 20's, but – you know, 40 gold pieces you could put in the belt. And that's how I went in to the camp. And one guard asked if he found anything, he would give us bread. So I told him I had – I found one gold piece, what would I get? He said a loaf of bread. And I was buying bread for a 20 dollar gold piece, a loaf of bread, which was enough for my brother, myself and my brother-in-law who

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was with us there too. Oh my bra – what I call him brother-in-law because he's wa – was my brother's brother-in-law, but we called him brother-in-law anyway.

Q: You always worked outside the ghetto?

A: Yes.

Q: And always –

A: Not outside the ghetto, outside of the camp.

Q: Outside of the camp.

A: Yeah. The camp was in the ghetto.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm, so in other words, you lived in –

A: Yeah, in – i-i-in – in the ghetto –

Q: – the ghetto, but you went outside –

A: – that's right, working, mm-hm.

Q: Okay.

A: Because our was what you call encircled camp with high wires and guards at every section; there was machine guns set up, so we couldn't do nothing or try to even get out of there.

Q: Mm-hm. How many hours a day did you work?

A: Sometimes 10 - 12 hours.

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Q: Mm-hm. Was there any kind of organization, like the Jewish organization

[indecipherable]

A: You could not – you could not, other than in the, what you call, barracks, you could talk to each other. Outside you could not get a – an – an – and form like a group. You couldn't do that, that was not allowed. Inside, yes, but you couldn't form no group. Only thing we did is people were trying to do is make up a – what you call a song and do – keep us what you call, happy. Which we learned that few of them, I don't know if you ever heard about it **[speaks foreign language here]**. Did you ever hear about it?

Q: Oh yes.

A: Okay then. And that's what we were singing all the time. And it kept us a little bit more excited and the feeling as – as otherwise, you know, it would be just the other way around, would drag you down, but that song really kept us going.

Q: And how long did you stay in **Warsaw**?

A: In the **Warsaw** we stayed til about September or October, because we heard the rumor also – rumor, that the Russians are closing in on **Poland,** getting closer and closer to **Warsaw**. So they told us to get together and take what you got, which we didn't have nothing.

Q: Who is they, the – the –

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A: The **SS**, or the guards.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we will march. What they didn't tell us where or how long, but we marched and we marched.

Q: And that was in September 1944?

A: That was in September or October, somewhere around there.

Q: In the autumn.

A: Yeah, in the autumn, you know.

Q: And you started to walk.

A: Yes, we walked. And as we were walking, people were falling out. If he was alive, he was shot. If he pretended he wasn't alive, he was shot anyway to make it sure that he was dead.

Q: Did you know which direction you were walking towards?

A: No, they told us we're walking toward **Germany**, that's all we knew. And I didn't know **Poland** or **Warsaw**, anywhere, which way we going. All I knew is that we were walking toward **Germany**.

Q: How many days did you walk?

A: I couldn't tell you that, but it was quite a few days.

Q: How many hours a day did you walk?

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A: From sunlight to almost darkness. Sometimes we stopped earlier and just like the man was saying, we were using whatever y – tools you had to make a hole and get some water out of the field to drink it because there was no water. And if you walked on the main line, there was the sewer – not, I wouldn't say sewer, but water drainage, and – and we used to drink water. Whether it was clean or dirty or infected, we didn't think about it, nor did we care about it. All we knew because we were thirsty. And then one time, one – one time we got to a water and we just ran into the water and – clothes and all and drinking and – an-and bathing and just name it, we did in the water. Then they wa – some of them wanted to swim away from it, and they were killed in the water. We got out of it, and I think that was the last time that we had water that I know of, is when we were at the river. And then we walked about a couple more days. And they said pretty soon we going to go into a – no, I think – I think we were about – I would say about maybe three or 400 mi – kilometers we walked. Then they put us on the train. Where it was, I couldn't tell you.

Q: When you were walking, until they put you on the train, did you come across villages or little towns?

A: No, we did not, we used strictly the roads. There was never villages or towns, never.

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

Q: So you didn't see any of the local population?

A: None whatsoever, no, none whatsoever.

Q: Who gave you food to eat?

A: Whatever they – what you call th-the trucks or cars were bringing it out there, what little it was, because you know, I – I was told there was 11,800 people that walking.

Q: 11,000 people?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: All of them from the **Warsaw** –

A: Ghetto. I mean, there was also other buildings, you know, other than ours. And th-that's what they told us. Now, I cou – I-I only go what people said and – and we were – arrived very few of them in – in what you call, **Dachau**.

Q: Now, before we get there, how did people react to one another during this march? Were they helping each other?

A: Yes, myself and my brother was hel-helping a-an older gentleman who so – who – it just so happened he was a rabbi and we carried him so long, so far. After that he could not even walk and we dragged him a little bit, but he just fell down and you couldn't bend down and try to help him, cause they would kill you the same way. And so we walked, and I – we heard a shot.

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: Okay, we were – we were talking about your marching from – from **Warsaw** towards **Germany**, and I asked you if people were helping each other and jus –

A: Yes, e-e-everybody, you know, who – who needed some help, they had an arm, you know and – and try to support him by walking. One who could not, like I said, fell down –

Q: – Fell down.

A: – and you could not do anything, we had to just walk and leave him behind. And I heard – this is just what I said, I heard that only about 11 – 1800 or 2800 survived and all the rest of them died on the way. This is what people told us. Now, I couldn't say whether I counted them, because I didn't, you couldn't do that. But I just going by them and – and like the gentleman said, that he – you know, when he walked into **Dachau** that the – the whole street was lined up with dead people on the floor. So I couldn't tell you that, but he said and then they said that it's about 180 people survived. Now I – I – I couldn't say that I counted them, but I just go what people told us.

Q: Yeah, but – but you're pretty c-certain there were about 11,000 who were there –

A: That's what they told us, and now that's – we – we had 11,800 people.

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Q: And how many arrived in **Dachau**?

A: Well, you see, there was more than one group, but that – in the group that I came in –

Q: In your group.

A: – there was 18 – 180 people survived.

Q: Out of how many?

A: Of 11,000.

Q: 11,000, my goodness. How did people feel during that march? I mean –

A: You know, we wasn't talking to each other, other than what's going to happen to us, and many times you were thinking about just hide in the bushes, maybe some Polish farmer, or Polish partisans will come and help. And – but nobody was daring enough to do that because, like I said, some people wanted to do it in the water, and they shot them. So everybody was afraid to do anything, and I wa – just so happened I was with my brother and I just couldn't take a chance on anything. We figure we gonna survive one way or the other. And thank God we survived.

Q: So you were hopeful for –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: You said that you walked and then they put you on the train.

A: On the train.

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Q: For how many days did you walk?

A: I couldn't tell exactly because you know, that time, the counting wasn't there, but it was quite a few days, was quite a few days. We slept outside in the cool weather, but we slept good because we bundled up among each, you know, instead of being just one or two of them, was eight, 10 people got together and – and warmed each other up.

Q: What was the name of the town from which you took the train? You don't remember.

A: Like I said, we were not even close to the town so we couldn't even see what it was.

Q: Ma –

A: The on – the only thing we knew, that we saw some buildings, but where or what, I couldn't tell. Nobody, I mean anybody was on that trip, could tell you what the town's name is.

Q: And so you got on the train, how long was the train ride? This – this train ride to **Dachau**.

A: I would say from – tha – to **Dachau** was a couple of days.

Q: And how was your physical health during that period?

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A: Mine was good because as a kid I was a hard worker and – and – and good condition, because we were working all day and so my physical condition was good because I was used to hard life at home, like I said, we lived that way. And so I had no problem in that respect. Many people are – were passing out because they had no – also I, as a – as a young man I was a sportsman. I was a soccer player, I was a runner and so on, so I was in good condition in that respect, and so was my brother. But other people was with us, they were just falling out. Naturally, some were older than we are. We were that – you know, I was – that was what, about 20 years old, and so I wa – I – like I said, in my prime, in that condition.

Q: I meant to ask you when you went from – from **Užhorod** to – to **Auschwitz** –

A: **Auschwitz**.

Q: – and then from **Auschwitz** to **Poland** and now to **Dachau**, were you the whole time with the same people that left **Užhorod** with you?

A: No, not the same people. There was – you see, in – in that train was other than **Užhorod.** There was surrounding areas and they brought them also into the camps, so let's – I would say surrounding area, yes. And that's – that's the people who was there.

Q: And these are the people that eventually you got to **Dachau**?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

Q: Tell us about **Dachau**.

A: Now, in **Dachau –**

Q: Tell us when you arrived there, and –

A: When we arrived to **Dachau**, there was people greeting us and some of them said welcome to death camp. And I said, what camp? He said, death camp. Well, I didn't know what he is talking about it til I found out, you see that chimney over there? He said that's where all the people wind up who stays in here. Well, we didn't know nothing, they gave us a bed, and they allowed us to go in a bath house. Warm, hot water bath. And then they said if e – you know, we gonna have some food in the kitchen – which, they gave us food.

Q: Who were the people who greeted you in **Dachau**?

A: Prisoners.

Q: So the prisoners told you it was a death camp?

A: Yes.

Q: Were the prisoners Jewish, or –

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: They were mixed?

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

A: He was a – a – a – what you call a preacher I wasn't sure, a Catholic, or whatever it is, but that was a preacher, cause he still had that collar, only the collar on his neck. Otherwise he had the same striped uniform, you know, and – and he greeted us and he said I'm not Jewish, he said – he told us right away that he wasn't Jewish. There was many over there i-i-in a religious group that were arrested by the German government.

Q: All right, so tell us some more about **Dachau**.

A: And then we st – like I said, we stayed a few days, I'm not so sure how long because we were so tired, and – and as – a – if they allowed us, we were just laying and sleeping. Then one day they called and they said, where anybody wants to volunteer to go work in – in the underground factory – building, a factory. And no one experienced what the man in – in **Auschwitz** said, the first thing you do is get out a ca – a death camp. And exactly that's what we did, and we got to a small town, what they call **Mildorf**(ph). And from **Mildorf**(ph) we had to walk to the camp, which was in the forest, I would say maybe five, no more than eight kilometers from there, and they had the cabins. You know, I – we call them bunkers, cause all it was i-is – is a roof over it and concrete, everything else concrete. The place that you sleep and – and sit, or whatever, or walk, it was

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nothing but concrete. And we stayed there a few days you know, til they took us working out the camp.

Q: Outside of **Mildorf**(ph)?

A: Outside of **Mildorf**(ph), yeah, that was also outside **Mildorf**(ph). There was an underground factory they were building, and we were –

Q: And what were they doing there?

A: We didn't know that because it was just in the process of building that – the place up. And what it is – was, that people were standing on steel, what you call –

Q: Beams?

A: – platform, or – or – or shape, then we poured concrete. And if you were not careful and you fell in there, the concrete buried you instantly because it was flowing, the concrete, continuously. And it – that's the place where I got badly hurt, when a train, a construction train hit me in my chest and ruptured my ribs, punctured my lung and almost killed me. But I survived. God, I believed in God, and it helped me. And there was one German worker who had a hat on, they called him **Toten Kopf,** which translation mean dead head. And he helped me with little food there was in the underground, while I was in the camp, in the working camp, when I was going a – I – I came out every day to walk back because they counted the people when they came and when they left, make it sure that there is everybody

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there. But every morning when we walked there, which was seven days a week and sometimes working 12 - 14 - 15 hours a day, that's including in walking and everything else, and I was most of the time in the bunker, underground and in the dark, cause I couldn't breathe. Finally, I got better. And – and also it was a problem in the camp because they threw me out from the barrack because I was moaning from pain all night long and I couldn't – they couldn't sleep and they f – they felt that they are so tired that they just cannot take my, what you call misery and – and sound, or pain, cause that would have made them more s – what you call vulnerable to their – to their work and because they were so tired. Even then we didn't have sleep. And many people died there too, in the working place, if not on the what you call, on the march. Cause it was, you know, every day marching to work and from work and lunch. Lunch hour was in a section and we knew what time. When the horn sounded, you're supposed to go to the – what they call a – a lun – a lunch area. And people used to always slowly work their way in closer – closer to their lunch, because if you didn't, there was just a si – one hour time you had to feed I don't know how many hundreds of people. So natural, you were trying to get closer. When you were closer you ran to it if you were lucky, you know, and they used to put in a – a ladle in that soup, and come out with a potato and he puts it back and you get nothing but water. It has one or two potatoes in it and they showed it

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everybody else what it is, but never got it. But they showed what it was. But anything was cooked, what little was in it, and it – a-and a little bit, it did help. And to prove that it did help, I'm here today.

Q: So you essentially helped the Germans build this underground factory.

A: Yes.

Q: I want to go back to your accident, when that train hit you.

A: Yes.

Q: How did it exactly happen?

A: There was a Russian prisoner who was driving that little train. And then he wanted to put it in reverse, because he was in a standing position, he wanted to put it in reverse, and we were around there. And it, instead of reverse, it jumped in drive and it jumped – I was so close to it, that the edge of the train hit my rib, and it –

Q: So it was an accident?

A: Oh yeah, that was th – an accident, it was not on purpose **[indecipherable]** and I still have the thing sticking out over here, even though I had the operation, they removed part of it, not to – you know, punctured it. But there was a doctor who did help me, not an official doctor –

Q: At the time? At th –

A: At the camp, you know –

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Q: At mi – at **Misseldorf**(ph).

A: Ye-Yes, and he said, let me do something for you and he put his hand and pulled out the rib. I almost died in the pain from that alone. And he said now, the blood started – stopped running, as it did before. And like I said, everything, it was just working my way, bu –

Q: Was it a Jewish doctor?

A: Yeah – oh yes, he was a prisoner.

Q: Also a prisoner.

A: Yes. But like I said, we didn't have no doctors, not officially. We didn't even volunte –

Q: **[indecipherable]** he was a Jewish doctor from –

A: He was a Jewish doctor from our area, yes. And he is the one who pulled it out. And people said, you know, they pronounced me already dead, and I got up in the broad sunlight and I saw the stars, but I announced that I'm not dead, I'm alive. But the blood was just spilling out of my mouth. And you know, what we saw in movies and all that, a-all the time, when the person was shot and the blood was coming out the mouth, that – the sign was, that's it. And so did – I thought so too, and everybody else around that way.

Q: But you were taken care of by your friend – by your fellow prisoners?

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A: Yes, but this German, he w – he was a worker over there, he is the one who really helped me, he gave me some food every day. Not much, because he didn't have too much either.

Q: Was he a guard?

A: No, he was a working guy. He was – looks like a penalized worker, because you didn't see no civilians, Germans working in that camp. But whatever there was, an overseer, or – or what – he was not working like we did, but in the same area, so I – I couldn't tell what he was, but I figure he was maybe penalized and put in there working with us, even though supervising. What position, I couldn't tell because he wouldn't tell me nothing, other than he said he is sorry what they doing to us.

Q: Mm-hm, and – but he covered for you for the few days that you couldn't work?

A: He wa – yes, he took me down in the – in – in – in the bunker every day and he said, you stay here until I come after you. And he used to come down and got me out just before the work was over. So when there was a roll call, I had to lift my hand up and said aye, you know, he count so and so, everybody else by name. And sometimes they just counted how many people, and they – each – each group had 40 - 50 of them, and you better have 50. One was missing, we stayed there til they find the body or the person.

Q: Sure. And how long were you in **Dachau** or **Misseldorf**(ph), or –

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A: **Mildorf**(ph)? I was in **Mildorf**(ph) til the last day when the Americans were already close by and some of the guard were talking to each other, you know, that th-the Americans are already in – in – close by in **Munich** and all that. So we knew that it is coming, so they wanted to take us some death camp, and they told us, get ready, we going into the – on that train, you know.

Q: The Germans?

A: The Germans told us, yeah. The **SS.**

Q: When di – what time of year was it?

A: That was in – in **April,** in ’44.

Q: No, no, ’45.

A: I mean ’45. I me –

Q: April ’45, yeah.

A: Yeah, ’45. And then he said, everybody goes to the train. And we walk – a-and we – and we were close, and as we were driving, I don’t know how many miles, not too many miles, but the American planes attacked the train. And they thought maybe an army train, whatever it is, and the **SS** took off, the guards, and so did we. We opened the train – one of them was opened, somebody opened ours because every train was opened, and we were scattered in the forest, but it didn’t last too long because after the plane flew out, the **SS** guard came back and picked us up and

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walked us back. Now, we were afraid that they – what we heard about in – in – when we were in – still in – in our home country, that the **SS** took civilians in the forest and they killed them in the forest. And so we figured that's it. But as we were walking, it was getting darker and we – my brother, myself and my brother-in-law, I told them we gonna jump into the gutter, which was filled up with water, and we swam down about maybe two or three kilometers and we got up and we walked into a farmhouse. And that's – we stayed til the liberation – the Americans came in – with the farmer's approval and knowledge, because he caught us a couple days earlier, that we ate the food what they were serving to the pigs. And they were making so much noise, they knew that something is wrong in their pig house, because they never made that much noise. So he caught us, but did not give us up. He s – he told us what to do and where to stay, til the **SS** were coming back and looking in all the farmhouses. And that's when the American came in.

Q: And how many people were in your group? Just you and your brother and brother-in-law?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh-huh, so just the three of you –

A: No, only that – in that one, or – there was others, without our knowledge. You know, there was – well, there was quite a few all around it.

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Q: Uh-huh.

A: But were –

Q: But in that little house, that was just you and your brother –

A: And my brother, a-and my brother-in-law.

Q: Mm-hm. How were you treated by the – the German guards in – in – when you were in camp in **Mildorf**(ph)?

A: Oh no, the **SS** – the **SS** were **SS** in every guard. They did not treat you right. You couldn't ask question, and for instance, one time I walked to a **SS**, a what you call a guardhouse, and working on the – on – on the field, and he was eating pudding. And he looked at me and he just threw the pudding on the grass. And he didn't say here take it. He could have – you know, he could have done that, but that would have been a – a – a goodwill gesture. And so I walked over there and I put it in my shirt, which was nothing but a cement sack and I walked back to my brother. And we ate the pudding from my sack. And – and that – that was something that he – he – it was out of this world for the simple reason, we never had anything in those – in that time that I was in a camp that was sweet, and that was sweet. And that was just a few days before we were liberated.

Q: Mm-hm. Tell us about when you were liberated, how did you feel?

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A: It's – it's ou – there's no word to describe, nor to tell how does it feel to know that the American – the Americans, you know, were the soldiers, we didn't know different because we couldn't understand English. But luckily there was –

Q: Can you describe your first encounter with the liberators?

A: Oh yeah, we went – we wen – we ran to them, we hugged them, and – and – and they, you know, tried to, what you call, restrain us to the point they're hold it, now hold it, everything is all right, you're safe. But the first thing they ask about who is sick, what ch – you know, what – what's the problem and so on. And we said food, food, and food. And that's what we got – we got from the Americans, plenty food. We had – matter of fact, we ate to the time that we fell asleep. We were tired and hungry. When we were full we just fell asleep over there and – and – and stayed there til the next day, which they always ask us what we want to do. And I told them that I want to go back to **Czechoslovakia** to look for my family, because I knew I had a big family. I knew I couldn't find my father, my mother, my sister, but I had younger people. And sure enough, I found my brother, who was a staff captain in the Czechoslovakian army. Then I heard from him that one of my brother who was a paratrooper in the Czech army was shot in the air after liberated my hometown. Then I found out that two of my sisters were alive also in my hometown. And then I have another brother in **Budapest.** So I traveled from one

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end to the other, and I told my younger brother to stay here and I'll try to get the family together in one place that I know. And that's how we did what you call got – get at a family. I had clothes which I had to give up for my sisters because the Russians arrested my sisters, for whatever reason I don't know, but I went in there and they wanted to get my –

Q: Where was it that –

A: That was in my hometown.

Q: And – and –

A: You see, the Russian occupied it.

Q: **[indecipherable]** you went back to – to **Užhorod**?

A: Oh yes, I had – yeah –

Q: How long were you with the Americans?

A: Not too long, just a few days, because I wanted to go and find my family.

Q: And were you in a camp, or –

A: No, no, no, I stayed a few days in the – with the farmers, and after that they took us into the city, which was mil –

Q: The Americans?

A: The Americans – which was **Mildorf**(ph).

Q: Uh-huh.

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A: And there we stayed a few days, like I said a train – a – a truck is going –

Q: And they gave you clothes, and –

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I still had the same – still had the same clothes on, they didn't give us clothes.

Q: So you were still with your –

A: Yeah, that's right –

Q: – prisoner uniform?

A: – mm-hm.

Q: And what was the farmer's name **[indecipherable]**

A: I could no – it – I don't think I knew or I asked, but I wouldn't remember, definitely I wouldn't know it, but I was very grateful to him.

Q: And so you were with the farmer and the American gave you foods. And how did you get back to –

A: **Czechoslovakia**?

Q: Yeah.

A: On top of the train.

Q: Did the Americans give you money?

A: No.

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Q: How did you manage –

A: There was no – you couldn't buy –

Q: How did you manage the trip?

A: You don't – y-yo – there was not tickets that time. That was only strictly army movement. If you're going on the train, it was free. There was no – no – no money exchanged as far as the trains is concerned. But that was so many people and so many army inside there, the only place you could go on the top and even that was full.

Q: So from **Mildorf**(ph) you went back to –

A: We went to **Munich.**

Q: To **Munich.**

A: Yes.

Q: With your prison uniform?

A: With the prison uniform.

Q: And from **[indecipherable]**

A: From **Munich –** from muni – from **Munich** we took – there was American what you call trucks, were going toward **Czechoslovakia**, which is actually were going to **Pilsen**(ph), which is the border town – border town. Well we got there – we wanted to go to **Prague**. From there we got on top of the train and we got to **Prague**, and

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the first thing we did, we looked up the Jewish community section, because we knew that there has to be, because I'm not the only one who survived, so some are – they have to get together and find out, or get information how to get where. And sure enough, we found out that I had a brother in **Bratislava**, which is the capital city of **Slovakia**. And we again, on the train, on top of the train, we got to **Czechoslovakia**, and they told us where he is, also went to the Jewish community.

Q: In **Bratislava**?

A: In – in **Bratislava** and they told us where. Meanwhile he told us that here is a place that you're gonna stay while you stay here, and there was food, kitchen, everything else, Jewish people who were survivors or hidden, whatever, there's – they were cooking food there for everybody. And we slipped – slept in the apartment there. But anyway, went to see my brother –

Q: And fa – when did you change your prisoner's clothing?

A: In Czechoslo – in **–** in **Bratislava** we got clothes, you know.

Q: In **Bratislava,** mm-hm.

A: And –

Q: Did they give you money as well?

A: Yes, they gave me money, not too much, but you see, we didn't have to buy nothing, because everybody was very helpful, even non-Jewish people if you s – if

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you said you know, what you are and where you come from and all that. So people helped you if you wanted something. Some people gave me apple, some people gave me oranges, because they knew I didn't have a chance to get that. But anyway, I went to see my brother.

Q: Which brother was **[indecipherable]**

A: Was that the oldest brother who was a captain in the army, and people ask me who you looking for, and I told them, **Herman Klein**. They said oh, th-th – is – is – was a staff captain. And he said oh, Staff Captain **Klein** –

Q: In which army –

A: – I didn't know that – Czechoslovakian army.

Q: Oh, and he was fighting against – I mean –

A: He – you see, he was in the army, then the army went to **Russia**. And he went with the army into **Russia**.

Q: Was he fighting for the germ – on the Germans –

A: For the – no, no, against the Germans. No, no, no, you see the ar – Czechoslovakian army in 1938 –

Q: Sorry, he was with the Czechoslovakian army?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: Okay

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A: Anyway, when he came back – but I haven't seen him for seven years, he didn't recognize me. He said, who are you? And I said, you don't know me? And he said no. I'm your brother. And he looked at me and he said, which one? Cause we had – there was eight of us. And I se – I told him, I said **Baylor**. And he started to cry and we all cried, and my younger brother with me over there. And we had – I mean, excitement i-i-in my body, I could feel like – like the blood just circulating with – with the speed in me, and then he was telling me about it that he heard that I – our two sisters in my hometown and he could not leave his position, even though he could have gone easily there. So he told me to go and then he said, I heard that there's one brother in **Budapest**, and so I went around in my hometown and picked up my two sisters and my brother was in **Budapest,** I took him – took them over there and then we turn around and went back to **Czechoslovakia**, into what you call **Bratislava** because my brother was there. We stayed –

Q: Your brother the officer?

A: Yeah, and we sta – stayed there a very short time, then we went up to **Prague** and from **Prague** they told us that we could have a house if we wanted in the **Sudeten**, maybe you heard about the **Sudeten.**

Q: Yeah.

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A: Okay. And I got a house what belonged to postmaster in that section, and we stayed in that house until we decided that we want to go back to **Germany** because we heard that from there they're going to **Israel** and what – **America**. So we signed on for both ways and I wind up going to **Australia**. To the last minute they announced my paper arrived from am – **America** and it's – I can go to **America**. That was in 1951.

Q: Oh, so you were, from 1945 til 1951 in the sud –

A: **Germany**.

Q: – in the **Sudetenland?**

A: No, no. No, no, no, I – **Sudetenland** I didn't stay but maybe a few months we stayed there.

Q: Uh-huh. And when you were there, did you stay with your two sisters and older brother?

A: Oh yeah, my brothers, my sisters, everybody was together.

Q: So all of – all of you were together?

A: Yes, I got them together.

Q: Uh-huh. And what happened after the **Sudetenland**? Where did you go then?

A: We were – we went to the border town in the **Sudeten** where –

Q: That was in '45, after you –

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A: That was ’40 – n-no, that was already ’46.

Q: ’46.

A: That was early ’46, and – and there we’re a-all signing up and we had the Israeli people there talking people to – where to go because from then you will be able to go to **Israel.** Which we didn’t care where **Israel,** just to go, you know, someplace. And we walked through the – in the border town and they told us they have to wa –

Q: What was the name of the town?

A: Oh, I couldn’t tell you that. It was so long ago and I never kept it in my mind. I didn’t write it down. I should have, you know, but things were – was very important, yes, I would say I would know where I was, but from there we arrived to **Germany**.

Q: Where in **Germany**?

A: A-As – that was – oh, what they call that border town in – oh, I mean, I – it’s – it’s offhand, and I couldn’t remember. But that was i-in close to **Czechoslovakia**.

Q: And that was in ’46?

A: And that was in ’46.

Q: After the **Sudetenland**?

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A: That's right. And then we – we – we stayed there a few weeks and they ask us if we want to go in – in a different camp and we said yes, we would like to go. Now we got into **Munich** –

Q: So you went back to **Munich** then?

A: Yes, I mean beca – the train went to **Munich** and from **Munich** they told us there is camps. **Wasserburg, Rosenheim, Fernwald** and so on. Well, we took –

Q: What kind of camps were they?

A: They were –

Q: **DP**?

A: No, displaced persons.

Q: Displaced persons, okay.

A: Yes. In those camps there was, where we were it used to be either mentally **de-arrange** or retirement home, cause it was very nice, but they were eliminated by **Hitler,** the same reason, because they were a burden of their country. And that's where we stayed til 19 – I stayed there til 1950.

Q: Which one did you go to? Did you stay in –

A: In fer – I stayed in **Wasserburg.**

Q: **Wasserburg.**

A: Yeah.

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Q: So what was it like, a sanitarium – sanitorium, like a –

A: N-No, it was not that, it was just building separately – a separate building, and – and – and like for instance, it was like an old home. Each building had some eight, 10 or 15 different apartments and that's where we stayed.

Q: Mm-hm. Did you work while you were there?

A: No, you didn't have to work. I mean, some people had to, you know, and they paid you for it. But we didn't have – that –

Q: So you were there for five years?

A: No, I was there for about three years, and then I moved to a-another camp, which was **Fernwald**.

Q: So from **Wasserburg** –

A: To went – because –

Q: – to **Fernwald.**

A: Yes.

Q: So that must have been around 1949.

A: That was about '49, yes.

Q: Uh-huh. And when were you there –

A: And then I stay – we – I was playing soccer.

Q: So in other words, you were convalescing the whole time?

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A: That's right, I mean, you didn't – like I said, in the displace camp you did not have to work. But some people were in business – some people were in business. But they gave you food, and you got clothes, so much clothes and what – what you needed. And then there was a place where you went and cleaned your laundry. I mean, it was a normal life in the sense that you didn't have to worry about anything. And the –

Q: Mm-hm. So you were there until 1951?

A: 1950 – 1950 –

Q: 1950.

A: – because after th – after that, at the end of 1950 and then I went into what you call **Bremerhaven** because I stayed there for awhile and I come out here in 1951 in January.

Q: So you left from **Bremerhaven** to **America** –

A: Yes.

Q: – in 1951.

A: '51.

Q: You had applied for a visa, and –

A: Oh, that was a big – big story, you see, my brother and my sister, they came in 1949.

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Q: Oh.

A: Somebody – somebody gave a – a story that, you know, one of the person that I would not let him play with me soccer. He got mad and he went to the consul and told them that I was a communist. And I asked the consul general, when was I a communist? And he said I don't know. I said, before the war I was 14 years old, and after the war I couldn't be, because I was always – almost like in a prison **[indecipherable].** So it took a little while and finally he acknowledged that there was nothing but a false rumor and they gave me the paper to apply again, you know, and – and – and I was within a few – a couple weeks, I was ready to go. And then I went to **Bremerhaven** and –

Q: Took the boat?

A: – took about 11 – 11 days to come to your country, cause I messed – missed my brother's wedding. I had arrived here Monday and his wedding was Sunday.

Q: Oh. Okay, so you arrived in **America** in 19 – when – what month was it?

A: January.

Q: January 1951. Mm-hm. And where did you go?

A: **Chicago**. I had my mother's brothers, two brothers, the one who sponsored us, and that's where we stayed til everybody got married, and this is why I wa – I'm here, because my cousin is over here, or – or her grandchildren.

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Q: And how do you feel about all that experience today?

A: I feel that it is nothing we could have done, but the world as a whole, yes, it could have done. And I felt, as I'm speaking in an engagement, that what happened to us, it could happen to other people, because people are fighting not a war, but always a religious war. Whatever the reason it is, it happens – it just so happened now in **Russia** is the same way with the Orthodox Ukrainian, with the Muslims over there, or **Yugoslavia**, the Serb, and the Muslim. So it could and it does happen. But as far how I feel about it, I think the world could have stopped it and I feel that partly President **Roosevelt** was also like against the Jewish people, which I feel it wa – you know, that's what everybody else feels the same way about it, because he sent the ship back and the Germans figured nobody wanted, so might as well kill us.

Q: How did you feel during the war about being Jewish?

A: I always felt Jewish, I always was proud that I am Jewish, and I've been approach so many time by so many people to convert and I told them that I was born a Jew, I am living as a Jew and I will die as a Jew. I'm a very proud Jew. I would never change with anybody.

Q: Does the war still affect you now?

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: Do the memories of your experiences still affect you?

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A: Ah, yes, it does affect me many ways. First is I was beaten up very badly and so it have the pain, like my knees, which both has to be replaced. My hand was broken and my wrist, and my back, like I said, is like a map. So that's was one thing. The second, when I'm in a speaking engagement, I feel all if I sleep, I dream sometimes, but I try to get away from it because it – it brings bad memories. So – but I have to talk about it for the simple reason I get it – I get it out of my system and I feel a hundred percent better. That's what I'm doing that, in the speaking engagement.

Q: When did you – when were you beaten?

A: Oh, when I was in the camp, working –

Q: They did beat you up?

A: Oh yeah, sometimes with a si – a – a – a pick, sometime with a shovel. And many times with a gun butt.

Q: Where did they beat you? Over the –

A: The back.

Q: On the back.

A: Uh-huh. And I never said that – that I had muscle spasm in my heart and muscle spasm in my legs. I was married almost 17 years that when my wife caught me one time in the kitchen on the floor laying, and she turned on the light and I was actually pale gray. So she thought that I have a heart attack, and I said no, I don't have a

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heart attack, I have muscle spasm attack in my leg and in my heart. And when – I couldn't breathe, but the leg paralyzed. I had to roll off the bed and roll into the kitchen and get the, what you call the circulation back in my legs. And it's even today, I have it for 50 years. Almost 50 –

Q: Why did – why did they beat you, for what reason did they beat you?

A: There is no such a thing as a reason for them, for any reason or no reason. They just came by and they hit you. Maybe I was in his way, or he just wanted to let me know he is there.

Q: Did you ever tell your children about your experiences?

A: Oh yes. When they were in – in – in – around 10 years old, I felt that it's time for them to know what I went through, that – what they knew, I was in a concentration camp, but not the details and as we watched some films, they were talking in German, they always asked me to translate what they saying, and that's when I was telling them ho – and what I did and what they did to me. And my son, who was very much active and supportive of the museum, and my younger daughter, who is sometimes my spokesperson, she can tell you my story as good as I am because she heard it so many times from me, that if – one time I missed my appointment at home with the **TV** crew, she was the one who gave my interview, and they accepted. That's – that's – that's how well they know.

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Q: That's very good. Mr. **Klein**, did you ever apply or receive reparations?

A: A operation?

Q: Reparations.

A: No, I did not apply. I – I oh – when I was in **Germany** one time, I went to the Jewish organization and they gave me a few hundred dollars. But in this country when everybody else signed up, I don't know why, but I just didn't do it, and – but a couple years ago, I applied for a hardship fund and they gave me 3,000 – no, 5,000 German **mark**, and – which was about 3,000 dollars. That's the only thing. But applied for it now, when they came out again, the German government said that they have 175 million dollars to give away and so I applied for it, but so far I didn't hear nothing from them.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to – to tell us, that you have to share with us that we didn't touch on **[indecipherable]**

A: No, no, I think I just about told everything what had happened to me, wheth- whether major or minor, but that's – that's just about what it is. I – I think I said everything there is to be said, as far as the story that – you know, that it happened to me.

Q: Well thank you very much.

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

A: You're welcome. And I hope people will hear it and read it, but like I said, I – you know, I have newspaper people come out to my house. There was a Passover they came into my house **[indecipherable]** paper. If you want me to send you those things, you know, I'll be glad to send it to you. Also, I have letters from – at least 500 letters from schools, from children, from teachers and all that, that they never knew that that's happen. You know, children don't –

Q: You go and you speak in schools, and –

A: And this is – the people ask me, do you hate? What – and I ask one time, what's that? They said, you know, you hate, you don't like him. Hate does not exist in our society as far as the Jewish people is, because we **[indecipherable]** from history, the only thing we teach is remember. Because if I hate somebody, is only hurts me. It doesn't hurt the other party. He doesn't know and he doesn't care. So people were so surprised that I don't hate. No, I have a German girl, works in a – an office that I used to be on the board in there and we became very good friends. And she knows that, that I don't hate her. A matter of fact, her boss is a German Jew, and – and he accepted her, cause she is a very nice person. She was a young girl, she must have been about 12 – 13 years old. She could have been responsible, something with her father or – or grandfather, or uncle, or whatever it is. So you can't hate everybody. And like I said, there was many good Germans too. And – and – and –

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

Q: Did you know any?

A: Yes, I did. And like even – like I said, after the liberation, and it's not that they would **[indecipherable]** they were saying this way, that they were told if they ever help any Jewish person, or any prisoner, they will be killed with their whole family. So it was threaten, and let's face it, that goes the same way like was in **Russia**. Your family was in jeopardy if you said something against the government, the same way in any other country. So I would say there was many that, like I said, in our hometown, when we worked with the army, which was army, German army, they were not hateful, they were not bad. They never touched us, never. And they told us that they don't want to join the **SS** because they are nothing but murderers.

Q: When did you find out about your parents, your mother and father?

A: The next day, when we ask the overseer, the **kapos,** that what they doing with our parents, and he said your parents are dead. If they were old, they are dead the same day, some the next day and it got to us to the point that we were lifeless, like – like no feeling. You just walking in the air and – and they said you have to get used to it and you have to go on living. Either you gonna live or you gonna die here, you got the choice. And we decided to live.

Q: In other words, your parents died shortly after arriving at **Auschwitz**.

A: Arrived there, that's correct.

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Interview with William Klein
October 18, 1993

Q: Thank you.

A: You're wel – **[tape break]**

Q: I'd like to thank you very much for giving us your time to do this interview.

A: It was an honor and a privilege and I – I – I think it was my job to do that.

Q: This concludes the interview with **William Klein**. The interviewer was **Mira**(ph) **Hodos**(ph) and the interview took place on October 18, 1993 at the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum.

End of Tape One, Side B

Conclusion of Interview

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