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SCHINDLER

Richard Rechen

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Richard Rechen

Q : Mr Rechen perhaps you can tell me a little bit about your memories of the Amalia factory?

RECHEN : Er, I came to *Deutsche Email Fabrik* it seems to me in April or May forty four. I was working in this time in the concentration camp in the garage as a mechanics. I heard something about *Emailwagen* but I didn't know what is it exactly. They were looking for a garage meister and er they sent me to *Emailwagen* ^{*Fabrik.*} When I came there with escort of the S.S. people, the first day I didn't know where I am, because er I saw people, they are laughing, they are working. It was a camp, but no S.S. man, nobody was inside the camp. Afterwards, they told me it's forbidden for the S.S. to go inside, so people are eating, they have bread. It was like to fall on the other planet. Mr Schindler came to the garage, they told me, the people, now is Oscar Schindler is coming. So he greets me, even he give me his hand. I was afraid to give him my hand. To shake hands, but he told me don't be afraid, er, I heard you were a good mechanic, so you will enjoy your staying here and don't be afraid, you will never be hungry and so so I told in Polish to my friends when he went out, tell me, he's a bluffer or a it is so? They said no, no it is so. It is really, it is so. So I stayed there and I worked and my first work when I did er 'cause Schindler was er he likes very very much fast cars. So I remember his Alfa Romeo Sport, I make an overhaul on his engine and er after few months, he have very unpleasant accident when a aeroplane, British bomber...

Q : Let me ask, just when this car goes by, I'm going to ask you about Oscar's tastes in motor cars. And perhaps you can tell me in some detail about the various cars that you had to work on? If you can start by saying Oscar's taste in motor cars was ...

RECHEN : Er, Oscar, I don't know if you know, all his life first he started in motorbykes, fast motorbykes. When he was young. When I came to *Emalia* he has three cars. One was a American Hudson. It was not a race car, but er I remember the first time I saw with half automatic transmission, it was the Hudson. Afterwards was the Alfa Romeo. It was a sport car, the body was from Aluminium. In this year. It was model thirty nine or forty. And the third car was a Horsch. This doesn't exist today. It was eight cylinder car, very fast and in this car we escaped from *Binnwitz* to freedom.

Q : Let me, let's talk a little more, 'cause there was an Adler as well, wasn't there?

RECHEN : No, no Adler.

Q : No, okay.

RECHEN : No Adler, no Mercedes.

Q : I know about no Mercedes. Um, so tell me again about the cars and tell me what Oscar liked about them. That was a very good answer, but I just want to ask you once more about that.

RECHEN : He was then a,
he was in this time, thirty two or thirty three.
Very young fellow. I was this time, er,
nineteen, so I saw him a grown up man. But he
was young, so when he said er, when he sat
down into the car, it was (REVVING NOISE)
and he liked fast, to go fast you know. Today
I am laughing, but once I have very bad
experience because the Commandant of the
camp there, (NAME), he wanted me to learn
to drive, because he couldn't, but Oscar gave
me the car and told me don't be afraid it
will be okay, because er he was bribed this
Mr (NAME).

CUT

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Q : Richard I know that you weren't involved in the production side at Brinlitz 'cause you were working in the workshop, but um tell me what you saw of how the production was.

RECHEN : Er, there were several rumours, I don't know exactly, somebody told me the production was no good. I cannot tell you it was good or not or bad. I cannot. I was only because the private cars were not there, only one, so it was usual of me to keep me in the garage so I was working partially as a (NAME) it is process. And the (NAME) and again we started to work maybe it was two months, maybe less, because when they came to Brinlitz there was nothing there. They were in textile machines there. So we put them, it was October or November so to clean it it was two or three months, it was maybe February already. They came the machines from Krakow, the big machines. Maybe we were working there month, month and a half or something like this. So to be profit, the German army didn't have from this production.

Q : Because you were in the, also working in the garage with the one private car which had a radio I think, didn't it? You were able to find out about what was happening.

RECHEN : In Brinlitz was a little bit harder, but in *Smil work*, every night we heard the BBC. Every night. So, we knew what's happening on the front and we, even we drunk Vodka on the 6th of June, when the invasion starts on forty four.

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Q : So Richard, tell me about the Horsch : about how it was.

RECHEN : About the Horsch .
Er, because cars were my love, all my, all my life until today, so I love the car because it was beautiful construction. It was eight cylinder car. Very very long, the engine, er, it was very long and inside the upholstery was from white leather and it was a beauty. Simply a beauty. I felt in love with it and er as we fun away from Brinnlitz so, we went with this car.

Q : What did Oscar think about the Horsch ?

RECHEN : Oscar was crazy about the cars like me. He loved it very much. He loved the Alfa Romeo too, but mostly because er this Horsch was unique car. Unique car, this as far as I know, only several very, very big shots including the big guy Adolf Hitler, had such a car because it was prepared it was a hand work, more or less. But when he wanted to make impression of somebody, it was very necessary sometimes, so he went with this car.

Q : Very good. You used to listen to the car radio, secretly, didn't you?

RECHEN : Yeah. Again, boom, boom, boom.

CUT

Q : Richard what I would like you to do is to tell me the story of how you used to listen to the radio.

RECHEN : So, every night, er we change this particular night on the 'D' day, I was lucky to be in charge of the Horsch radio with my friend. He was standing outside to watch that somebody don't come. And er I heard about the landing in Normandy. So I started to yell and he told me crazy man what are you lay ... what are you yelling? So I told him Joseph er we are safe already the American and the British they landing in Normandy. I put out small bottle of Vodka we drunk.

Q : Let's come to Binulitz now, and er I want you to tell me about what you said to me when we were in Haifa, Schindler wanted to leave early in April, but he was dissuaded from it.

RECHEN : I don't know. This has is you because er probably heard from (UNCLEAR) you know, no? Okay I heard about it I was not inside. The confidential things was ...

Q : Okay, but that's fine. Because I've heard about it as well, but I haven't asked anyone about it, so I want to ask you about it. Okay if you could just start, Schindler wanted to leave.

RECHEN : As far I heard, not from him, but er I knew Schindler wanted to leave. It was in April because he was very afraid about the Russian, when they will come. He has his good reasons. But he was asked

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RECHEN (Cont'd.) : with us and they promised him that if the Russian will come, so we will smuggle him out from the camp we promise him to save his life and his wife's. They promised him.

Q : Can you tell me about the last day of the war and the broadcast on the radio, Churchill's speech?

RECHEN : Er, we were told, everybody, from every shifts, we were working in shifts, to come into the factory we didn't know the first time what's happened. So Schindler gave me order to put out the big loudspeaker and we had the translation of Winston Churchill's speech. That the war is over. Schindler ask also the guards, the SS guards, and he told them through a microphone put your weapons, I will give you a big lorry, you can go, don't touch nobody here. You will safe go out from the camp. There were people mostly in sixty five even seventy years old. The SS people, they were so happy to live. They were very happy to live. And you can imagine how we, all of us, we yelled from and cried and were happy about this moment.

Q : Now there was the problem of how to get Schindler away from the Russians, wasn't there? And what happened how did that work? Tell me the story as briefly as you can, about how you packed up the trucks and the horse and you all left from the factory.

RECHEN : I did not exactly what's happened outside, because er have a big celebration er I have a girlfriend, she's today my wife, er, we laughing, we was speak together all my friends and er I didn't know that the outside happen something. I don't know exactly who loaded a big, big er truck with two trailors with all the belongings of Schindlers and other engineers German engineers, but er Doctor (NAME) he was one of the prominents in the camp, came to me and ask me to speak to him a little while. I asked him Doctor (NAME) what, what's happened? He told me (UNCLEAR).

CUT

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Q : You'll just start by saying I was approached and asked to do a big job. You don't have to say who approached you. I was approached to do an important job and then tell me the story.

RECHEN : Somebody came to me and er asked me to do a very important and big job. I asked him what will be the job? He told me ...

Q : Sorry, you must remember to look at me ...

RECHEN : Oh, not at you, oh. Somebody, somebody came to me ...

Q : One of the, one of the prominent people.

RECHEN : Why not Doctor (NAME)?

Q : It's alright. But no-one knows who Dr. (NAME) is, so. Now look at me.

RECHEN : Doctor (NAME) he was one of the prominent of the camp came to me and asked me to do some very, very important job. I asked him, what is it? You were chosen Richard to save the life of Oscar Schindler to take him from the camp, outside, and take him to the Americans. You will do it? So I told him, yes, of course I will do it. We owe him, Oscar Schindler this. So I went out into the car, I was alone and er the secretary of Mr Schindler came to me and told me I will go with you with the car, Mr er Herr Director will go with his Horsch first and his wife. So, in this moment came to me

RECHEN (Cont'd) : ... with me because it is almost sure we are going into the death. So never mind. Probably my brother in law, my sister was killed in Auschwitz. He came to me and told me I will go with you and so one after one and suddenly I had about eight nine people with me. Friends close friend of mine he told me he will not let you go alone. So we started our way. Out from the camp it was about twelve at night from the eight on, eight, nine, of May. We started to go. Er, after a few hundred metre, came on a motorbyke, brother of at that time Miss (NAME) and he told us nobody on the road and he was our escort.

Q : Tell me what it was like on the road, with all the German soldiers.

RECHEN : So, er, we went about two hundred kilometres straight, I was going about fifty, sixty mile an hour, but afterwards instantly we jumped into a very, very big column of *Waffen* SS and *Wehrmacht*, so I was in really in a jam. And er we went into the (NAME) it's the Bohemian Forest and er this hilly road, very hilly road and I use very much the brakes and after fifty, sixty kilometre, I lose my break in the car. So you can imagine there were the thirty tons without brake. So I put on the two wings, two friends of mine. I gave them a big piece of wood when I couldn't start, er stopped any more, the car would be with the gear. So they jumped and put the big pieces of wood under the wheels because I was in big danger and I would make an accident with the German military car, probably they will give me a small bullet in my head. So, er, so we went about a hundred more kilometres and then we were very surprised

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RECHEN (Cont'd.) : from the forest went out five Russians, Cossaks. And I can never forget thousand of German, Germans, with heavy weapon, they run away like small children, yelling Yvan, Yvan commen. They run away. And the second thing I remember the first was an officer and in pure German he said Commeraden, with his hand, Commeraden, Eine unst eider fahr, as though, don't be afraid, comrades, please go ahead. In this moment, I gave my jacket to Oscar Schindler, and I told him, listen to me, you are no more Director for me you are Oscar and er I give him my, we have a special hats, because I was bald headed and he has his hair. And so you are from a concentration camp, you should remember it. The sad thing one of the Cossaks came very near to us and with his knife he cut the watch of Schindler, it was a golden watch and hold it in the air and run away. So, er, I told everybody happy birthday, we are inside. And um, we went about ten kilometres into a small town (NAME) of Czech. Deutch (UNCLEAR), there were Russians inside they put on a very, very big place and then started big travels with them.

Q : At this stage, Schindler still had some wealth that he was carrying with him. I wonder if you can tell me how Herr Director was carrying his wealth?

RECHEN : Er, I don't know exactly the true how come he has brilliants? because I hadn't... Ah diamonds yes. I don't know because I didn't have diamond since thirty nine. I saw only what my mother had in thirty nine, diamonds. But as far I know, he brought from er several people, diamonds. And he came to me on this place with small jar it was inside full with diamonds. He ask me to take it,

RECHEN (Cont'd.) : because he was afraid.

Q : Perhaps we can start that story a different way. When we were when we had left the factory, Schindler came to me with a small jar of diamonds.

RECHEN : No, it was, it is not true.

Q : But it is, it was (UNCLEAR), you'd already left Brinnlitz hadn't you? So don't, just say after we had already travelled some way from Brinnlitz

RECHEN : After we were caught by the Russians. After we were caught by the Russians (NAME) and (NAME) he came to me and asked me if I can save his diamonds.

Q : Could you start it the same way, but say Schindler came to me?

RECHEN : When we were caught by the Russians, er Schindler came to me and asked me to take a small jar with brilliants 'cause he was afraid. Diamonds.

Q : We'll get it right, don't worry. Shall we stop for a second, do you think, or?

RECHEN : When we were caught by the Russians, in the (NAME) er Oscar Schindler came to me with a small jar of diamonds and asked me to take it and to, put in some somewhere, he was afraid. Not to be caught with the diamonds. So I told him, er, Oscar, I promise the people of (NAME) certain hundred Jews to save your life, but not your diamonds.

RECHEN (Cont'd.) : her and asked her to go back to Brunlitz and to give it to Baubier. And as far I know, he, she went back. And told the people there the Russians killed us, all of us. Probably she took the diamonds and run away. Probably. _____

Q : _____ When you came out of (NAME) the next day, all the trucks had been vandalled, the truck had been vandalised, the Horsch had been smashed. Tell me what you saw when you came out the next day.

RECHEN : First of all I must tell you we didn't have, we were very afraid to stand there and came a Russian soldier who wanted to take my, today my wife with him. You know what was the purpose, er, I was working when the German, Germans with the Russian people, so I learned some Russian dirty words, so I started to yell at him and he disappeared and so we are in dungeon so it came I was looking for some Czech officer and it was my, probably my best idea in my life, I ask him to put us into a jail, Czechoslovakian jail and so we were saved.

CUT

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Q : So the Czech officer was, it was a very good idea. He took all of us, I told him all of us, we are Jews from the concentration camp. He took us into a cell into the prison and after a few hours er I knock on the door, came a Czechoslovakian soldier and asked me what do you want? So I told him listen to me. I have stolen from the Germans a Vodka and food and cigarettes and everything. It is on my car. Outside. What you go with me to save something for us? Okay. So I went out, it was a disaster. Really a disaster. The Russians, they were already drunk. They are looking for more Vodka. It was altogether it was really a disaster outside. They came into, we have from fat, from pork, in big jars, they stepped into it. Impossible to tell y ou all, all the thing was tea with, together with coffee and together with fat from pork. But I found still a few cartons of cigarettes and two or three litre of Vodka, because it was underneath they couldn't find it. And I looked at my love, it was cut out all of the leather from the upholstery and smash all the speedometers and tachometers, so I run into the prison with the Czechoslovakian soldier (UNCLEAR). I don't remember I was crying or not, but I was very, very sad. And in the morning I ask the Czech officer to put us in some place. So he put us in a small hotel outside the town and after several years we saw a bed with white linen inside, so we behave like small children, started to laugh and to cry with, we jump on the bed. But at night, again, the trouble started. Came the Russian people. So I ...

Q : What I'd like you now to describe is that story that you heard yesterday in the train. Tell me about it.

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RECHEN : So when we left
(NAME), Moravia, Czechoslovakia, was not so
bombarded. They were train in Czechoslovakia
so we take train as was going in the direction
of (NAME) to the west. Only in the same place
in the same cabin and we fall asleep. I was
watching. Probably Schindler was dreaming
about something, he was sitting near to the
emergency brake, the handle and I saw him
jumping and pulling the handle and the train
stopped instantly, so I took him like this
and pull him on my place and I, we changed
places and when the conductor came he started
yelling at me. So I told him, listen to me,
I am three or four days from concentration
camp, I dreamt about something and what I
did, I did, so you want to hang me. No, no,
no. So don't do it again. ~~Yes. So, the~~
train started and after one or two hours it
stopped, so I asked the conductor again,
what's happened? So he told me we cannot go
more, because in this forest there are staying
two SS divisions and the train will not go,
again.

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Q : So you came to a
eventually, after walking through the forest
and so on, you arrived at the Americans.
Tell me what the first contact you all had
with the Americans was. What you saw.

RECHEN : We almost we almost
run to the forest on the road. We wanted to
stop some American cars, but they didn't.
So we run about eighteen, twenty kilometres
through the forest and we came out from the
forest and we saw from the far, um, a machine-
gun on the road and here was some red label
on the (NAME) so somebody was yelling my God,
we are again by the Russians. Because it

RECHEN (Cont'd.) : was, the pattern
army they have a (NAME) a (NAME), so a
sentry jumped, the soldier stop who are you.
So we run unto him afterwards he told us,
I saw some zebras running to me, not a human
being so I didn't shoot you are lucky. I
didn't shoot you. So we ask him to go, we
want to pass through, was it impossible, but
if you want, you can make some circle around
me so we did and we are into the Americans
it was a big cell and a Staff Sargeant
and he wanted to put us into a prisoner of
war camp. Because we spoke German. Nobody
speak English. So, we started to tell him
to explain him we are Jews from concentration
camp. Nothing helped. To the camp, to the
camp, to the right. So again, lucky, there
came an officer and ^[Lieutenant] (NAME) he asked the
Sargeant, what's the troubles? So, he told
today, I know what he said. There are some
funny people here. I don't know, I want to
put them into the, into the camp. So he
asked me in German, who are you? So I was
afraid to tell him we are from Poland. They
will send us probably to Poland back. So I
didn't have a choice. So I tell him we are
Jews from the concentration camp. So he
told me, don't be afraid please. I am a Jew
too. My name is (NAME), I'm originally from
Berlin, but now I am since thirty three in
New York. I am living in New York and don't
be afraid, I will put you inside, but I
cannot do it only the Brigadeer. But don't
be afraid again, because the Brigadeer is a
Jew too. So he went and after maybe ten
minutes, came this Brigadeer and he told
the soldier to to let us come inside.

RECHEN : I never felt that Oscar is a German. It is amazing. I don't know. I always thought about him, he's a friend. He's as one of us. So it was not a such a huge difference upon my behaviour before and after. We became, but of course we became very, very close friends after we came to the Americans after all of this we passed through.

Q : You saved his life and he had saved yours?

RECHEN : I don't know if I saved his life. Probably yes. I don't know. I don't want to speak about it. That he saved my life it is for sure, but it seems to me for sure. I don't know if I would go to *Mathausen* or some other camp and I will be alive.

CUT

Q : Okay, if you want to tell me what, when you heard that Oscar had died, what you felt.

RECHEN : In one of our conversation in Haifa during the visit of Oscar Schindler, he told me I wish to be buried in Israel because they, here are the, my children and my grandchildren. So I, I spoke to my friends in Haifa and they told me he said something, but er seventy four, one day I was called, seems to me by Doctor Aresner. to came to Tel-Aviv. He told me Oscar Schindler is dead. So I came to Tel-Aviv, it was several people there. Aresner and er.

Q : Perhaps you can tell me what the mood was like at this meeting Tel - Aviv.

RECHEN : It was a very, it was a very, very sad meeting and again they ask me to go to Frankfurt and to arrange the bringing of brother Oscar Schindler to Israel, so the next day I went to Frankfurt and they gave me some telephone number afterwards I knew it is Doctor (NAME) it was one of the ...

Q : Richard, can I cut you short? For the story to work from the television explanation, it needs to be quite short. We don't need to know the names or the details. We simply need to know that a decision was taken that you should go to Frankfurt to fetch the body, that you came to Frankfurt and you brought the body back with you in the coffin and I want to know a little bit of what you were thinking about.

RECHEN : I didn't brought it, because it came in a special plane afterwards. If you, I don't know.

Q : You arranged it, and what you felt. I'm interested in what you were thinking about. Sorry...
Okay Richard, so I want you to know first of all what you thought, what you felt about when you heard that Oscar had died.

RECHEN : When I heard from my friends that Oscar had died, I felt very sad, of course, because he was not so old. But his, he was sixty six. And I felt very bad like, like a brother or my father died and er the people asked me to go to Frankfurt so I told them I will go, because I am very honoured first of all I saved him from Binnlitz and now I am honoured to bring him as though to bring him to make the funeral arrangement. To bring him back to his home because he told us always, my home is in Israel. So I came to Frankfurt, I was connected to some people and the same day they took me to some Polish church where a very big in German they had (NAME) fire, I don't know exactly how is it in English and er there was several speeches, they asked me to have a speech too. I spoke about ten or fifteen minutes and after it, I arranged everything. For a few days the body in the coffin became to Israel, it was really, until today, when I am speaking about it, I am really moved. How it was in Jerusalem, it was a big ceremony in the Franciscan church Catholics, because Schindler was a Catholic. And he's buried now on the Zion mountain in Jerusalem. So I was twice honoured.

Q : Tell me again, just a little bit, I was the man who drove Schindler to the Americans from Brunn and I was honoured because I was then the man who brought Schindler's, who arranged for Schindler's coffin to come to it's final resting place in Israel.

RECHEN : So, I took out Oscar Schindler our beloved Director from Brunn away into the freedom and I am the man who brought him to Jerusalem to be buried, so I was twice honoured.

Q : What do you think about Oscar and then you think about that funeral, about how he saved your life?

RECHEN : I think about Oscar Schindler like a big friend. Several people ask me why he did it. I don't know. I know only he was a humanist, a fine fellow and an individualist. I never knew he was in the party. But I personally never saw him with Hakenkreuz. Now I know he was in the party, probably who put his Hakenkreuz when he went in some offices between the Germans. It was good for business, but as far I know and I know a lot because not once we were drunk together. After we went out from Brunn. As far I know, he was never a Nazi in his soul, but it was good for business to be in the party. Even I ask him once, what's happened to you? I know you were by the, but the Admiral ^{Cunaris}, you did a dirty job, you were in espionage. So he told me yes, I am a German Sudeten Deutsch, I went into the job but after I saw Bachau in thirty eight, I don't know if he told this story to somebody, but to me, yes. I saw, he told it in German,

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RECHEN (Cont'd.) : Because I must
clean my nose. Sorry. Thank you, excuse me.

Q : Richard, I was watching
you while you were talking about going to
fetch Oscar's body and about the funeral.
And I think that you were very nearly crying.
Because of the emotion that Oscar brings to
you and I'm wondering why it is that Oscar
brings you like that?

RECHEN : Er, we all cried.

Q : But talking about it
now, thinking about it.

RECHEN : He was close to every-
body until today, but to me he was, how to
tell you, like a brother. Please stop it.

CUT