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Accession No 7423/1

SCHINDLER

Sol Urbach

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INTERVIEW : SOL URBACH

Jon: You were telling me actually about your life in Krakow before the war and again tell me a little bit about what you as a small boy, which you must have been actually before the war, what it was like, what you remember.

URBACH: Born born in er I was born in Kalwaria which is about 30 kilometres outside of Krakow er in October 25th 1926. Um pre-war pre-war pre 1939 I was in a family of erm 4, there were four brothers two sisters, parents living very humbly, very poorly um nothing of great things as we expected of life, we um my parents thought that living in Rumania would be better opportunity, better life so they ventured into Rumania from 1928 to 1933, that was after I was born already and then returned in 1933 to Poland where we lived right outside of Krakow er about 3 kilometres outside of Krakow in a little village known as (NAME).

Jon: Thats thats fine..
I kn ow from what I have just read about you and from what we talked about yesterday that you managed to avoid getting into the ghetto your whole family managed to avoid getting into the ghetto when the ghetto was formed (UNCLEAR) 1942, when your parents decided that they had better for their own safety and your safety, move in. Now I wonder if you can tell me about the day when you were rounded up by the S.S.

URBACH: (UNCLEAR) now we did, we did

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finally get into the ghetto because living outside of the ghetto was not possible any longer because the er surrounding er people er were in fear that er somebody would have to report us because the the news er kept blaring away at us if you know of a Jew hiding out you must report it and so on. We came to the ghetto in er some time in 42 and the date er is not accurate when it was, but um as a youngster at that age, at that time I was fifteen um fifteen sixteen possibly um walked around the streets of the ghetto, my parents had nothing to do, my um my brother was occasionally rounded up into forced labour and was shipped out during the day and brought back to the ghetto at night. I myself just happened to walk in the streets without anything to do um my family lived in some cramped quarters inside the ghetto by now um and walking on one of the streets I was suddenly stopped by a few SS people who jumped out of the a truck and rounded up people and before we know we were on the road onto some place we didn't know exactly where we were going but we did wind up in what was later known to us as *Emalia wiste* and when we arrived there we we were brought into a not into the factory complex which would have been on the right as you enter but on the left side which was a open field with some er machinery out there in the open, like for carpentry and cabinet making and at that time Schindler appeared at that site where the SS Guards lined us up for his inspection. Um.. when he took a look at us what I thought at that time was a hundred people well it was accurately 100 .. unimportant, but um.. he looked at us and er um.. he selected me out of the group picked me out and he declared to the SS Guards that he doesn't want any children

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he said that in German. (GERMAN SPOKEN)
Um... the SS Guard er replied very quickly
that er er when we bring you people you keep
them and at that they parted with them and he
kept the all of us that they delivered..um..
I was not on any kind of a list pre-selected
or er... have known anybody er I just simply
was as a lost kid walking around the ghetto
and I wound up in that group that went to the
er.. to the er (UNCLEAR).

Jon: Thats an excellent answer um..
cos' I sometimes ask people to answer a
question once or twice in er slightly different
way um what I would like is for you to tell me
that story again if possible and this time you
can make the details a little more compact,
if possible, so perhaps you might start, I was
walking around the ghetto as a boy of fifteen
with nothing to do, suddenly two SS trucks
which is what you say in the (UNCLEAR) two
SS trucks pull up, they rounded us up maybe
a hundred people, they delivered us to a factory
and then Schindler appeared, a man I now know
to be Schindler appeared.. and so on...

URBACH: Okay. Um... I was walking around
the streets of the ghetto with anything, nothing
particular to do and er .. we were all of a
sudden found myself in the middle of of a
er...few SS people that were rounding up people
in the street, er...they took us into ..they
loaded us into two trucks and brought us to
the factory er which later on was known to us
as (NAME) (UNCLEAR) where Schindler met us
and inspected the hundred or so people that
were delivered to him er.. he er... after
checking us out he selected me out of the
group and said that he does not wish to have

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any children er... as workers and the SS guards responded that they would er they delivered and what they delivered he should keep. Thats how I stayed with the working in (NAME NOT CLEAR).

Jon: Perhaps you can draw for me the picture you were drawing of (UNCLEAR) verbal picture description of the factory with the camp and where the machines were and so on...

Urbach: Er.. the factory was er.. located on two sides of the street er.. the name of the street I don't remember at the moment er... but it was on a back street of Krakow er... with the factory er..itself entering through a gate er... which was er.. was a office building over it an office building both sides of it as you entered the factory complex on the right side was a giant hole which at that time seemed to me as a giant hole with presses and stances and er.. cutting equipment for the sheets of metal um... on the left side of it was the er... place where the (NAME) ovens were er...there were two ovens as far as I remember er ...connected to (UNCLEAR) different shops was acid er in which the er...um the er..wares would be dipped after they were pressed out into and shaped into pots and pans, they would be dipped into the in acid to be cleansed before they entered the er.. oven, the oven of high very high temperatures so when they opened those ovens you er...um... you could barely stand it, as you continued through those, between those two buildings

(TALKING IN BACKGROUND)

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Jon: So Mr Urbach you were
describing for me the factory and you
can just continue from where....

Urbach: As you continued on through
the between those two buildings erm... you
came to the site on the left er.. which er..
was ...(TALKING IN BACKGROUND)

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Urbach: As you continued through the er..two buildings er... on the left side there was an open site, that eventually became the new er...structure for er.. for er the production of some um... *armaments* supposedly...er..later on when the camp was built it would, it was built as a continuation of this factory and you would have run into that the camp site which is rather small site with two barracks on both sides and the SS guard building at the back of it.

(TALKING IN BACKGROUND)

Jon: Describe for me the prisoners quarters when Schindler built his home camp in the background, in the backyard of Amalia. Describe for me that camp.

Urbach: That was a er..very er.. simple barrack um.. of a wooden structure um...with er...nothing but windows and (UNCLEAR) or the double decker kind of beds and triple deckers er.. to sleep and um...with a table through the middle er...for where you picked up your food and you brought it into your own sleeping quarters to eat.

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Jon: So what I would like you to do now is tell me about that conversation with Schindler in 1943 and if you start by saying, early in 1943...

Urbach: Early in 1943 the er...on one of my routine trips to the offices of er.. Oscar Schindler where I repair the er...um... shades for the windows for the um...for the preparation for the bombings that took place Schindler told me of the er...situation as coming up whereby the Jews will no longer be able to walk from the ghetto to work but they will have to be er...imprisoned in concentration camps and therefore he's planning to build a concentration camp.

Jon: Its a bit remarkable isn't it a German telling a Jewish prisoner oh, a Jewish worker that they are about to be herded into concentration camps.

Urbach: Er..that was remarkable and it was unbelievable to my ears because I didn't think that there is anybody out there that is still friendly (unclear) to a forced labourer but he he was friendly and he did seem to be a little bit er..concerned with that the er... that he has to get the job done and against many odds because er... he also told me the same time that um....the er...situation inside that concentration camp that he will be building er...people will be much better off inside that camp than outside and he er... made a joke of it, er..the guards will be there to protect us from the outside people rather than er... to keep us as prisoners.

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Jon: You were only a boy of fifteen at the time or sixteen er..yet you were conversing with this very tall, very big German, how did that come about.

Urbach: Only because of my frequent trips to his offices er...there weren't too many people wondering through the offices at will.

Jon: Can I stop you a second, could you start that by saying, I was only a boy of sixteen (UNCLEAR)

Urbach: I was only a boy of sixteen at that time but er er...I was er... because of my work, particular work dealing with the shades and blackout shades for the windows I was a frequent visitor to his office, so I had occasion to converse and he would use initiate the conversation , I was totally in awe of him to er..er.. approach him, but he sort of er....relaxed me by starting a conversation with me occasionally, when he wasn't too busy with other visitors and.....

Jon: Could you tell me the circumstances by which you actually missed being in the ghetto when the ghetto was demolished and liquidated and also perhaps you might include the story of what happened to your brother.....

Urbach: In er..March 12th I walked out together with a group of people for a night shift in the (NAME UNCLEAR) um...that night we did not return to um...to the ghetto or after the night shift we did not return to the ghetto because er....er...Schindler has spread the word that there is trouble in the

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ghetto, that the ghetto is being liquidated and there are lots of killings going on there so we will not be going home and er he kept us over for the next three nights in that in the er (NAME UNCLEAR) we slept on tables or benches wherever we could find a place or floors er...for the next three days. During those next three days er...my family went through er ...the liquidation er...were liquidated as much as the rest of the people my brother er...who was my older brother tried to separate himself from a line he was in er...and run towards my parents, at that time he was shot down by the er..SS guards, at the time I did not know of that incident because I was separated from them in the (NAME UNCLEAR) but a person I met later on in Krakow (NAME) has told me that he has witnessed the shooting of my brother, my other two brothers and two sisters, father and mother er...I don't know about their fate where they went but I suspect they were transported to Auschwitz.

JON: You were safe and kept safe because you were kept overnight by Schindler.

URBACH: I was definitely saved and this was my turning point, if I stayed in the ghetto I would have been together with them, only because we stayed overnight at Schindler's camp or Schindler's factory.

JON: Could I ask you to tell me that a little again more compactly perhaps. Start by saying, on the morning of March 13th Schindler told the nightshift of which I was part that we should not go to the ghetto....

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URBACH: On the morning of March 13th 1943 er...Schindler has told us not to return to the ghetto as we would normally do but to remain there and and make the best of it by sleeping wherever we can because there was trouble in the ghetto er...the ghetto was being liquidated, there is killings going on and he wants to keep us over that period, during that period while I was er in the factory staying over for the next three nights and work during the days or work nights er... the ghetto was liquidated together with my family of parents, two sisters, two brothers er...one brother was shot down as he tried to cross from one line to another one the rest of the family's fate is unknown to me but I suspect they went to Auschwitz. I have never seen them since.

JON: Thank you thats er..very good answer. Um...I wonder if you can now describe to me as you've done in your letter Schindlers' enjoyment of being a businessman which you witnessed when you were in the works.

URBACH: Yes, during my m-meetings or during my observations of Schindler I could clearly detect a man enjoying his life er.. to his fullest er I have seen him emotionally in company of high ranking officers er... of SA or SS or Vermot type of but obviously um.. officers um... also with some business people and he always had a ready smile on his face, um....enjoying his life, he really enjoyed his success, conduct of business with Bankier sitting in the back of his office conducting business along with them, he was just having a good time.

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JON: This time again we are going to talk about Schindler and the high officers and perhaps we will bring you into it a little more, you can say, that when I used to have to go into the office for my work I would see Schindler there with high ranking officers, you don't have to mention *Bankier*, but mention high ranking officers and so on.....

URBACH: When I went into the Schindlers offices er...um... on my frequent trips I would er...I would see er...Schindler in the company of German officers with all kinds of labels, SAS SS Vermot or others, some of them um.... high ranking with er... possibly Generals er... and the only way I could tell is because some of the red appeared on their lapels or pants er... and in all the instances Schindler seemed to enjoy his status er... his *entrepreneurs* life.

JON: If we can come now to the incident of the rounding up of the people this how the seven hundred which you mention here and what happened with you personally and so on and um....er.....and perhaps er.....you could start by virtually as you have done here in the late Summer of 1944 Schindler was ordered to reduce the size....

URBACH: In late er...um....er...year of 1944 er... Schindler was

TALKING TOGETHER

In the summer of 1944 Schindler was ordered er....to reduce the size of inmates in his er...factory or in his camp and er....to the best of my knowledge er...er....when the

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when the segregation began to separate
seven hundred from those one thousand we
had as inmates in the camp er....the
seven hundred were eventually shipped off
to Krakow (NAME) I myself found myself in
that group of the seven hundred people
and some sixth sense told me that I am on
the wrong side....

TALKING TOGETHER

Cut.

(MUMO JUMBO) FAULT ON TAPE.

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JON: Um...lets start that from the beginning again and um...maybe if we start again with the same thing, in August 1944 Schindler was ordered to reduce the size and so on....

URBACH: In August 1944 Schindler was ordered to reduce the size of the inmates of his camp of what was approximately a thousand people by er..two thirds and leave one third as his work force um..the SS guards um... helped in that er...shipment and separation of the seven hundred people er...to be shipped to er..Plaszow (NAME) um..as the SS guards er.. were marching in front of the people and making the selection with Schindlers help I found myself what I thought in the wrong group where I would be shipped out rather than remain in the (NAME) I at that time ran forward from my line towards Schindler and I declared to him Herr Schindler (GERMAN LANGUAGE) um...which meant there was no carpenter left in the factory um...Oscar Schindler took me very seriously for my statement and he er took me by my arm and put me into the group of three hundred people and thats how I remained with the group of three hundred.

JON: Schindler has been thought of as a saviour by people like yourself ofcourse who were saved all the way through and by the people who joined you from Prashov er..later. What do you think about those people who didn't make it that way and many of them must have died cos' they were shipped to Mathausen and not have survived.

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URBACH: Well, er...this thought has occurred to me many times and it has certainly um.. er..is not clear to me on what has happened and obviously they were um...they thought they did not receive the fair treatment because they were shipped off while others er...took their place and went to (NAMES)

JON: What's the thought thats occurred to you.

URBACH: Candidly er...the thought that occurred is that they were some forces er... whether they were a a a combination of Schindler working (UNCLEAR) ship some of his people that he thought of highly into the um...in the Schindler future and er the most likely thing that happened is that at that point in time in 1944 (NAME) tries to secure himself a place in heaven and a better place than um...than he is in right now, the fear then amongst these people like (NAME) was he has a choice of going to the eastern front a was feared most, or he looked at Schindler as a giant ways of getting around machinery and if he sort of hangs onto Schindler he will um...he will wind up surviving the war, for himself at this point. Er..so how do people the exchange of people actually took place unknown to me but um...it is a mystery.

JON: Shortly after the shipment of people, the factory is obviously much smaller but there was many barracks and so on, there was a crash by an Australian aeroplane, an Australian pilot of the RAF. Can you tell me about that.

URBACH: Early one morning late in the year of 1944 prior to our shipping out of the (NAME) a er...a crash occurred early in the morning and um...we ran out of our barracks I happened to be sleeping in a barrack when the crash occurred and what I found outside of my living quarters no more than hundred fifty, two hundred feet away from where we were sleeping was a fusilage a.... a burning fusilage, er..with a strapped flyer in the cockpit and exploding ammunition for a very long time, by the time the fire was put out, the er..pilot was er only part of his upper body was left and nothing else.

JON: I wonder if we can go back to the story right at the beginning, about how you came to be there and um... and most of the Schindler workers came there because they knew (NAME) or many of them came because they knew (NAME) they were family or whatever but your experience was quite different and if you start it by saying....I was a boy of fifteen, I had no job, so I just wandered around in the streets of the ghetto.....

URBACH: In early 1942 er...when I was fifteen years old I found myself in the ghetto Krakow with nothing to do, there was no employment, um...no future, I simply walked around the street one day and I was rounded up by um...SS guards er...SS men who came into the ghetto with two trucks and loaded us into the trucks, I did not previously have any connection with Bankier or with (NAME) or any of the other people, I simply was an unemployed boy that was rounded up and shipped off..

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JON: I was asking you about the situation by which you arrived there and we agreed that you would start off by saying I was a boy of fifteen, with no work in the ghetto.....

URBACH: I was a, when I arrived in the ghetto I was fifteen, there was nothing to do, there was no job, no knowledge of any future for me, when I was rounded up by the um...SS guards er...who came in by two trucks and rounded up a number of people, what seemed to be like a hundred, and took us to the factory of Oscar Schindler's (NAME). When we got there he um... Oscar Schindler er...inspected the group that was just delivered to him and um... he selected me out of the group um...saying to the SS guards, that he does not want any children as workers. SS guard answered him that the what they deliver he has to keep, but er the reason for Oscar Schindler selecting me out of the group of people was obvious because when I was fifteen I looked like a at least twelve or around twelve, I was a very much undernourished youngster when I arrived at Oscar Schindler's factory.

JON: Here was this undernourished youngster who was forced upon Oscar Schindler, but you have got to be rather closer to him you got to know him better. Tell me about your relationship with Schindler in the days when you were at the enamel factory.

URBACH: At the enamel factory after the initial er...period of working in the um...in the press itself in the um...in the presses and ovens um...I eventually (UNCLEAR) into the um...cabinet making shop and in connection with that I was given the responsibility of maintaining the black out shades in Oscar Schindler's office and the other offices adjoining Oscar Schindler. Because of my frequent trips I came in contact and saw the um...Oscar Schindler with his different contacts of high ranking officers er from the German uniform people, SAS and Vermot and in this in all my trips er..Schindler was very friendly whenever he had a chance, whenever he was alone he would er...start a conversation with me um...umm.. in many of these trips he would talk about what is going to happen er...next, on one of those, in one of those conversations he mentioned to me that in 19 early 1943 that er...er...the er.. that the er...concentration , walking from the ghetto would no longer continue. That he would have to build a concentration camp along alongside the factory.

JON: Very good.... PAUSE
In August 1944 the thousand workers were split up weren't they and you very nearly was split up then, um..tell me about that incident again.

URBACH: In late 1944 er....er...
the um... Oscar Schindler was ordered to
reduce the size of inmates by two thirds
or so and um...they er....they did that
by the SS guards helping Oscar Schindler
create a shipment of seven hundred people
and er that would be shipped off to Krakow
(NAME) while er the three hundred remained
as a work force er... to continue the
closing of the factory er...that would
eventually take place er...during that
segregation I was put into a group that seemed
to me that I was in the wrong place er....
when I got that feeling I stepped forward out
of line and ran towards Schindler and er...
declared to him er.... Herr Schindler
(GERMAN LANGUAGE) um.....in English that meant
er that there was no carpenters left among
his group of people and Schindler took me very
seriously and took me by my arm and er and
placed me in the group of three hundred which
eventually wound up the groups that remain
in Amalia and the other seven hundred were
shipped out.

JON: Very good.

Thank you very much. Thats very
good, just as a matter of interest what
(BREAK IN TAPE)