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Go ahead.

My brother's name is Peter Winternitz. He was born in Prague on April 28, 1922. Now, I see you-- when we talked before you said that you lived in Karlín.

Karlín, which was Prague then at the time.

Mhm.

And that your father was a wholesale rug-- he was selling rugs.

Wholesale retail floor covering.

OK.

Not just rugs. Any kind of floor covering.

Did he have his own shop?

He had his own store.

OK. And let's see. It was just you and your brother, yes? Those are the only two children?

Yes, it's the only children.

OK. Now, he was born in 1922, so he was older than you were.

He was four years older than I.

OK. Let's see. Now, you said that you went-- when you started school you started in Czech schools.

No. We started in German schools.

OK.

And then we had to transfer from German schools to Czech schools.

When did you transfer?

In '36 or '37. I don't remember.

OK.

As things were getting--

Excuse me. Go ahead.

As things were starting up in Czechoslovakia we had to leave the German schools.

Because of antisemitism or?

Because-- yes. antisemitism.

OK. Were you-- now you said-- you did mention in the earlier interview that your brother was involved with some Zionist organizations. Do you remember what they were?

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Yeah. He belonged to the youth group, and Zionist youth organization, Maccabi Hatzair, and due to him I also joined.

What kind of things did-- what kind of work-- get togethers or functions did the organization have?

Well, Maccabi Hatzair was a Israeli-oriented preparation for life in Israel and the kibbutz. So we all went on hatzalah which was a preparation working for farmers, living with the farmers in the countryside, which later on helped us, as far as work was concerned, in the concentration camp including Terezín.

Oh, really?

And it helped him. He was assigned as having so-called experience. He was assigned as a stable boy to work for the horses that belonged to the SS.

I see.

And he even lived in the stables.

OK. Did you all go-- now, you went on-- were there lectures and things about Israel and that kind of-- or about Palastine.

Well, yes. We had meetings. We were reading. As a matter of fact, we were already teaching the younger children later on when we were not permitted to go to school. We arranged [GERMAN SPEECH] which was sort of a group helping hand when the transports started taking the people to the assembly place. Packing for them, because we each were permitted originally to take one package, one backpack, or one little suitcase.

Yeah.

And the Zionist youth organization sort of was the helping hand every place, including in the camps. Trying to help the smaller children. Teaching and keeping up the morale in Terezín. Trying to arrange for singing, poetry, writing, any kind of education.

Right. Speaking of education you said that you didn't finish high school before the war. Did your brother?

No.

No, he didn't either.

He also didn't finish. He had one year left.

So he was almost done.

Almost done.

Can you tell me a little bit about the occupation and what your brother was doing when the Germans came in?

Well, we were in school when the Germans occupied us in 1939. Then when we were immediately thrown out of schools and before it was turned into law, he started working for the Zionist youth organization. Of which, actually, the leading man was who is written up in many books, Fredy Hirsch. And you might have heard that name.

Mhm.

And with him and these other young people he was instrumental to work on a place called Hagibor in Prague, which was the only place left for us to go to, which was a huge sports field.

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Mhm.

Where we continued not only sports activity but educational activity, lectures, study groups, schooling, and so on. And he was part of that leadership group.

You said it was like a sporting field. Was it open, or were there--

Yeah, it was a big, open field.

Yeah.

And that was the only place left for Jewish people to go to after we were no longer permitted to go to any public places, playgrounds, movies, theaters, schools, et cetera.

I see.

And since we couldn't take any public transportation anymore, for most of us it was almost over an hour walk to get there. But it was one place where we could talk, be together, otherwise it was never permitted to be more than two or three people together. So this gave us a perfect place--

Mhm. To gather.

To gather and continue sort of our work.

What are other kinds of-- you mentioned a few restrictions that were placed on Jews. What other kinds of things were placed? Did you have to wear a Jewish star at this time?

We had to wear the Jewish star, yes. And the laws were coming out day by day. We had to give up all our radios, our telephones, our record players, our records. We had to give up all our valuables.

Right.

Any kind of art collection or like naturally jewelry.

Mhm.

My father was a big stamp collector, well known stamp collector. He had to give up his stamp collection.

Mhm.

What else? We were no longer permitted public transportation or own bicycles or cars.

OK. Transportation.

Bus, taxis, trains, trolley cars. No public place, movie theater, and certain stores were not permitted for Jews to enter. We had a curfew. Seven o'clock we had to be off the streets. What else were there? There were so many.

How long after the Germans came into the city was the curfew in place? Pretty quickly or--

Pretty quickly. Almost day by day laws were coming out. I don't know exactly remember the succession which started first. I think giving up all valuables was one of the very first ones.

OK.

You mentioned earlier you and your brother being involved in the helping hand organization. Once the

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Germans came in and the restrictions started, did the helping hand-- did the organization become more active in trying to help people?

Yes. It became sort of almost legalized.

Mhm.

It was under the umbrella of the Jewish elder.

Oh, like the Jewish council or something?

Yeah. Jewish council.

We established two or three rooms in a building there, and it was sort of the communications center to send out the transport notices. And we followed up with the notices immediately, helping the people pack, getting them to the assembly place. And prior to that we had another room. We are not permitted to take those big, European-type blankets. You know [GERMAN SPEECH].

Mhm.

And everybody was hoping we could take blankets. So we took the big [GERMAN SPEECH] opened them up, took out all the feathers, and stitched them into very thin little blankets and we stuffed them. Then we rolled them up so people could take it on their backpack. Of course, we got permission to be after 7 o'clock on the street with a special [GERMAN SPEECH] it was called, special papers.

Mhm.

Stating for that day we had permission to be on the street after 7 o'clock to help with the packing and getting people to the assembly.

You and your brother, both of you did this?

Yeah. Well, no, not the sewing. Only the girls did the sewing.

Right.

And working. But he did more the packing, the office help. But he left in one of the very first transports.

Your brother did? Do you remember what time? When that was?

Yes. He left on the very special transport in December '41. Second transport to Terezín which was called AK2. The first transport was AK1 consisting of 280, I believe, young men, to build up Terezín into a camp called-- AK stands for Aufbaukommando.

Mhm.

And he was in the second transport a week later, Aufbaukommando 2, which was 1,000 young men.

And that was in December '41?

December '41. I don't remember the exact date. They were one week apart, those two transports.

OK.

And they went directly to one of the barracks, called Sudeten caserma.

Sudeten.

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Sudeten barracks. To build it up.

So at this point, Terezín was just being opened. Is that--

Right. It was a small garrison town at the time housing about 6,000, 5,000 to 6,000 people. They were moved out.

Oh, the people who were there were moved out?

Right. And it was turned into a concentration camp.

Hmm, OK.

And the two transports were sort of the forerunners to build the bunks and--

Right.

--build it up into a concentration camp.

OK. Let me go back just a little bit. When your brother was deported--

Right.

And since you were-- you helped with some of the getting people ready to go on the deportation. Can you describe for me a little bit of the deportation, what would happen? Like, people would get a notice and then they would be told?

Right. There was no telephone, so people got the notice.

Through the mail or?

No, no. We took it, or the Germans would give the list to the Jewish elder, or, what do you call it, [GERMAN SPEECH] commander.

Mhm.

I escape the English word for it. And we, in turn, would take the notification, or sometimes people were just by the Germans staying off the street, or whole streets were closed down. But most of the time we went to the houses. And, as a matter of fact, we rang the doorbell. If the doorbell rang, it meant bad news. Either it was the SS or a transportation notice.

Mhm.

If you went to yourself some place, you never would dare ring a door bell, you only knocked on the door.

I see.

Doorbell ringing meant a disaster. And the notices were handed out that way, or, if we worked in the office and we knew who was on the transports, we could send out quickly, because sometimes you didn't have much time to get to the assembly place.

Yeah.

Sometimes you had four or five hours. Sometimes if you were lucky, a half a day.

Now, is that what happened with your brother since they knew him at the--

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We knew that this transport of young men will be assembled within probably a few hours. So pretty much we anticipate that he would be in it, and before we turned around we learned, yes, he was on that list.

Yeah.

And then he came home, and I was home at the time. I knew when he came home that this is what had happened by his face. We told our parents and I remember my mother and father standing in the door when he left and just holding hands. There was never a good bye.

And then, of course, when we got our notice, I kept sort of the fun up. I kept telling my mother that they would be soon together with Peter. We had a few hours to get the holding place.

Yeah.

And since I was familiar having worked on it and knowing the holding place and all, I got help from some of our friends, and they walked with us to the holding place.

Did you leave shortly after your brother?

We left--

A few months later or?

A few months later.

Mhm.

We were in June.

In June of '42?

June of '42

OK.

So fifty years now.

When people left from Prague they left on trains?

Yes.

Being sent to Theresienstadt.

Yeah. First we went to the assembly place, which was an old exhibition hall which was cleared out.

Mhm.

There we were held for about two, two and a half days. 1,000 people all day sitting on a concrete floor. Men, women, children, and babies. And for me particularly, in our transport, we were there two and a half days.

Yeah.

And then we were taken to the train, which was about-- in back of the building. It came to the back of the building. Some trains were regular passenger cars, most of them were cattle cars.

Yeah.

Some were a mixture of everything. And I remember being with my parents in the same car, which was a cattle car.

When you go to Theresienstadt--

Yeah.

How long was it after that you found your brother?

Well, actually, to Theresienstadt-- the trains at that time did not lead all the way in to Terezín. We had about-- they stopped in a little village before, which was Bohusovice. And then we had like half an hour walk in to Terezín.

Oh, so you didn't actually go into Terezín, you walked into Terezín.

You had to walk at that time. Later on, the railroad went all the way in. The tracks were laid all the way in to Terezín.

Mhm.

It was a faster procedure for loading and unloading the people. For getting them in and out. We were earlier, so we had to walk.

Right.

In a column of three with SS all alongside of us. And we had about a 20 minute, half an hour walk. We walked through the gate. The gate that, like all camps, said Arbeit macht frei, which means works makes free.

And in the camp I kept asking as we walked through to the [GERMAN] You were taken to a place where you were searched and stripped which was called [GERMAN] which means like a sleuth.

Mhm.

And there were people working who were already in Terezín, and I kept asking them and yes, they knew my brother, and he was still there. And then maybe a day or two later, I really don't remember, I was able to locate him and see him. And then I told him in which barrack my mother was, and he was able to go there.

So there was no segregation of males and females where they were?

Yes, they were different barracks.

Mhm.

But we were able, in the beginning and least, to go after work if we still were able to or something to go and-- to that barracks.

OK.

So you could actually see each other?

Yes.

And now, let's see. Before when I talked to you, you told me that-- well, and actually you said it earlier today, that your brother took care of the horses for the SS.

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He also did something else. He was very handy, artistically handy. And the SS provided him with materials where he made different pins and chokers, necklaces, for their wives and girlfriends.

Oh, mhm.

And he managed always to, out of little remnants and pieces, make things for me or for my mother. And I have a couple of those things.

Oh, you do.

And I happened to find just recently, in the Book of the Precious Legacy, a picture of one item, that after liberation, was found in Terezín.

Oh, do you think he might have made it?

And there is no doubt in my mind that he must have made that. It was found in the-- where the Gestapo, where the SS lived and the Kommandatura. And it's so identical, the picture, to the item that I head.

Mhm.

I wish I could find out where that item is.

Yeah.

I'm still working on that.

Yeah. That sounds like quite a job that will be, to look for that. Yeah. Let me see. You said now, since your brother-- you said he took care of the SS' horses, and then now he also made things for the wives of the SS. Do you know how he became involved and was able to get a job like-- jobs like that involved with the SS?

Well, when you came in, you were always asked and filled out what work or what do you do and what were you. And he, of course, that was part of all the Zionist youth organizations, the hatzalah helped us.

Because the girls or the boys who were in hatzalah again, in Tarazín, were assigned to [GERMAN SPEECH], which was working outside the-- outside the camps for the farmers. Working on the farmland, which hatzalah was the training for Israel to work on the land.

Right.

And so they used that. And, again, the youth Zionist organization helped and the Jewish elders A lot of younger people, some of my friends in my barracks, survived due to that. They are now in Israel, a number of them.

Because they had the training.

Because they had been the training. Because the Zionist youth organization helped, including at that time, Adelstein, who later on himself was killed in Auschwitz. His family. There's a book written about him now called the eldest-- The Jewish Elder I think it's called, by Ruth Bondy who was also a member of the youth organization.

Oh, I see.

And she's now in Israel.

Mhm.

So by just saying that he worked in the fields, and he worked with horses on that hatzalah he was assigned

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to the stables. The SS stables.

Let's see.

As a matter of fact, he received-- there's a story. He received lumps of sugar for the horses. Every night they would get, like, after they were groomed and all that, the sugar. And at one point, my mother was very sick, and he tried to get the sugar some of the lumps of sugar to her.

Mhm.

But he was caught by one of the German police, not SS, German police.

Mhm.

That policed us. And he was taken to the punishing center which was the [GERMAN SPEECH].

Mhm.

You might've heard that word.

Mhm.

Which was about three miles out of Terezín but was still part of Terezín. The artists of Terezín were taken there. And usually everybody taken there was killed or tortured to death there. Nobody survived.

Mhm.

But he came back to the camp about three days later, but so brutally beaten and tortured that we hardly recognized him in the three days.

Yeah.

But the reason he came back, at that time we understood, he was needed for the horses. He was especially good with the horses. So some of the SS got him out, but he looked terrible.

Yeah.

For just a few lumps of sugar, which were good for horses but not good for-- for his mom. For Jewish life.

Oh, let's see. You also said that your brother, earlier when we talked, you said that your brother had made medals for a soccer game.

Yes.

Do you remember something about that?

The medals?

Yeah.

Yeah. That was part of the art he did.

Oh, I see. For the SS.

For the SS. Those were big, round circles. And when the Red Cross came for the performance there was also a soccer game. And then they were handed, the winner, the winning team, were handed in front of the Red Cross team, the Red Cross that came, those medals.

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And your brother had made those medals?

He had made those.

He designed them. He was told to design them. He was told what to do, and he had just to follow orders.

Mhm. OK. Can you tell me now, when did your brother leave?

Leave Terezín?

Terezín.

Or was deported there, or deported away.

Actually, my parents and I were in the transport that is called the Masaryk transport. 5,000 Czechoslovakian Jews were shipped out from Terezín on September 7, 1943 to Auschwitz. And my brother working for the SS as their stable boy was protected, because they needed them. He was not-- he was [GERMAN SPEECH], protected from being shipped out.

But when he learned that my parents and I are on that transport, he volunteered. He ran to the German-- to the Jewish elder and asked to be put into this transport, and got the number and joined. And as we were already boarding the cattle cars, by then the trains came all the way into the-- into camp, to the Hamburger barrack. Hamburger caserma.

Mhm.

And my parents were already in one car, my brother in another, and I was boarding the cattle car on that ramp, the SS standing at the ramp called out my number, pushed me aside.

Took you off the transport.

Took me off the transport. I didn't know why or what. And the train left.

Mhm.

With my parents and my brother. And later on, only towards the end when the death transports and death marches were coming back to Terezín, and on those transports were some people that we knew from Terezín or before through the Zionist youth organization and had been in Auschwitz at the time, told us that this particular transport went into the gas on March 7th, six months to the day that they arrived, because that was the birthday of the first president of Czechoslovakia.

Tomas Masaryk.

Tomas Garrigue Masaryk. Right.

Yeah.

Right. That's why this transport is called the Masaryk transport.

I see.

And actually at that time, as far as I researched and understood, out of the 5,000-- that's also in the movie show I mentioned-- only 2,800 were still alive. The others had perished due to starvation, sickness, beating, et cetera. And my father and my brother had perished before.

Oh, they died before.

Of beating, starvation, malnutrition, sickness. At that time, as far as I researched it, I don't have documents on that, which will be released now. I hope I can find out more dates. As far as I know, only my mother went into the gas on March 7th.

OK.

And I was saved by being taken out. And I found out much later that the transport was on the roster 5,000. There were 5,004 on that list. So four were taken off, and I was one of the four.

Hmm.

Possibly that, which I found out later, my brother might have taken my number.

Oh, I see.

But I still had the number.

Mhm.

And the [GERMAN SPEECH], it shows his transport number was the one I had.

Yeah.

A big possibility. 90% possibility.

Mhm.

What happened at the Jewish elder when he volunteered, that he gave him my number.

He took your number in order to save yours.

Well, no, we didn't know save.

Yeah.

But since they only could have 5,000.

Right.

And they had 5,004. But that is not proof fact. I'm putting this together in my mind and in my research.

Right.

I have no proof of it.

Maybe this is a bad question to ask you, but--

Go ahead.

You don't know exactly what happened to your brother or father only that they died before?

The way I understand that the 5,000 were kept together. They were not separated. They were kept together [GERMAN SPEECH]. And they had to work, the ones that were able. And the ones that died, they died of either torture, malnutrition, sickness due to the malnutrition. Like we had dysentery, typhoid, and so on.

OK. OK. Let me ask you, I know when we talked at the end, right before you had to leave, we were talking

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about your brother, and I didn't get to ask you a few questions about your story.

Go ahead.

I know I'm to the end, if that's OK.

Go ahead.

Now, let's see, when you-- they left on that transport, your parents left, on the September 7th, 1943.

Mhm.

OK. From that time onward, what happened to you?

I stayed in the camp. I worked there. After the transport after transports were leaving. And, again, due to the Zionist youth organization and the Jewish management that always had to put together the transports, they always were trying to keep some of us, the younger people, behind. In Terezín we still had a chance of survival.

Mhm.

But we knew once we are shipped out east that there's hardly any chance left. And then they needed work for-- what do you call in German? [GERMAN SPEECH], which was mica. The war production.

Mhm.

That's the word I was looking for. War production. And I was assigned to that war production, which was a big barrack in Terezín built out outside the camp. And about 6,000 people got assigned to that war production, which was splitting that big rock of mica into very thin slivers, which were used for the filters in the gas masks for the German soldiers.

Oh, I see.

And the other we had to do, which also protected us at the time from being shipped out, were building the gas chambers in Terezín.

You helped to do that?

Yeah.

I see.

Which were going to be operational on May 11th, and we were liberated on May 7th by the Russian Army.

I see. OK.

Four days before they-- five days, actually, before they became operational.

So you remained in Terezín until the end of the war?

Till the end. Right. But then when the death transports were coming back and the-- we were unloading the trains of the dead bodies mostly. And either then or some place else, I don't know, I got the typhoid.

And I ended up in the typhoid barracks. Because typhoid was contagious, the Germans had one barracks that all the typhoid cases were taken to. And I was in that barracks more or less unconscious when were liberated.

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Do you remember which-- were they Russian soldiers?

Russian, yes. The Russian Army. We went the the path of the Russian Army. We were liberated in the night of May 7th to May 8th, which I don't really remember.

OK.

But a friend of mine came to the typhoid barracks two days later when I became conscious. And she brought me a piece of sort of a slice of white bread, which the Russian Army had brought in for us. And then I realized we must be free, and then it sank in.

Yeah.

Do you remember how long before you were liberated that you went into the typhoid barrack?

No. Not really. Must have been just a couple of days. I remember sort of floating in and out of consciousness, semi-conscious state, or whatever. I really don't remember. Then I remember being carried by two, sort of, two guys to-- and this friend of mine who helped, carrying me to the typhoid barrack, but I didn't realize where to. I just knew I'd been carried, but I don't know where. And next thing I knew when I regained consciousness sort of and she was there, this friend of mine.

Mhm.

Who now is in Israel. And we are still the closest of friends. We went through the whole camps together.

Yeah.

We helped each other. And we remain the closest of friends til now.

Yeah.

Well, what happened after liberation? What did you do?

Well, after liberation I tried to get back to Prague.

Mhm.

By then I knew that my parents and my brother are not alive. But I hoped somebody else, some other people of my family. But, again, I couldn't leave Terezín because I had to be first-- we needed a repatriation card on which it stated that we were deloused and no longer carry of any sickness and so on, which was set up by the Russians.

Mhm.

And Czechoslovakia, Prague at that time was also under the Russians.

Right.

And I couldn't get there since I was still a typhoid carrier and I was too weak and to sick. But this friend of mine already was in Prague. And on one of the trucks coming back from Terezín to take us out wherever we wanted to go, she had sent us like an empty beer kettle [INAUDIBLE]. And before we came in to Prague to the border, like the check point Charlie type, like a gate where you had to show you are clear you can enter the city--

Oh, with papers and documentation and everything, right?

I didn't have that one slip, so they shoved me-- I crawled into that empty--

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You got in the barrel. [CHUCKLES]

And they covered it up with some old blankets, rags that were in the truck. And that's how I was actually smuggled into Prague. And once there she already had assigned an apartment. What happened, the repatriation office, as we were coming back, the Germans there had fled.

Mhm.

And their apartments were empty. So the Red Cross and repatriation center tried to assign us to various empty--

Oh, they let you settle in those apartments, yeah.

So there was one apartment where about six or seven of us in the beginning stayed together. And that was on the fourth floor, and I couldn't walk the stairs up yet. And I remember being carried up. And then I recuperated. I got a little better and stronger. And then later I started to work, and later on I got my own apartment assigned. And started getting documents, everything together. A year later I had an uncle here, and a year later, I decided to come here.

Oh, I see. You had relatives in the United States.

I had an uncle here. And at first there was no communication. I could not find him, he could not find me.

Mhm.

About three months afterwards he found my name in the paper in New York on the Red Cross list of survivors. And I, in turn, knew his address, and through a British soldier that came back with the Czech Army, was a friend of my brothers.

Mhm.

Through him, through the British Army, through London, through his mother, I was able to send a wire to New York.

Oh, I see. Yeah.

To let him know that I survived.

Mhm.

And actually out of my entire family when I came back to Prague, out of entire family, aunts, uncles, cousins, everybody, I was the only one to survive. Everybody else perished. And then I came here a year later and started a brand new life.

Yeah. Do you remember when you arrived in Prague after getting out of Theresienstadt?

Mhm.

What year was that?

What year?

Yeah.

That was in-- well, we were liberated in May of '45.

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Mhm.

May 7th. And about five weeks later--

You were released from-- or you smuggled yourself out. Yeah.

I smuggled myself out of Terezín and in to Prague.

And then you lived in Prague for how long before you went to the United States?

A year.

OK.

Till '46. And I came here in July of '46.

OK. Came to US. OK.

I think that's all the questions I have.

About covers it all.

Yeah. I think we've gone back and fixed everything here so yeah.

All right, well, thank you for your time.

Well, thank you for your time. I really appreciate you talking to me.

I don't know if you're going to use the material on my brother for this project.

No, well, we'd like to, and that's one of the things that-- in fact, that's why I wanted to get the story because--

This his picture. You have his picture?

Actually, let me-- I'm going to turn off the tape here. Hang on for a second.

OK.

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