

BENJAMIN LEWIN

December 12, 1995

Raie Goodwach: Raie Goodwach interviewing Mr. Ben Lewin, the 12th of December 1995. Now could you start by telling us about your family and your life before the war.

Benjamin Lewin: We lived in the Sudeten first in, in **Ústí nad Labem**. That is **Aussig** until the Germans joined Germany, that section Sudeten and we all had to leave from there to Prague because they didn't want the Jews there anymore. So once we were in Prague, we were settled the whole family in different flats you know we lived in our flat but some lived across the road. Some lived around the corner. And so these people all wanted to emigrate and a lot of people had their chances to emigrate until they closed the border. You couldn't leave. For those who come too late. So we stayed and we stayed there and worked until, until, until 41. In this there was a certain strong war activity, production coming on in the areas where I come from Bohemia and Moravia and the Germans used to come and they said there not soldiers. Certain German manufacturers you know, these people. They wanted to buy let's say hundred to thousands of cookers, electric cookers so an arrangement that firm I was working with my uncle's shop, that they should produce those cookers. So we had, we had enough marks to live, so we lived not bad because the firm still operated. And they still gave me part of this what, they shouldn't but they gave. I know this chap who was in, the troy handler the person who was faithful to the Nazis. He was a decent chap so it was alright. So we lived on this until me, the uncle, my father, they all had the same, actually we worked at home on this tool because there wasn't room in the place to produce it. So we took home the things from the turners who produced the bodies and we put in the elements. And then the Germans came and they said how many have you got. 500 ok, we pick up. We take it right away. Pulled out 6000 mark, gave us the marks and finish. And so the business went right up to the pick. We went to camp.

Q: That gives us an overview of what happened. I'd like to go back now to when was it that you went to Prague?

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A: To Prague, we went in 1938, before the Anschluss before the part of the Czechoslovakia what was then Sudeten become Sudeten. It was a certain time.

Q: Prior to that you lived where?

A: In Aussig.

Q: Can you describe it to us?

A: It's not a, not a big town, just a town in the northern part of Bohemia.

Q: How many Jews were there?

A: In Aussig there were a lot of highly talented people because this was industrial. And they all were very jittery because they wanted to leave. A lot of them left from Aussig straight to the states but we were allocated by the consulate a certain number for a certain time. So these who like me, we shifted everything to Prague. The whole goods what we had in the flat like and in Prague we had another flat and that we were in. So we were not in the lowest strata but we were in the middle strata. The Germans didn't worry about this but as long as you paid them the duties what they wanted and they weren't too friendly. They were just edgy. When you said you worked for the Reich they looked at you sideways. Who gave you the right? **Trian**, the manager there. So then it got worse and worse. Til people, let's say the people who had no means, they were already congregating around the Jewish community and demanding you know support. So it was already sort of, very tense. The time shifted pretty fast. I mean they went too fast for the people's thinking at the time. They didn't think that fast so the Germans issued orders by the alphabet. They first went people from A to F on a Thursday. Then on Sunday, on Monday come the other one and like this, in a matter of a week, everybody was in the camp, not in the sport hall. You know where they congregated us all together. But we were on the L side so we

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were already coming there later. Like first were all these up to L. And so we still sat there on the night. In the morning they already put us on train.

Q: When was that?

A: September 41. And then we came to **Theresien**.

Q: I want to go back further again to hear about your family. Who was in your family when you were young and how you lived?

A: We lived before the camp you mean?

Q: From when you were a baby.

A: At this part. Well.

Q: Who was in the family and –

A: We had a big family. We used to live before Aussig, we lived in **Karlsbad, Karlovy Vary**. You heard about that town. Now that's a spa, like a town what increases in summer to 200,000 people. In winter it's only 40,000. You know a lot of people come there. So we lived there for since I was born there, in Karlsbad. So we were there to ____ like, wherever. But we, I went to Czech schools so I was -- my father was a returning soldier in the First World War and he was in Russia. Then he came to the Czech army to be in Czechoslovakia. So we were Czechs, Jews. So in the morning I went to school. Afternoon I went to **cheder**. That was the normal approach at the time.

Q: Were there many Jews in your area? Karlsbad?

A: Oh yes, Karlsbad. We left Karlsbad in 36 because there were too many Nazis there.

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Q: How old were you then?

A: When we left, I was exactly about ten years old.

Q: So til you were ten you were going to the Czech school in the morning and to cheder in the afternoon. So in the Czech school you were mixing with –

A: With Jews, with Jews and Czechs.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism there?

A: There was a bit of schism but not extreme because there were not Germans there. Those Jews with us who sat in Germans. They had more troubles, more problems.

Q: What sort of things did you see?

A: Well we saw the whole Karlsbad suddenly had Nazi flags hanging out from all the windows. Not a pleasant sight.

Q: When was that?

A: That was already 37, 36, 37 when we moved to Aussig. Aussig wasn't so Nazi. Aussig was more industrial and people didn't want to be politically oriented. They didn't, they had a few Nazis there but you didn't see them.

Q: Was that the reason you moved there?

A: That was the main reason that we left because Karlsbad was very Nazi. From there came **Franck**, the big administrator later. It was a Nazi home.

Q: What did your father do when you were small?

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A: My father was a representative of a big shoe factory all over Europe. He traveled around Europe selling.

Q: And your mother?

A: My mother used to run a kosher **Pensional** because it was a spa. A lot of people come from the Romania, from Poland from the parts in the east like from the rest of the east. They flowed in the high holidays like when the summer come. So they had to have a pensional because those people didn't want to go to a hotel. They wanted only kosher.

Q: Did you have brothers or sisters?

A: I had a sister. Only sister.

Q: Grandparents, uncles, aunties?

A: Grandparents didn't live with us. They lived, they lived in not in Moravia. It's close to the Polish border, on the border they lived. Some lived across the border. Some lived inside the border. But they come a lot, they were a lot, every year they were in Karlsbad. They come to us for visit. We had rooms for close 50, 60 people so there was enough room to accommodate everybody.

Q: You grew up in a kosher home?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Was your family religious or traditional?

A: My father came from a rabbinic family so he was quite demanding that we go to Shabbat, to school on Friday night and all this. There was no shuls, there were shuls but **beis midrash** you

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know, beis midrash. So it wasn't a, my shul was fairly inside the town. It was a beautiful building for the visitors.

Q: When did the atmosphere in Karlsbad start to change?

A: Quite early. Quite, Nazis were there 34, 35, they had only marches and racket and this. It was unpleasant. In a little town it is not easy to avoid this. But we were never abused. We were in, we lived in a corner of Karlsbad and we didn't have any contact with Germans. We had but not with the extreme. Those Jews who lived in the center, of the more progressed Jews like everything kashrut but they were not so observing and so they had more contact with the real Germans. And they had probably their troubles with them. They run away. Those people didn't want to be under the threat of the jailing when the Nazis come so they opened their **Tulio** (?) fight. We get you. And so they expected in the Sudeten, we are told that all the Jews would be locked up, you know what they wanted. For no reason, for no, just because Jewish but we, personally we didn't feel this because we had no, no contact with them.

Q: What were yours and your family's dealings with non-Jews like?

A: Mainly people who worked for us. They were very friendly in the war. They hid our car. We had a car. And they put it on blocks and I got it back after the war. We had good relations with the employees. They were Czech German stock but not Nazi.

Q: Did you say that when you were in Karlsbad your family already wanted to leave to go to America?

A: And then we already, we got in touch with our relatives in America and we had four uncles in America so they were getting us the papers. It wasn't so easy either. There was a big, there was a quota system, quota. And the same alphabet. So being L in the ____ fell down in the list. So they sent us the papers and we arranged all the routes to be lifted from -- we couldn't send it from Karlsbad but we had it in Aussig. We could have sent it from Aussig but we went to Prague. We didn't want to stay when the Anschluss came in Aussig.

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Q: When did you first apply to go to America?

A: I think 1937, 1938. 39 we should have left. We come too late. I would have been lucky, would have been America. We had also American visitors because this was a spa where people went to because they didn't operate on gallstones at the time and they would in Karlsbad splits your gall stones into little stones so 200,000 people use it. A lot of _____. They used to come still in horses there. In horse drawn coaches there. And it was so nice to live with it.

Q: What languages did you speak at home?

A: The common language was German because there was, this was a German area. But I spoke perfect Czech. I could be hidden away as a Czech there, nothing. My father was a returned soldier with, he was what can he do. He didn't, he said he was taken prisoner by the Russians and the Russian formed at that time a Czech battalion and they had about arrangement with the United Nations about Czechoslovakia establishing. There was no Czechoslovakia before 1918. It had 376 years under Hapsburgs, happened with the Viennese, kings and queens. So it was a new -- he was not politically active but he had a lot of political friends from Prague. In Prague in the government they mostly, let's say four fifth of ministers were not Jews under the old republic. So they were in a good standing in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Is that why you didn't go into hiding, why you decided not to hide?

A: There was no hiding yet. They were talking about it but nobody, the Czechs couldn't hide much because they were too much implicated the Germans. See after the war they threw out family and Germans. They said finally it's been a long time but they still implicated families with German in parts. You know like these Austrians were there 300, over 300 years. It was a certain small, it's, in Czechoslovakia it wasn't even as Victoria. It might be a little bit bigger. It was at the worst living there about, I can't remember, I think 14 million or something like that. So it was a sizeable industrial country. Actually Bohemia was the industrial country of the

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empire of the Hapsburg's empire. So the Czechs had something to stand on when they opened up.

Q: Now when you left Karlsbad, you took -- what went with you?

A: All the, all the furniture, everything. We shifted everything to Aussig. That was still when the Czechs were there. It was not yet, there were no Nazis yet. Not in power, but Nazi already in Aussig. There was a decision of including into that Sudeten towns that are close to the border of the Germans. But Aussig was close to 80 percent Czech but still it was in a German area. So it fell to them, so we went to Prague.

Q: How long were you in Aussig?

A: Aussig we were from 36 to 38. In Aussig.

Q: What did your parents do there?

A: My father still worked in the same field like he worked before. But my mother didn't do nothing anymore. There was no Pensional or nothing. There was no traveling that's all. The whole Karlsbad collapsed. There was no guests.

Q: What did you do there?

A: I went to school still. I changed from that Karlsbad school to a Czech school in Aussig.

Q: Did you still go to cheder?

A: There was a cheder but of a different kind. There was **Bnai Akiva**. This pattern of education changed radically around the years before the war. Firstly the rabbis had, they ran away to back of Czechoslovakia to **Podkarpatská Rus**. They didn't stay there when the Nazis started to make

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troubles. So there was no teachers. But there was **tionistik** [ph], sort of a revival. A stronger one than before. And those people drew us into those groups of Bnai Akiva

Q: Was that like cheder or was it –

A: Bnai Akiva is more **Ivrit**. Had an orientation towards Palestine, at the time.

Q: Was that run as a school or as a youth group?

A: It's that was run by the Zionist organization. This Jewish organization functioned until the camp. They always were there. If you had access to Palestine and you had means, you could have gone. People had no money. People. Especially later when they confiscated everything so they had no money to buy nothing. For me, we had all our accounts paid and there was still money freely operating. But later in the years 39, 40, those things really kind of changed. The laws came, dining out, dining in, rules and people had to adjust to it.

Q: That was when you were already in Prague?

A: In Prague, yeah.

Q: So prior to that in Aussig, you would go to the Czech school, the whole day or the morning still?

A: There was more work in those years. I came in the fifth, in the fourth and the fifth. I was just in the fifth, in the fifth grade so there was a lot of work to be taught. In Europe they demand stuff to work. So there was no time for me to -- my older cousin, **Avdunot** he was a close finished Czech so he was quite willing to help. So, ain't easy.

Q: Your Jewish education then was through Bnai Akiva?

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A: Bnai Akiva mostly. Even Prague later, when we went to Prague it was also Bnai Akiva. They did, they taught us the things, they taught Ivrit. Nothing abstract at the time I remember, but a little bit abstract.

Q: And then so you were there for about maybe –

A: Until September 41.

Q: So you were in Aussig maybe for a year and a half something like that. Two years and then you went to Prague because --

A: Because the Anschluss. Anschluss means the joining up with that part of Germany.

Q: What happened in Aussig?

A: All Jews left. Those what came later to leave everything behind. We didn't worry about it then enough. You see we did everything always in sort of an orderly fashion. It was my father's, my mother's ideas to have everything. They were haggling in the time in Aussig to send those things off. So my mother seems to say that we hadn't got yet the permits to the states. Where do you want to send it off? Where do we sleep, what will we eat? So we then came to Prague. So my father and me actually arranged the lift because the brothers said the permit is already given. You are invited it by mail to come. So by travelling the lift went, the container. So we had nothing. When we went to camp, we just had field beds at home, army field beds. We had a few furniture from the relatives who didn't come back after the war. But I mean we got the flat back. The Nazis left and we went back.

Q: You said in Prague a number of members of the family lived close to each other. Who was there?

A: Well there was a brother of my mother. He went to Belgium from Prague. There was another sister who went to Poland. I don't know what, the rest of the people, I can't remember. A few

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people died. People died at the time when they were 50, 55 so I can't remember this. And we were busy. I was busy with production of the heaters, of the cookers for the Germans. We all worked on it, my sister, my mother, my cousin, my father. We all assembled the heaters for the Germans. Later, they didn't even look at it, the Germans. They were just getting nastier and nastier. You had to have the star, saying you couldn't go anywhere. They had when I had to put those things off on the railway to go so I had a friend, a non-Jew who put it on railway for me but you had to sign it and all this. It was not easy. When the German came, I said **Tamuk**, I have troubles. Don't worry you just tell us. Couldn't do nothing against the Nazis. Then it stopped by my -- I couldn't you know produce. They didn't have the metal parts of the stove, of the cooker. So they couldn't send it. We're back to square one.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was in 1941.

Q: So in 39 you went to Prague.

A: 39 I went to Prague, yeah.

Q: You were how old?

A: I was -- 39 I was 13, just bar mitzvah.

Q: Where did you have your bar mitzvah?

A: In Prague.

Q: Can you describe it, what happened?

A: We had trouble to get ten people for the minyan because people were frightened to go to shuls. So you can imagine. But I still had bar mitzvah.

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Q: So you managed to get ten people?

A: Oh yes. In the **Klausen** synagogue in Prague. And then I went still for one year to school I think in the **Kalinska**. But I can't remember exactly. Only a year and a half. But then I stayed with them, with -- in that shop and when the call was read, say goodbye. Without tool we don't work somewhere. The Germans never agreed what they are doing with us.

Q: Was there a celebration for your bar mitzvah?

A: At home there was.

Q: Who was there?

A: Well most of the family. All the young ones with the old ones. They closely lived. They were there.

Q: So there were cousins and aunties and uncles?

A: Aunties and uncles.

Q: Enough men went to shul to make a minyan?

A: To gather people who knew us like acquaintances in Prague. There were quite a lot of religious people in the shul but they didn't go to, they didn't, they were worried about -- when you're in it they come and drag you, the whole thing.

Q: Did the women go to shul too?

A: They went, but nobody went.

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Q: To go?

A: There was danger. People could not expose themselves. They were praying in the areas where we lived, have a minyan there. A minyan, I'm not sure. It was already -- they practically invited us at the time. You see we are still free men. Sudeten fell. We had still a republic. But there were also a few Germans there and there were other people who didn't make it hard but they all knew something like most of the Jews. I didn't understand at the time. I was too young. I couldn't never imagine that we will be incarcerated in the **Kasernes** [ph], in Theresien, for no reason whatsoever. They let us starve there. They didn't give much food. I worked in a little place not far from Theresien where there was a, let me say, they penalized people who were politically active. So they put them in another place. It was a horrible place but there was no electricity so we installed. There were a lot of electricians, Jewish electricians who worked in that place.

Q: To go back a little bit again, so in Prague you were in school for about a year. So maybe til you were about 14. Was that right?

A: Yes, you're right. It was.

Q: And it was a Czech school?

A: Yeah, but then we'd have to leave Prague, the schools. They didn't allow Jews in schools. When the Germans come in. The Germans come in, in 1940.

Q: And what happened when they came in?

A: When the, started to take away the businesses from the Jews and positions where people worked with us and they take about nine months, a year before this was completed. Uncle lost the shop.

Q: So your uncle, tell us a bit about your uncle's shop.

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A: Well all businesses what are bigger ones they put in the administrators of the Nazis to administer the business. So the uncle had got already good Nazi, he knew, they knew him, from who I didn't know. And evidently that he was a decent bloke. They didn't abuse me, nothing.

Q: Your uncle had a big shop and it sold what sort of things?

A: Electrical goods, repairs and all this.

Q: And they put a new administrator and then school had closed and you went to work there.

A: And I was working there.

Q: With your sister?

A: No my sister. My sister stayed at home. My sister was actually a **dolmetscher**. You know what's a dolmetscher? It's translator. She was very good in languages. So there were always forms to fill out for the people couldn't, didn't have the German. Had only let's say Czech or Polish or other, so she helped those people

Q: And you worked with your uncle?

A: No, uncle wasn't in the shop anymore. They were not, they were not -- I was the lucky one. It was all mazel. It's not, you cannot say uncle was out. The military made all Jews went out, only I was inside.

Q: How come you were inside?

A: Because at **Trian**, they didn't mind that I be an apprentice, especially when I got in the business for the manufacturing of the – they all thought about me that I am a superman. But I still rated somehow.

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Q: And so what did you do that they thought you were superman?

A: Well we produced those heaters for the Germans, not for the Germans from us. They used to come from Germany, came from Frankfurt. They had very big shortage of anything because they did war manufacture. The Germans. There wasn't any person like me at the time. You couldn't buy nothing. So they came first to Bohemia, not to Sudeten but Bohemia where the industry was. They badly needed those heaters to plug in.

Q: Were you the only Jew working in the business then?

A: Only.

Q: And you were an apprentice?

A: That wasn't allowed that you work inside. They didn't, nobody knew this.

Q: Did they know that you were a Jew?

A: Of course. In these companies still there was uncle and there was – yes, they knew everything.

Q: They knew but you were tolerated.

A: It was a danger for that administrator also. See but if you are in blue uniform it identifies you are not different. You have to be pointed out.

Q: What did you wear?

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A: Overall. We did work in Prague. We did, they finished one building what was just under construction. We had to finish it more or less, not for Jews. But for anybody til the Nazis coming. So you worked on a building.

Q: So you supplied the –

A: This was the, this was the other line. It was something else.

Q: What was it?

A: It was the acquaintance I made in the shop with regards to supplying him with the heaters. But I still had to do work to satisfy the Czech who was leading during the --. In Europe you cannot simply fib. You can't do this. You are either an apprentice or you're not. He was, saw that I brought my business and the business was producing those heaters. See we dealt here with something unreal. The Germans who come to buy them were complete detached from all the rules what the Nazis gave. Being German, the Nazis didn't do them nothing. But I told you my problems to post it out, to load it up. But I have had problems. There were the Germans and the rails. Rails and such things the occupying power immediately take on. So but it's finished. In May, it's finished. And I also had to leave only there because there was new apprentices coming in. They were not the Czechs. They were decent up to – I suspect them as Hitler youth, but it didn't show anything. It didn't show anything.

Q: As an apprentice you would have to go into the rotor (?) to send off things?

A: No work, you work already. This is production. Well I had to, I had to send it off and like it's I promised him you know. In Europe when you promise something you deliver.

Q: So how was it done then?

A: Well it was produced. We produced everything. We brought it in by night, into the shop and they had it all, they wrapped it all up in the parcels. And the parcels went out and that's usually

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when you are in it, you do the signing on this. And I -- it was a bit nasty. You know so then it, they decided they will do it. So after this they did it, but then it was a very short time when we didn't get any of those metals to manufacture. The metal man stopped. He couldn't get any metal to cut.

Q: Who was they who organized it, who did it?

A: Well the metal man cut it, bited it, it was pre-printed and delivered it to shop. And from the shop we took the things home. In the shop they didn't make the heaters. Because they were not set up for this. They were mechanics. I worked still as apprentice and at home we did it at night. I did, I corrected, I fixed up, I tested.

Q: With the delivering it the railways, who did that?

A: It was really unpleasant, the first few, but when, once the Germans come in, I couldn't go any more. When the Czechs were still there, it was trouble but when the Germans --

Q: What would happen when you still went?

A: It's very hard to explain. You cannot hide the -- we knew this terror all the time. It's very unpleasant when they know that you're a Jew when you are hiding, hide your mark here. Then going to the railways. So I felt I don't want to do it.

Q: Was that on your overalls, the star?

A: On everything. I am mostly fit on the overalls. I never wore them on overalls.

Q: So when you were working, you usually didn't wear it?

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A: Once, once we come back was already dark so I didn't worry and at home I guess. But you had to put it, straightway from here onto the coat. You know we cannot have a coat here, with this here put it here and not this. You have to fast, like needle, just pin it on.

Q: When did that start?

A: Star business started in Hitler. Germans come in three months later.

Q: When was that?

A: It was, they came also in September 40 and probably by December it already was passed indicating that you're Jewish. So the people shouldn't deal with you.

Q: What was the situation like with food for the family and the --

A: Enough, we had enough food because the people who had worked with us in Karlsbad, they had a farm in **Kladno** and they brought us the eggs and butter and all this. For this, also risk, a risk. But we met them. It was with the carriage there on a bridge in the evening, at our home. So we had connections. We had, we didn't suffer that much in the real world of suffering. Until we moved into the camp, we were quite well off. We were not one of those already half dehumanized people. We also were dehumanized in a certain sense but not fully.

Q: In what sense?

A: Well I was still active. I was still, we still were producing until nine or ten. The summer months come, the long days, you couldn't hide. You couldn't – so many times I had to go to all that. I put on the star and go to my, our home from the shop. This, I really don't feel like doing it. It's all risk, it's a risk. So one day some raining, it was rain. Sometimes there is raining more than here. So you are exposed to rain. So one day it was raining so he said come. He pushed the cart. In Europe we had carts to shift material and this. So he shifted a cart through, by my house

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and I hopped in the house and he would shift the cart back. It wasn't -- you had here danger all the time.

Q: Did you see people getting caught?

A: No. They, the Germans did it in a way that it wasn't visible. They were locking up some people but not everyone. There was, like everywhere else, but the star, this was an obligation of the police to look at it. The Czech police had to check it. The Germans made them but the Czech police never caught anybody. Never worried about anyone.

Q: They were –

A: They never worried anybody. It was not, I can't remember. I don't think the Czech police did anything, nothing. They didn't do nothing. They just didn't want to participate in the Germans. They were still anti, Czechs are anti-Germans in a real sense. You see deal here with people who lived together and who have got sort of a reality or, or acquaintance connections where your level is the same so maybe sometime they can read Germans. But they were all had to speak Czech. The Czech wouldn't tolerate them.

Q: Did your father work in Prague?

A: Only on those heaters.

Q: Your father was working on –

A: Yeah. That was our boon. He couldn't, he couldn't do anything because the owners of the factory they went to the states. They went before us. They had better connections than we had. We had the same connections but my mother always hesitated. So my father could have done the same thing as his associates there in the firm. Another uncle who had a big factory in textiles, he used to produce textiles for export. I also looked there but when you're young you are interested to visit those people.

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Q: After your work ended at the shop in May of 41, then what happened?

A: Then I lost contact completely. It was rather difficult to do anything. The Germans only had the overall scope of people where they live and what they do. So you couldn't fool them too much.

Q: What did you do?

A: Nothing. I was at home, clean up. One day I called him and he said take him, this is mine, what was there. Tools and I take the parts in May. They can't be loaded up but my father pushed it back to the shop. It was by(?) for 200 meters. It was quite a distance. In Europe, say from the center of the activities to the outlying Jewish areas in **Josefhoff** it was quite a distance. So it was pushing, pushing. It could take an hour, two hours. It wasn't simple.

Q: You lived in a flat in Prague?

A: Yes.

Q: Who were you living with?

A: In the flat, only our family.

Q: Your parents and your sister?

A: Yes. In the block only we lived.

Q: How many flats were in the block?

A: About 14. And he also, the -- in every flat in Czech, in Europe, you have got the concierge which knows the people who they come in with and what go out. We didn't want to start with

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those people. So you didn't know whether they have got a German in the family. We didn't know this. A very nice, open neighbors, but sometimes can be mistake. There was a lift so I had no problems bringing up the goods and going down. Nobody noticed things.

Q: Did other Jewish people live in the block of flats or not?

A: Yes, there were other Jewish people in the block. But they were all doing nothing, we are all stick to their places. For the Germans there was also the sign. I was supposed to be at home, sitting with nothing. And it was doing the nothing by the time before we went to camp. We went, there was no activity at all. So this friend had no connection with Czechs, no connection with Germans. They already grouped people that they will die and other people coming to places within there so they got the Jews together in those few streets. We didn't notice but we realized later what happened. It was noticeable. Germans are very skillful in these matters. Real police state. I mean it's, even today they're not better. They control Europe.

Q: What did you do in the daytime and after you'd stopped working?

A: We couldn't go to the river, we couldn't go nothing. We just spent a lot of time. I can't remember this part from May to September. Those things went too far because people were already loaded up into the camp from July, from June. So May, June when we come. Must have been a lot of As, Aarons, a lot of this. This took a long time until the Kalman, Kohn. There were all big lines until we come to our letter was already September.

Q: What did you know about where people were going and what was happening?

A: They're resettling to some work, that's what they said. We're going to resettle you, have to be someplace where you will be working and producing for the Reich. You know the Reich, Germans.

Q: Who organized it? How did that work?

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A: In Germany, the Jewish administration. The information you got to come was from the Jewish administration. They made people responsible, the Germans had such a system where they made people self, self-administrative. Even in Theresien, was all Jewish administration apart from the few SS. They're running around. But the main dealings with the food were all Jews. And Germans of some other kind.

Q: Were people worried about going to be resettled or did they –

A: The Germans you don't ask these questions. We're glad that they give you something, all the documents with ration cards. They gave us a half value of other people. So we had less to eat. The calories. But we had plenty to eat. We never had any problems our self. You know we were supplied plenty from connections we had. They still come until we went to camp. Our people from Karlsbad still brought us things.

Q: In those couple of months you couldn't go down to the river.

A: You couldn't shop with the star on. They just pushed you away. The Czechs weren't allowed to associate with us. It wasn't simple. It was no use. You sat home on a **shpilkes**. You know what shpilkes is? Any day you said you were called up. The time goes fast when this is on. Everybody was nervous. So we had to have breakfast, lunch. That was enough to worry about.

Q: You said that you had the papers –

A: To the states?

Q: Yes.

A: That was already in 30, end of 39, 40 when they moved into us, the Germans come in. It was still about four weeks before they closed it. They didn't say when they close it, they just one day come and said closed. They don't forewarn you, nothing. We were just unlucky to be the ones who stayed behind. And this was still for us quite a lot. We could have gone to Austria but to

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Hungary, to Hungary. My mother didn't want to. We still could have gone. There was a, on the rails there was a wagon for Jews when they wanted to travel or had to travel. So without papers we couldn't go into Hungary. You don't want to pay the visa into Hungary and it's over. It's always depending on yourself or what your scope is, but the people don't understand the part so the Jews we are still trustful to the Germans. We consider the little hassles but they didn't oppose it. We don't even in Akiva they told us a few things. It's good if you still want to move to Palestine in a more cheerful manner. That was the more active, in Akiva also. Already unhappy. They were not so happy like they used before but it was all closing the curtain. They said well must like him. My sister knows more, my mother knows more. My mother used to know more. I was too young. I was still, I just finished apprenticeship so it was nothing yet of mature. Now I'm still young man. You know. My sister was more mature than me.

Q: When your name is called, your name is called, what happened?

A: We took this what they allowed us to take. We moved into sports center.

Q: What did they allow you to take?

A: A case with clothing, with soap and whatever they specified.

Q: What happened?

A: We are then put in the center and the next day we were on the train shifting to Theresien.

Q: Did you know where you were going?

A: How you mean?

Q: Did you have an idea where you were going?

A: To the sports center. We long time knew the people who were at the sports center but when

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we come to Theresien, half the camp was already occupied. Half the kasernes were full. I was lucky. We got the kaserne where we were. And my mother worked in Theresien in the kitchen because she was an expert lady from a kosher house at Pensonial. So we had enough to eat in Theresien also.

Q: What did you do there?

A: There, we for a while we did nothing because it was going to winter. Winter, you do nothing there, there was nothing to do. There was snow. We heated the room with something. I don't know what it was. It was warm. Inside the room was warm. So then when the spring coming, 42, they called outside people, **Hachloiter** [ph]. So I went. They wanted electricians. They wanted some **schlosser**, do you know what schlosser is? Engineer. Workers. So I started to work then on, in the **festung** [ph]. What they call it in Czech, **manistrania** [ph]. It was the prison there. So we put the lights in for, for militaries in 1944.

Q: What were the conditions like there?

A: Nasty. We had to produce work and if it wasn't straight and this, was screaming. But we tried anything. We were there quite a lot. We were there about 30 people. So the, they were a mixed lot. There was some Czech outer guards and German inside. But when the work was done right, the Czech administration said it's all good and there was no problem. But you know some people put in, let's say a nail into the -- when the German comes nail fell out so there was a big scream.

Q: Was there more than screaming?

A: Well if you opened your mouth, you get one on your head. If you say nothing then you didn't. Sometimes you put it all down. When it was done, it was night. Well like this is bagatelle. You worked there, every about four or five months. Then come snow you couldn't work. There are minimum but they gave you the poke (?), it's called. It's hard work, so you would work in summer when the temperature is up.

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Q: The sleeping conditions, the eating conditions.

A: We had beds. We made our own beds, bunks. They were made, when we come, some carpenter. They must have been Jewish or not Jewish I wouldn't know. There were all bunks in the rooms.

Q: And who was in the room with you?

A: He was in the room, what's his name? This Gary, Gary Fagan. You spoke, you had him here? He was a little boy. He was younger than me, about and I was there 14. He was seven or six. He come from Germany. We were in a section where they put all those Jews from Germany, from Austria. In this part. We were not with the Czechs together.

Q: Where were other members of your family?

A: In the camp. Well there was only surviving about four members. Others died slowly off in the years and before the war. So this, they were spread in other rooms.

Q: Your sister was somewhere else?

A: Oh the women, they were completely segregated. We only met them, we only met them by the food, by the kitchens. The girls where sometimes I met, we had girls, electricians. They were all different people like they didn't mind if a girl works.

Q: And your father?

A: My father was **pulasek** (?) [ph], he was Russia called, you know what the Russians call it. Russia call, means a leader of the people. Like there was minyan and there was this – I know we had arguments in the room like with the German Jews. They were all, they all said it's nothing. The government will change and we go back home. They were very patriots. German Jewish

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first, Germans then Jews. And we were not. We were Jews first and then others. We didn't, we didn't -- people from the area what we come, we didn't look at it. Only Germans do this. So we argued. We was, there were between them socialists. There were also others. Same argument like now in Israel I think. One group against the other one. There were talks. There were arguments. About the state, nobody want to admit for the Germans. They even forbid to mention the word. The German Jews, they were very adamant. So we had heard that somebody died so there were all together the **Kaddish**. But otherwise, they were all of their take the clean lives. I didn't understand much of this part.

Q: People were still praying there?

A: Oh yes. We had this little prayer book which leave in the case. Some prayer book. Some people I think had **tfillen** mean nobody took them out. But all this was still in Theresien.

Q: And the food?

A: Food, I had enough because my mother was in the kitchen. The months or week that I was in there, I mean I had no problem I could read. There was enough books there what you could read.

Q: You had enough food because your mother was in the kitchen. What about other people?

A: They had only one ration. I had to go three times to the kitchen. We were only the same soup. I think that's will be, some eating. So if you had only double the right or three times you were all right. You function no money. Once you work and run, you are hungry and you put the container in the --

Q: How was the organization there?

A: In Theresien? They didn't hassle us, the Germans unless we did something wrong. They didn't, they condemned us to that life and maybe the idea was of killing us all but we didn't realize this. We always thought the government will change and we'll go back. You know like

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they talk. No, the people talk like this, especially the Germans. There were still Germans in Theresien. They were still patriots of a kind that I didn't know at the time. I never met the German Jew before. Not, not that I didn't meet them. You know I saw them, but I never knew his views or his approach to -- there might be good ones between them too, but I don't think they were bad but they were just -- I didn't like him for don't know what to say. They were all highly intelligent people. They were judges, they were bookkeepers. They were notaries. They were all intelligent people. They were nice to you. They were helpful. They want to teach you. When I read books, they explained it, but when it comes to Jewish things, they were adamant.

Q: Where did the books come from?

A: People brought them. Like in the case when you, what you could take, you take books. People didn't, they didn't object against books. I read quite a lot at that time. In winter. I keep inside because outside it's cold. Unless you go to the latrines. It was very cold. Kasernes, they had in every floor was this place. We used it and it was all in one area. Like in the olden days.

Q: People could mix together?

A: You were not allowed but you did.

Q: What did you think would happen and what did happen if you were caught talking?

A: Nothing much but it could be problems.

Q: So there was a threat of it?

A: There were people who congregated in the areas of the particular opinion of their own. There were Zionists, they were mostly segregating.

Q: So you could organize it yourselves?

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A: Well there was, there was, we were all educated like this. We were happy between us. We were happy between the Germans. We were used to hearing **krautkopf** [ph]. You know what means that. That means intelligent idiot. We didn't mind them but we didn't feel them part of us.

Q: What we're washing conditions like?

A: Very bad. There didn't have wash rooms. We could wash a little bit. But nothing much. People stunk. Conditions were dehumanized completely.

Q: Were you able to get more food because your mother was in the kitchen. Was there trouble because of that? Did people realize –

A: They were only asking to give them something on it. They didn't. They looked -- people who worked outside, they were higher. They say we got better food, there also by the Germans. They gave us bread with also.

Q: When you were working?

A: Yeah, we worked ____ They didn't have them self much but they gave us.

Q: How did that time come to an end?

A: When the transport to Auschwitz since 43. And a lot of people left, left Theresien but then came a commission from the Red Cross. And they came and just rehashed everything. The ladies had to sew. Suddenly come machines from Jews and sewing machines. We never seen one. But they brought it all from Prague and the women had to sew up dresses for the kids and this to present to the Swiss Red Cross for them to sing Shangri La. We had orchestra, we had tables where people could have coffee. Had delay, the transport to Auschwitz, it was a prank. I remember in 1944 when they come for this suspicion where they had people outside. Whether they had suspicion or not, they didn't. All those people what looked very bad, they had to be

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shut somewhere else, but there was a group of Danish Jews which were protected by the Danish king and they had plenty of food. They got parcels from Denmark with cheeses with all this so they were better looking. So the people were put into nice clothes and they were the teachers and we have all better class people who could fault the Swiss to showing this camp. Germans can do this in a matter of ten nights. They just force you with the stick to do the right thing.

Q: What in fact were people were in before that?

A: Rags, what you had.

Q: Your own clothes.

A: You stayed practically in three years in the same clothes. We had no change. You washed if you wanted to. Most people didn't. They didn't know how to. A lot of people died in Theresien. There was always deaths. There was always so many deaths that there was no minyan. There was nothing we can do.

Q: They were dying there from?

A: Hunger. Not enough food. There was only one day, one meal a day in the middle. Nothing at night, nothing.

Q: What was given for food?

A: Soup. In German it's called **eintopf** [ph]. Hear that word eintopf. One container. It was, everybody got about let's say 1200 calories or 800. Substance

Q: And what would happen if somebody was sick?

A: There was a **krankenbau**, there was a little hospital called in German **krankenbau**. There was nothing you could give in, you know medicine, unless somebody had something. There was

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nothing. Some people recovered, some people didn't. In Europe people mostly get grippe, that's like flu. If you're strong enough. Sometimes they gave from the kitchen. My mother sent them another soup so they recover but otherwise she was rationed. She couldn't do nothing.

Q: The Red Cross came in.

A: It's a known fact, film about it. Have you seen that film better than I explain it to you. They suddenly had gardens everywhere.

Q: Gardens.

A: Yeah, they just put flowers. They planted them and this, there were enough people to do the work. They just ordered it around maybe in fortnight maybe longer. They delayed sending to Auschwitz maybe three weeks. The transport to Auschwitz; that was in summer 44. So when month commission was in, we didn't go out to work. I think the work wasn't authorized by the Germans in Berlin. It was only a matter for the local administration to use us, as good as they can but Berlin doesn't know. They didn't know nothing about it. So while it still was on, we didn't go to work either. But I worked in the rehash of the Swiss visit. That we worked on this.

Q: What did you do?

A: Anything that had to be done. We did lights, we did some lights when it was needed but otherwise we didn't have the work. It was work. Work is work. You have to paint the chairs and all this. Plenty to do this. Had to be all tip top for the Germans and for the Swiss. And people had to learn to perform and all this, to talk to them and it was all prescribed to the words by the Germans. You had to learn them. So that's all.

Q: Did you actually see them?

A: You wouldn't even know what they looked like. They come between the SS. When the SS was there, we were not visible. Only those were people who were performing. The orchestra

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was there, the kids and you must look at the film. There's a film about it. So this was only the lie of the transport. And of course once the Swiss went we had to put everything back like it was working. It took another week to clean it all up. So then the transport resumed again. And once I come back from work from this, they said your name is up. This naming of people to transport was not in the German, was not in the German hand. The Germans just said to the Jewish administration we want today 3000 people. You can do what you want. So he picked people what he didn't use, what, what the administration didn't -- so when we come back he said your name is up but if you have to work there you can, you can go tomorrow or next day. So one day after another shift, shift, shift and I had to go because my father went. My mother didn't go because she was in the kitchen and my sister didn't go because she was in the *krankenbau*. In the hospital.

Q: You had to go because your father couldn't get out of it? Is that right?

A: Not by the administration's idea. He was relatively protected by me because I was in there.

Q: Because you were working.

A: Well you see, from Theresien there were two transports to work outside. We didn't go on it, but there were others who went to something, somewhere to work. I don't know what. There is always work. They always took them away for three months to work. Somewhere else. They come back so we didn't think it would be different.

Q: You were told you were going to work.

A: Other work. So I said but we didn't finish. We worked on still the *kleine feshung*. We must finish that work. We didn't so he says good. You go, you go, you go. Shifted, maybe ten nights. I went with the last two transports and they stopped the transports. They had too many in Auschwitz. They couldn't handle it.

Q: Do you remember when you went?

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A: Yes.

Q: Can you describe what happened?

A: They put us on train and we shifted to Auschwitz. It doesn't take that long. It takes about three hours. Usually they loaded us up at 12:00 or 3:00 so we come to Auschwitz, was night so they had to put the lights and all this.

Q: How many people went with you?

A: In the wagon? Maybe 80, the say a wagon. I lost my high title. I was a normal one like any other when I come to Auschwitz. You know in the camp I was, I was the lucky one that I could work. But in -- when I went to Auschwitz I become nothing. So we came to Auschwitz. In three hours we were there, four hours and they pushed us out of the wagons. Mengele was standing there and said left right, left right, left right. And when I came up with my father, he pushed, put my father on the right side.

Q: How did you know it was him?

A: That face of Mengele we saw in Auschwitz quite a lot. And you come out the night and you see someone. He was a fabled man, a big German. He couldn't, I believe 40 kilo, whatever.

Q: What happened after you were sent to the right?

A: We went to normal showers. We were handed out prisoner's clothes and that was it. We came out on the other side. The other people went to other barracks or they were later gassed.

Q: At what stage did you know about it? Did you know that?

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A: That was later, much later. But things shifted very fast. I was only there four weeks in Auschwitz because at that time, they bombed the gas chambers. And after this, they, I could come out. I was never going out for Appel. I was always inside cleaning the barracks, because in my size I wasn't going to gas. If you have a certain height what they let live. In a similar height they sent to gas. So I couldn't go out. I was not, I was not the height that they demanded.

Q: When you say you couldn't go out to the Appel, that was because –

A: It was a asylum what I got from the kapo inside. It was, he was familiar to me anyway, to my father also.

Q: He hid you in a way?

A: In a way yes, but I was hidden and I was doing things around the – when they whistled I was hidden. I hide.

Q: So your name was never on the list?

A: There was no line, I was only number. But there was, no, there was the same number let's say we went to the barrack first and out came let's say 180 people and if next day is only 179, they look for the 180 but if they had to fill a day only 180 so they didn't worry about you.

Q: Did you get a number?

A: Oh yes, I got a number, immediately by the, right after we went out from the showers.

Q: And do you want to show it.

A: It's a long interview. (shows number) Switched off now because I, you can see it here.

Q: What is your number?

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A: 12498. It's ____ . So we had everybody in Auschwitz had to be numbered once you were in the survivor group.

Q: The kapo, how come the kapo was friendly?

A: Was friendly with my father you see. It's Europe and you have got such a Pensional, you are bound to be knowing some people or know those people. Blimey, I don't know.

Q: So you think that it's maybe somebody your father knew before?

A: He didn't know him but he knew about my father.

Q: The man knew about your father?

A: About the family. He was he knew that immediately go out. I don't know. The Appel. In the Appel let's say 180, let's say five were chosen out because they were not suitable for living so there is in the administration but everything changed that time. You see when I was in that barrack, I shouldn't talk about it but they were, the kapos were always inside. And the kapos used to come together. The SS were very few. That many and mostly were how should I say. This you must have heard from others in Auschwitz, that the SS was having for some people more respect than for others around like, they were all upper class people. Like on this, he really was bad. He was beaten by an SS, but mostly kapos were. Some barracks, even some are, or some was – they are not nice. So this kapo was very nice because he says look, if you go out, you're gone. They had other two boys, there were three boys inside. So as long as we live it was all right. The SS never came in but when we came in, they didn't see us. In the barracks, just in, out. So once they bombed the gas chambers, the gas works, crematorium, they couldn't use the others. It was the second attack on the crematorium. But the kapos knew about this event quite well because they spoke Yiddish, I understood it, what they were saying. They said it, it's miskimen [ph] (German word). It was (German word), slighter.. Its miskimen. There was some connection with the SS. I didn't see this. I heard about it later. Saw two SS there helping. One

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was killed, one run away. That's all I heard, I didn't see nothing. So one day there was no Appel after this. After the bombing there was no Appels. There were Appels because they wanted to hassle you. But not like before. Before was -- so then one day, just the fourth week they come out and look for ____ people. So they sent us to **Czechowice** where there was a bomb _____. And there we could only work one day. And when the night came half a meter of snow and there was no work. Also we stayed in heated barracks. They were heating there for the guests they had, the barracks _____. But you had to go out and in. Then came one day a sunny day and a few things got clear so we had to go out to work. And the _____. But then again, next night was again a half a meter of snow. So there was no work. We were stuck inside. And we were pushed out for Appel and for, they didn't count us. They -- just line up. This, the count is automatic but meaningless.

Q: Did you know anybody that you were with there?

A: Oh, yes. There were friends. I still have the friends here from those people who survived. It was after this Shangri La in this Czechowice when they pushed us to **Obitz** to walk about 50 kilometers at night. We walked to Czechowice, to, to Obitz. And there we were unloading sand for wagons, open wagons. Shovel it up in this. Then they closed it and put us in open wagons to Buchenwald, in the middle of winter. The guards on the, on the wagons, they all froze. They were on ice. One day I lift up and I hit the guard and he fell over. He was sitting on top of the wagon landing. Snow with the ___ on this and we traveled to Buchenwald til we got from the Germans who took stones, they throw at us. Bricks, half bricks. So they are not so holy the Germans. They are all, there were hundreds of bridges by dying was always dangerous. But they were, when we arrived at Buchenwald, I think there were three living guards from 24 wagons.

Q: In 24 wagons.

A: There must have been 21 must have fell, fall off, frozen. There was once an attack but we didn't go out from the wagons. You know the airplanes, its til the attack was over, the motor start again so

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Q: How long did it take to get there?

A: Three weeks, no food, nothing.

Q: No food.

A: Most people died. From our wagon. I think we were 180, we survived about seven.

Q: About seven people out of 180.

A: The younger ones. We just had to be warm. There when those people died, ___ was cold so it was always three days so by the time we come to Buchenwald, the three weeks were over. Terrible. Can't imagine what it was. It was traveling hell. They didn't shoot you. They had nothing. They just let you die. No food, nothing. Once we got bread, some old bread in our wagon. So we had a little bit each what lived. And a little bit of snow to drink. This, the coldest months, January, February so we arrived in Buchenwald I think. From the whole wagons we were about a thousand people. What they -- in wagons were about 7000 people that were dead, from all the camps around Auschwitz. They all congregated around Obitz. The Auschwitz people, in Auschwitz they did better. They could hide there anyway from the Russians. The Russians we know this because we spoke to the Polacks in Czechowice. They said the Russians. I said you know the **Wisla** It's a river and they were more weak. For three months they sat there. In the joke they used to say that they wanted to finish off the Jews. In the reality it looks like they could have advanced. They just advanced to, in February, they came to Auschwitz or in March, when I would have -- if caught back in Auschwitz I would have gone to Buchenwald. .

Q: You were transported in open wagons. Did you go down from the wagons ever?

A: Never.

Q: You were in the wagons the whole time?

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A: Terrible. Conditions were _____.

Q: What would happen when people died in there?

A: They just lie there.

Q: So they were there the whole time til you got to Buchenwald.

A: We crawled between them so we were cold, extremely cold. The guards were ice. With his gun, everything was ice. He was complete frozen. The guard on top.

Q: He was on top of the wagon?

A: They fell off. No, you didn't see them by night.

Q: What were you wearing?

A: Same clothes that we had. Paper, paper is the best. We had some in bags, it was down the shirt and there was the socks. To protect you there were papers in the back, in your garb. Your garb, put your hands.

Q: And so the drink was some snow that fell on you.

A: But you wanted to drink but when we didn't want to, you didn't want to snow and ice filled up. That kept us alive. I didn't know if I was alive or dead when I come to Buchenwald. They just, the SS was just there and I said to myself, _____. There's a few who survived this. I remember from this transport.

Q: You started out what room was in the wagon? Could you sit down when you started?

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A: No we cleaned them all out, there was sand in it. In many of them. I think from 24, I think 7 had sand. Had to shift out the sand what they wanted it. They wanted to put it out. We had no energy left from these nights, the march with no food. So we shoveled slowly, we shoveled, shoveled until we got it clean. Then the wagons, I think the two guys, two people died when they were shoveling. So maybe people had sand there when they were loaded up. I don't know. The Germans were cruel. It was the cruel hand when you had sand in the wagon. Sand was good for nothing. Cold, frozen. Lucky we had a few sunny days. We got warm. Then a few, in Europe it is winter. The sun comes out and heats you up a bit. Most people died. Thousands. Terrible. But we didn't hit _____ at Buchenwald. They said the showers, with new fresh garb, shirt and this. I was already, was early summer at the time because everybody coming in February. The sun was out. It's, I didn't feel cold.

Q: What happened then?

A: Then we were put into the barracks and then they called out for work to clean up after the bombing in Magdeburg. It's close to Buchenwald. So we walked there to Magdeburg and we stayed there. In the buildings where we cleaned up. Overnight, we didn't go back. There was SS supposed to be but there was, there was hardly any SS left there. We cleaned up. We had to eat. We found conserves, we found borscht. We found everything. We had a, we had, one time we found apples in the cellar. In Europe they put apples in the cellar to preserve so we had plenty to eat. So one day they come, the SS and they said all march up, all line up and we're going back to Buchenwald. So I come back to Buchenwald and then I saw there my uncle. He was, he was the rabbi from **Drohobych Borislav** in Poland before the war but he was also professor of some theories and I can't remember what it was in Hamburg. So before, because it was like this, the Germans put in between the Weimar republic people in Buchenwald. There was a whole section where only those people were sitting and he was there between them, in a room by himself so I welcomed him. After this, we went again out to clean up and they made a continuous attacks of American airplanes. So one day I didn't have to eat only for a day or two days. We didn't get nothing to eat. Only what you found, you fed on. I probably had nothing to eat, had probably left in my bag some apples or something, or some other rubbish whatever. And came attack fast into the whole train. A wagon train. Under the train the shots don't come through. The timber is so

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thick so I must have fallen out. The Russians found me when they come. I must have been sleeping. I was healthy but I was not as bad as others. Others could be even worse. So they picked me up, put me in the hospital. I was with them for three months on dysentery but they had nothing. They only had black bread and milk. They were poor. Russians were very poor. It's better like this. Americans had too much and the people died from overeating. Then after this I came to Prague. Late, they already thought I wouldn't come back so when I appeared, August was very late. All the telling people they're home by 9:45. I was in Russian _____. There were many there, Czechs because when I went back there were about 1500 on the, on, when the train, the pass open bus you know took us back. It was already. It was warm still, it was warm, took us back to Czechoslovakia. The Russians released all Czechs. Worry about us so I come back to Czechoslovakia.

Q: How long did that take?

A: Maybe half a day. That's so close everything now.

Q: What was it like when you got back to Prague? What did you find?

A: My mother and my sister. Inside flat where we were before the war.

Q: What had happened to your father?

A: My father died in Czechowice on -- from pneumonia, got sick. Couldn't do nothing about it. He was young but he was 52 when he was chosen by Mengele to work. He looked about 40, 38 so he chose him too. Put him to working. But there was no work for him. There was no work for me either. We got relatively good food in Czechowice because we got it from the kitchen of the people who had worked in refill areas [ph]. They brought the food over so the food was quite substantial. And that's it.

Q: You also said that people had brought you food.

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A: When?

Q: From the original Italian consulate.

A: No, they were from Kladno, from the little town where they lived. They brought the food all the time in Prague. There were the shortages in Prague. Not big part but relative shortage.

Q: What happened after you met up with your family?

A: Well I went back to school, sooner or later and then when I come back my years for the army came up so I said I don't want to go for ten years. So I went to my uncle in Belgium. Just before the war he went there on a job, an engineering job. He was a civil engineer so he was hidden in Belgium, that firm where he worked they got -- they hid him in the -- I do know they stayed in Holland, in Belgium, in France. They were -- hid people much easier than the Slavs on this side. The Czechs they would have hidden them. They were frightened they would be killed when they find out. So the French did it and whatever. Or maybe they didn't. Don't know. Lot of people survived there with hiding but wouldn't participate in the eastern parts.. It also in Poland, hidden people but in a different way. The children they put into the idea of priest. Well that's it.

Q: You went to Belgium and you stayed there for how long?

A: In Belgium I stayed very little because I wanted to get into Uni, because I had access to when I was in Prague this year, I was in Prague til 47 so the schools gave us a test and after the test they gave us a matriculation certificate for anything other than medicine. So I said why not and I took it with me and I went into the, to Ghent, into the first semester school in the University of Ghent.

Q: Why was it for anything other than medicine?

A: Because I didn't have the four years. I had, had been out in the force and there were still four classes above me. So they only gave us a mature finish in this, just because we came from

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camps. We were decent, the people are decent in Prague so I was not extra but I was quite studious type. I mean I could learn. I could read. I could do this. I could do that. So I was there for nearly, it could have been a year or less. Then suddenly came the Flems and Flemized the university. It's a big battle between the people in Belgium, between the people what are Flemish and the people who are Walloons, French. So the battle was so steep that where the Flemish people lived they pushed out all the Walloons and where the Walloons are they pushed out all the Flems. And so the University of Ghent was always French from thousands of years. At least thousand, so they changed it to Flem. When I come next year they said all Flemish. Can't change now to Flemish. I hardly changed into French. So I was very unhappy. But then I went to Paris and tried the school there, the Sorbonne and there was such a range of people. You just could sit there and participate. Then I heard from my mother that she wants to go out. My sister went with her husband to be a doctor in a little town in and the colonists changed it around. They put all the doctors into the country areas cause there were shortage of them in the hospitals there through the war. There was doctors in Prague but they were Jews so the few what survived there. So she was there living until the government changed and once they changed they left Czecho, Bohemia, Czechoslovakia at the time still. But I stayed outside -- until I stayed in Paris for a while because I went there to the, to the semesters. And then I went to meet my mother in Bari, in Italy. I still had the car from before the war. And so I went by car down to Bari and she came with the closed transport from Czechoslovakia of Jews who had left. They built an enclosed transport, completely closed ____ up to Bari in Italy. A transport to Israel, to Palestine. To Israel already. That was 49 then. That was already Israel. So they let the Jews out and the Czechs so I went to Bari and when she come out to change for the Israeli ship. So I put her in the car and went back to Rome. And they had papers from people here in Australia. What's in those papers? So I went to Genoa and boarded the boat and went to Australia.

Q: What was it like when you came to Australia?

A: There was, when I was up in the Australian legation, they wanted science people also, same story back in camp. So I said yes, I have, I am an expert in this and this. So they said good. You'll be working on a contract base. I said for how long? One year, two years in Australia in electrical field. So I said all right. So we arrived here in 49, I thought go to **Shipera**, go down to

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Canberra, that's a town near, close to Shipera. I worked in a Carnation Milk plant. So I worked there for six months. Then I come back. My mother worked here in clothing in Victoria somewhere on machine. So when I come back we had -- I married my wife and then we lived together in **Almaden**. We bought a house.

Q: Did you have any idea about Australia before you came? What

A: I felt like going back really, somehow it was not too well. In my standard, I mean I still lived in better conditions. Those conditions in Canberra were also primitive. Absolutely primitive how the people lived. So I finished my days there and I worked at General Motors Holden as an electrician also. So I then started myself in 53. I was already married, no wasn't even married. In 55 I got married.

Q: How did you find the Australian people when you came here?

A: Nice. To be frightened of us because we had a frightening them to take the job away from them. But they were fair because they didn't know a few things from being from Europe. They were really decent. ____ We were strangers to the country too because I never knew English. I knew French, Germans, Polacks, Czechs, Bulgarians, but I never met English.

Q: What about the language coming here?

A: The language came very fast. When you know French and German, you can do English easier. Had to speak already in Shipera in English, although I did, was another Jewish electrician. He was, we talked Yiddish, in Cara but still English you had to know. And worse you had to change the measurements. Until after a few years, we changed. It was a big headache, the measurements. Because our measurements in Europe itself is all in centimeter, meter but being here, English colony so it was a colony here. The first passports were English. And you couldn't buy nothing else than English. After a time, those England like nothing how many people German with us. It was just we are so we are _____. I don't know. Wasn't only my opinion. I

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mean other people had the same opinion. They didn't mind a few things but we see nicer life already after the war. We are settled. Took a lot to settle here at least ten years.

Q: What do you think that made it that it took you ten years to settle?

A: We work ____ one thing is. And then if you have time you can study up different things. I tried to fit in but it didn't work. Some work is intense so we cannot dwell outside it so easy. So we was trying and I was happy to move ahead. Other people did nothing. And there was no unemployment here. It was pretty tough. The welfare was a big help to those people or the people from the other towns. **Bialystok** and ____ they cared for those people. But those people they engaged to work. Like my mother worked. Other people worked. Everybody worked something. Otherwise you had nothing to eat. The conditions were here like that. But we were not strangers to this condition. We knew these conditions although there are more social laws where we come from but we didn't use them.

Q: Have you discussed your war time experiences with your family, children?

A: No. We couldn't tell them nothing like this what I told you. You just can't ____ now. Nowadays yes, but not when they were growing up. It was very strange time. If you were living in Germany it would be different. They had, in still need of such methods, is not accepted but more understood against here. Australians wouldn't even know when you tell them. Become the opening of people to talk took, that took them 40 years. I mean people saw a few films, they talked by them self. But most of those things cannot be even to _____. Unless you have got to Theresien with the Swiss people coming there. So they spruce it up. But otherwise you can have the other thing with that famous chap what saved Jews. Forgot his name.

Q: Schindler.

A: Schindler, yeah Schindler. Schindler or the one in Hungary the gentleman who moved more Swedish passports.

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Q: Have you talked to your children about it since they've grown up?

A: I tell them a few things when they ask. If you never experienced this you cannot judge this. It's not easy to talk. It's not made to be easy to be able to understanding that's why. I mean it would be wrong to experience so that they should have the concept of what it is. I can share this with people when they come together from camp, SS. You talk about everything's that we see but my wife, she was also in the war with different programs but they never had any such dealings like we had. The level to which we come. No other war people are close to that. So therefore it's talk. And between us, if you don't know the person, you don't like to talk either because his story may be through a different place what you have never seen that. I can only talk about this what I have seen, what's known to me. There are so many different instances where people were persecuted so. There were clever people in Auschwitz also. They were called **kommando**. They were on those parts of a people's goods were sorted out. There are people here too from that kommando. They never tell anybody what they did. Doesn't worry me

Q: You don't tell because –

A: Because he did it because he was clever. He was -- this was his nature. He was the kapo in that area. He didn't do anybody any harm. But he was -- the German used that stuff. They picked all the gold things from people, the gold teeth and all that. Then the hair they did in soap. I don't know what else they did. I only heard this after. I never heard it in Auschwitz. I knew about kommando. I didn't know about , any about -- in the short time I was there I didn't know this. There were very much people in there, what were there for some time. We were all newcomers. We are all, in our -- my camp wherever we go there's always the people before you. They know or they already gained their position where they were. So you had no hope to gain the same position. And then we would aim for it. Couldn't care less about it. If we will be longer there, let's say than four weeks, a half a year maybe I would have, maybe yes. I don't know, I don't think so because I wasn't size. You have to be big. The Germans like only big guys. They think a little guy is nothing so. That is their opinion. In life it's the same. The Germans will push you down if you're small. It's not ____.

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Q: How do you think that your experiences affected you?

A: It's hard to tell. This part I mean I can only say that I'm happy that I survived. Otherwise I can't say nothing more.

Q: Your schooling was cut off in the middle. Did you have hopes when you talked about liking to read. Did you have hopes of something you might –

A: I could have, I could have. If I would have stopped working, I could have but then came my family. I had to work. I had to support the grand family. And my mother.

Q: Did you have an idea when you were younger what you wanted to do?

A: like I don't know. I really can't -- I never learn on this. I lived every day like I lived to in camp. I had to be cause the next day can't be the same. Cause ____ Australian life like this. Here the same, you can open the car and by the time you go out you can be dead. That's the life we lived in camps. Every new day, if we get through the night before. You look for the human so that's the principle we should live.

Q: Do you think that your children have been affected because of what you went through?

A: Don't think so because the knowledge about these conditions has not come early, came very late after they had finished their studies. They are all professionals. We come from a professional family so goes on all the time.

Q: To what do you attribute your survival?

A: Being young in those years. We had resources what you had, what you could live on. Older people perished. I mean there's a limit to what we can live. In my years people used to die when they were 40, 45, 50. It was a normal life span before the war. There was continuous hearses since I was a little boy always. It was not unusual to see a ____ house but a hearse you

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saw every day. I think today you don't see hearses so much. People do it faster somehow here. I didn't notice anybody in Europe you see, you saw hearses before the war. Today people live longer. People died sooner.

Q: You talking about people dying of natural causes or because of –

A: Natural causes. There was no help when you had a heart failure or when you had some kidney failure. There was no -- people just died. People just died when they had a sickness. Let's say you had a very bad flu and complications of it. You could have had a paralysis before Salk. There were a lot of illnesses. They were affected like this for centuries. So here is all disappeared now. All those sicknesses what -- how should I say, inclined to be fail, they are all disappearing. So we live longer, all of us. But this concept what in a way you know. It was with us like this. The other people be the same. Put on the same people They feel the same way.

Q: What made you decide to give your testimony?

A: I never wanted to give it because it's not realistic. Nobody will believe you that you traveled three weeks in a wagon in winter. Until Australia it's your opinion. It's a big difference.

Q: So are you saying you didn't want to give it because you didn't think you would be believed?

A: In a way yes.

Q: Because who could believe that it happened?

A: ____. Couldn't visualize it. Two ladies what we met on Sunday they were longer in Auschwitz. One was from 42, one was from 43 so it was a long time. The breakdown of the facilities in Auschwitz was only in 44. So they to me they are heroines. To you probably it will be there but I look at them as extraordinary.

Q: What made you decide to give your testimony now?

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A: Only because of Philip. That's the only way you know. It's not a reason.

Q: So you thought before in a way because who would believe you?

A: In a way yes

Q: So now you are giving it, do you feel that you have been able to tell it in the way --

A: It went. Oh yes up to a certain extent. The details might come out within the time that I'll be, there's something missing I don't know.

Q: Are you saying that you've said all the details as you remember them?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You haven't not said certain things?

A: There is nothing to add on. I mean there is no, with such a testimony we have to glare on those things what matter. It's important but how many people give these testimonies? How many?

Man (off camera): Over 500 here in Melbourne.

A: Here? Already? So mine must be not exceptional. Mine must be the same like others. Mine would have to be the same as others. So.

Q: Everybody has their own.

A: There is different. There still are a lot of people living here who were camp people. But most will not probably tell anything. I don't know. I don't talk to them.

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Q: Is there anything else that would like to add now that might have come to you as we were talking?

A: No. I thought first when I come to Auschwitz, I'd be there for a year, six months. I looked up to those people in Auschwitz. They are all survivors. They are all the same in Theresien. I was one of the top survivor. Because I had food and I have work. So if you are like this you realize you are not those people in the same room. I was really amazed what those people could still do.

Q: Is there any message you would like to add? To the end of the tape?

A: I would like to make sure that this doesn't repeat itself. If I could, but I can't. That's all. There is a similar thing in Europe, intolerance of other people's rights. That's the only thing. In Germany is in the language itself it's define your right. There is no discussion. It's a fact, sort of accompli in Germany. The same as they decided that only German citizens can be Jews to die. If I want to get a German passport, I can apply. And those people born in Germany they get automatically. The German citizenship. If you are a Turk, you never get it. Even the servant so here you are. That's the Germans. And they claim they are very liberal. If you tell this to Germans, this, it is like that. There is nothing to change. This approach the English don't understand the German way of thinking.

Q: Thank you.

A: That's it.

(end)