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### Interview Transcript Title Page

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<b>Ref. no:</b>	166

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Bright
<b>Forename:</b>	Frank
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	9 October 1928
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Berlin, Germany

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	24 February 2016
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	Woodbridge
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Jana Buresova
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	2 hours 59 minutes



## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV166  
**NAME:** Mr Frank Bright  
**DATE:** 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2016  
**LOCATION:** Woodbridge, near Ipswich London, UK  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Jana Buresova

### [Part One]

[0:00:00]

*This interviewee is Frank Bright, also known as Frank Brichta, and the interview is at his home in Woodbridge, near Ipswich, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2016. Frank, could you tell us please something about your parents, when and where they were born, and what sort of work they were in, what their professions were?*

Right. Yes, my father was born in a village in Moravia called Vlkoš. He was one of four children; there were three boys and one girl. And...when he was eighteen he joined up, because the First World War had started. And he was captured in, on the Russian front during the Brusilov Offensive in 1915. He was taken to various prisoner-of-war camps, all of them were near the Trans-Siberian railway, on which they worked. And I've got a- I've got a photo of him. It's a postcard size...taken in Siberia, which he sent to his mother. His- He was born on a farm. His father was a farmer, and they grew, apart from anything else they had cows and they grew potatoes from which they made alcohol. He had a distillery. And... his, his father, which was my grandfather, died when my father was quite young round about when he was nine, of cancer. He, he, he died in Vienna, in a- in a sanatorium. And that is when I try to search for my grandfather, the search came to an, to an end round about 1907 because they lost touch, because he wasn't there anymore. But his mother, Theresa carried on the farm. Presumably she had a manager. And when the First World War broke out, the Austrian Army requisitioned their horses - everybody's horses, and the people who looked after them, the

farm hands. And therefore the farms couldn't be ploughed or seeded or harvested and that is one reason why in the end they lost the war, because they had no food. So he sent this postcard to an address, to her address in Vienna. He, they must have corresponded before through the Red Cross or whatever similar organisation, because he knew her address in Vienna. They- During the Russian Revolution, starting in October 1917, they were nominally free.

[0:03:36]

Obviously they had been, prisoners of the Tsarist Army, but they didn't want to go back. They didn't want to- They were Czechs and they didn't want to go back to fight for Austria. And they were wedged in between... in between the Whites and the Reds during the civil war. And as the Reds advanced, and the Whites retreated, they got, they, they... moved further and further east. Having worked on the Trans-Siberian Railway, they got hold of an armoured train. And they moved this, in this armoured train all the way to Vladivostok which is at the far end- It's the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway and you can't go any further. It's opposite Japan. And that's where he landed, or they landed in 1920. I've got copies of the documents where he applied for Czech citizenship, and to join the Army somehow. I don't know whether he had joined them before. And so I, I, I know the details. He... he was returned to Europe on a, an American war ship. And... they went through the Suez Canal, and landed in Trieste and he went to Vienna, to stay with his mother. Through some family connections, he was asked to be a representative of a Viennese bank in Berlin, and he joined this bank. It was a, a small, private Jewish bank called Sigmund Pincus in Unter den Linden 49. I, I, I went there several times. And he- he left his employment with the Viennese branch - of the family, I suppose -and joined that firm as an employee of that firm. And he progressed, and he was made a *Prokurist* which, he had the *Prokura*, which means he had the power to sign for the chief. He was their representative at the, the exchange. At the stock exchange. He did the annual accounts, and he got the clients. And he more or less ran the shop. So, that was my father. Now what we have to remember is that he had applied in Vladivostok for Czechoslovak citizenship, so he wasn't a German Jew. He was a - a foreigner; he was a Czech Jew. And that meant that after 1933, the anti-Jewish laws and restrictions didn't, strictly speaking, apply to us. I mean they - they did apply. We - we couldn't avoid them. That is to say, all our friends and relatives - who, those who were Jewish, they obviously suffered from them. But strictly speaking we didn't. But it, it didn't

mean that I could have theoretically started in a German primary school but that would have been utterly crazy since they were all members of the Hitler Youth. And so I started in a Jewish school.

**[0:07:35]**

Going back to my mother, she... she was born in 1892, and she had a twin, Fritz. Their father died when they were nine years old. Their father was Emmanuel. He was a bank clerk. They were in those days, people who sat on high chairs and added up- added up figures. And he disliked his job intensely. At the same time, the pay was very low, and this meant that he had no life insurance when he died. And grandmother couldn't afford to keep the twins so they were farmed out to orphanages. Fritz went to one for boys, and Toni, that was my mother, went to one for girls. Fritz went to a Jewish one, which I think was called the 'Auerbach'. Yes, my mother- I don't think they found a Jewish orphanage for girls. So she was put into a Protestant one. Fortunately, they were not anti-Semitic, they were anti-Catholic, so from that point of view she was all right. They both received an excellent education. My uncle Fritz was fluent in Latin and Greek, and my mother was fluent in English and French and also in typing and shorthand. And that's- once she finished school or orphanage she joined an insurance company as an interpreter between Japanese clients and her German supervisors, using English as an intermediary language.

**[0:09:44]**

That was 'The Alliance'. It's still going very strong, and not being particularly friendly. 'The Alliance', later, after 1933 insured concentration camps. So they knew full- They sent their representative there once a year so they knew full well what was happening. Anyway, my mother joined the Civil Service during the First World War. She took the place of somebody who...who was at the front. After when the war ended, she joined another insurance company called 'The Victoria of Berlin'. She married my father in 1927, and then became a housewife and mother. We- we all lived together. Fritz had started work as an office-boy at the 'Dresdner Bank' which is one of the larger German banks. And he worked his way up to become a Director. So he...And as his income was quite good, he had a villa built in Berlin, on the outskirts. And- For his wife, and his children of that marriage, for his sister and her husband, that would be my father and any children of that marriage. And their mother. They

were now all together again. And I've got photographs of myself of, in the garden, my father holding me as a baby, my- the same for my mother. And me on the veranda - there was a large veranda for some unknown reason – in, in uniform. One was as a postman, and one was as a railway ticket- collector. The point of that was everybody was in uniform, even the toy-makers... made uniforms, even if they were not necessarily military ones. But you got used to the idea that you wore uniform. And I've got pictures of myself wearing them. The... In 1933, it became pretty obvious that Uncle Fritz might lose his job, and we...we left the villa, and moved into apartments. Not again, we kept pretty close together, just one street apart. And that was where we stayed till 1938, when we sold up, and moved to Prague.

**[0:13:19]**

*Sorry, may I stop you there just a moment, and go back to your early childhood in Berlin?*

Right, yes, yes.

*And what your memories are or were of the changing situation?*

Right. I did get ahead of myself. The, when I was four years and two months, that was when the Nazi Party took over absolute power. And the first things that I remember, are the very anti-Semitic cartoons at street corners. They were part of a newspaper called 'Das Schwarze Korps' and 'Der Beobachter', and similar papers, all propaganda. And they would show a, a, a terribly ugly Jew, really ridiculous! Either wearing a Russian Army cap, or a top hat covered in the American flag. In other words, what they were trying to say was that the Jews were Bolsheviks – which was the name for Communists in those days - or they were Capitalists. And they all had it in for Germany, and they were doing absolutely terrible things apparently to very innocent-looking... German youth. I realised, even then, that this was the other way around. That the German youth did terrible things to quite innocent Jews. I also remember the sign at every bar and café, restaurant, and hotel, "Juden unerwünscht" - "Jews not wanted". And I also remember when my mother took me to visit her friends and relatives, they would talk in quiet tones. But children have antennae, you know, they...they aren't as stupid as they look. They, they more or less guessed what was going on. And they would be talking for instance about another case of a woman who received the ashes of her husband in a cardboard box, for which she had to pay postage. He had been taken to a concentration

camp – in those days it was Dachau and Oranienburg - and he was killed there and cremated. And what she got was the ashes.

[0:16:01]

And that, I've- I've got a book by a...who became a cartoonist, and he describes exactly the same. Quite an interesting chap actually. And he- because he and his brother also went to the same Jewish school that I went although all he had was one Jewish grandmother. So he was – he was sort of more German than he was Jewish, but he couldn't stand his German school. It was just too awful.

*Were you afraid- did you...?*

Well I wore, as a talisman, a Czechoslovak flag in my lapel, which we all did, which showed that we were- that we were foreigners! And, I remember the, one of the clerks in my father's office, asked my parents could I come to see them. They had no children, and they lived on the outskirts of Berlin. And so I went! And they were a very nice German couple. But there was also a, the Army did exercises nearby. And somehow I went there, and I talked to them, and I was a little blond boy. And I didn't look Jewish at all! And they showed me how to take a rifle apart, and put it together again. And what they call a *Gulaschkanone*, which is their mobile...sort of cook-house. It's a large battery really, with heating and a chimney which you can, which is hinged, you can tilt it down. And...And then – I don't know – they, they became a bit for my liking, too friendly. So I said, "I'm a Czech." Oh! They had shown these secrets to a, to a foreigner, so they told me not to tell anybody, and let me go. [half-laughs] So that was my connection with the German Army. Quite early on, oh, I must, I can't have been more than five. Because at six-and-a-half in April, 1935, I – I started school. The...the *Jüdische Reformgemeinde Schule* at in the Joachimsthaler Street, which is off the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. It is now an old people's home. It was an- It had been an old people's home. It, it wasn't a school at all; it had a very large theatre, an *Aula*, as we called it - we spoke Greek in those days - with sloping seating, and a proper stage and an organ. We had to lift the organ, the bellows, up. It was very large. We had to lift it up then and let go and that would make the organ work. And our teacher would play. He was an extremely gifted man. And... I know that- I know now, that my first year teacher - and I've got to think of her name; I can't think of it at the moment - committed suicide around about 1941. And

my second and third-year teacher, Erich Spiel...Spielberg or Spielbaum, I can't quite remember, had to do forced labour once the school had been closed, which would be around July 1942. All schools were closed then. And he had to do forced labour for a Berlin removal outfit. And he, he was getting on in years, and German furniture is very heavy, it's very big and extremely heavy, made of hard wood. And so he was unsuited for that and he was deported to Auschwitz around about March 1943, and that was the end of him too.

[0:20:50]

*Do you know why your first teacher committed suicide?*

Because she didn't want to be sent east. She realised... She realised what the destination was. Quite a number of people did. Just to intervene for a moment. Lately, I've got a picture of *Stolpersteine*: these little, little brass plates some people put at the front of the houses in which you used to live. And a couple did that. They traced all the people who had lived in their particular house, or block. And my Uncle Fritz and his wife had a furnished room there. And... they wrote a farewell letter to their son Ernest, who was in England and had arrived here on a Kindertransport. And it is quite clear that they know what was in store. They say, "We shall never see you again." And that was May, May 1942.

*That's very striking, because it contrasts with what so many Czechs in the former Czechoslovakia did not seem to realise.*

That's right.

*Yes.*

Yes. Berliners did. In fact, I've got some, some kind of Jewish newspaper cut-outs where somebody from Riga, sent to Riga, somehow managed to get a letter to his Berlin friends. And he says how, how dreadful it is. So people knew if they were either sent to Auschwitz which was really later. They were at first sent to places like Riga and Lodz and also places like that. Or... Treblinka. They did- they did know. They had a pretty good idea anyway, because say from the letter my uncle and aunt left to be delivered after the war to their son. It says it explicitly.



[0:23:22]

Anyway, I'm going back to... I'm at school... The, the teacher who committed suicide, I found a boy – he wasn't a classmate, but - he was a pupil at the school, who went underground, known as an *Unterseeboot*, a U-boat. You know, he- he realised that they were coming for him and he survived. And he went to New York in '45. And he said he was at her funeral. So it, you know, and he had said she took an overdose, so, because she didn't, she wanted to take her own life, rather than have somebody else take, take - take hers.

*How did you and your parents then move from Berlin to the former Czechoslovakia?  
And were you aware of the discussions?*

Well we- no, not really. They obviously- what I cannot understand is why they went to Prague, because it was far too near if you look on the map. It wasn't far enough. But they did. I can't query it now, I don't know, but they certainly did. My father had this brother there, Oswald. Oswald played a sort of important part in as much as he was married to a Slovak Catholic divorcee, whose sister had married a officer in the Czech Army. And... through... Yes, that's right, whose daughter from her first marriage had married a Czech officer and whose sister had married a Captain in the Czech Army. So we had connections to Czech society. Although we'd just arrived, we had connections to people who could occasionally provide a bit of food. We obviously had to – had to pay for it, whatever.

*And that was 1938?*

That was- we- my mother and I went first. My father stayed behind, to wind up the firm which was Aryanised, in other words, taken over by Germans. And he didn't appear until August. We went around about June, July, and we stayed in a cheap boarding house. I spoke no Czech at all. I had, strangely enough, my father thought it would be a good idea if I'd learn Czech in Berlin. Which was pretty difficult. He found a man who was Czech, and who would teach me Czech. But he had very old-fashioned textbooks and you learned all about chickens and goats and what a horse...how horses would look, you... all about agriculture.

*And Czech is not an easy language.*

**[0:26:55]**

It wasn't. And you know, the strange thing was, he also taught Czech to the German Police. To the Berlin Police. Now why would the German Police want to learn Czech? Well only because they knew they were going to occupy it. And that- it didn't seem to click at the time, but that's what it was. So... Yes, we, we went first. We stayed in a boarding house until my father arrived. Not far from where we stayed, was a library which had German books, so I read a book a day which ruined my eyes. And...but it was quite interesting. But we didn't know anybody. We didn't, speak to anybody, mix with anybody. Prague was getting very full of refugees from Germany, and later from Austria. My father arrived, but it can't have been much before November. He immediately joined the Army. They had a short call-up during the Munich Crisis. The Munich Crisis was all around us, right from the beginning when we arrived, near enough. It was pretty dismal, because the Czechs were not invited. Everybody else made up their fate. And if- we knew – Jews certainly did, so did the Czechs - what the Germans were capable of. And so that was a pretty depressing time, apart from not having a home, really. They had - the Czechs had a short call-up; it only lasted a fortnight. But my father joined up.

**[0:26:55]**

*At [inaudible] Hall?*

Yes, and... he was released. And he arranged for the... letting of a small apartment. A small flat, in a newly built block which was empty, in, in the district of Libeni - or Karlin -now it's changed. It was a reinforced concrete block of flats, six stories high. We were on the fifth floor; we had a small balcony. It was only a one-bedroom flat. They were all very small, and because it was empty, and because it was small, and because it was relatively cheap, there were altogether six Jewish families moved in. Five from the Sudeten, and...and us, from Berlin. I'm the only survivor. The downstairs, the family Bloch, whose son had just qualified as a doctor, or strictly speaking, he had attended the German Charles [Ferdinand] University. And the Germans were already in charge, whether the German Army had moved in or not. And they prevented him from taking his finals. But he, to all intents and purposes, he was a qualified doctor. And he survived, because he was a doctor. And he...he went to Israel and

became, joined the Army, and became a psychologist in the Army. I think the Israeli Army must be the only one that employs psychologists. And then he had an offer of a visa to America. Now he had applied in 1939; that's when he needed it. And the offer came through fifteen years later. So... Meantime his parents had perished of course. And he did go, and he did, he became quite famous as a psychoanalyst in Los Angeles. And that's where all shrinks go. And he died a few years ago. And it is his widow which came to see me here in this room. Because I'm the last link. I knew him and could tell her about him. She made a documentary about his life. [half laughing] Anyway. You know, it gets involved, my story.

**[0:31:39]**

*How did your life in Prague compare with your life back in Berlin at that particular moment in time? Were you aware of... Were you attacked in Berlin? Were you physically harmed?*

No... No, we were not attacked in Berlin. What you did was, if you saw two brown shirts coming along in the opposite direction, you went to the other side of the street. You tried to avoid them. And in, in Prague, no. We lived in a Czech area. The Czechs were neutral. They were not particularly keen on Jews, but because we were... hunted by the Germans so we were more or less 'the enemy of your enemy is my friend'. But they didn't go that far. They were neutral. They were neutral for several reasons. They had lost confidence in Democracy. They had been sold down the Swanee in 1938-39. The Munich Crisis had made way for the Communist takeover, because as I say, the Czechs had lost confidence. All the democracies that had said they would help her in that they had pacts - military and diplomatic - suddenly disappeared.

*Yes, because it was at Munich that France, Italy and Britain...*

Yes.

*... agreed to cede the Sudetenland. That's where...*

Yes, that's right. That's right, and they gave away a stretch of country that wasn't theirs to give away in the first place. And of course as the Sudeten are surrounding Bohemia it was like a- I got a map of it actually which shows if very clearly. It was like a crocodile's mouth

open, that only had to shut. You know, it surrounded Bohemia completely! So I then- I learned Czech. My father found a student who spoke no German at all and I learnt Czech. I learnt the words, the grammar, the exceptions, the rules. And... I got pretty fluent; I had a very large vocabulary. That's because I had a large vocabulary in German, I therefore could have a large vocabulary in Czech.

*Was this private tuition?*

Yes, yes.

*Did you go to- did you attend a Czech school at all?*

No, not at all. I couldn't first because I didn't speak Czech, and I couldn't later, because the Germans had taken over and you couldn't. So I started at the Jewish school. Now the Jewish school had strictly speaking been mainly empty. It was known as a religious school, although it wasn't really. But it was nothing much. And in- eventually it got overcrowded, because A, Czech Jewish children had to leave their Czech schools and came to us. There were many refugee children from Germany, Austria and the Sudeten. There wasn't enough room, and we worked as it were, in two shifts. That is to say, we either attended morning or afternoon, and so that one classroom did for two classes. We didn't learn anything. We didn't learn very much at all! It is possible that the Germans decided on the syllabus, and they were not interested in having educated Jewish children whom they were going to kill anyway. Which they proceeded to do. We did German. We had to do that, because we had to learn to obey their orders. But that was my mother-tongue after all. We did Czech, which I'd just learned, so that was of no interest. We did a little bit of geography on the rivers of Bohemia. And because I had no connection with that country really, I wasn't that interested. But, you know, you know a little bit about the rivers. And that was about it. We learnt no Hebrew, which I, would have liked to. We had started to learn Hebrew in Berlin. I still can read - read either the written or the printed version. And, and then gradually the children in my class would disappear. And we got used to that. They were just- they wouldn't turn up! They were, they were deported.

**[0:36:57]**

*Did you realise why they were not coming or did you discover that later?*

Oh yes, we knew transports were...were the in-thing. They were constantly... There's a long-I've got a long list of transports from Prague to various extermination camps at first. And then to Auschwitz.

*And when did those transports...when did you start to be aware of the children disappearing? Roughly?*

Well...Well it would be...I can give you the exact figures. They, that would be 1942, probably. The first five transports went to the ghetto of Lodz – 1,000 men, women and children on each. And something like 273 survived. And after that, everybody went to Theresienstadt, or Terezin, in Czech... At frequent intervals. Terezin wasn't really a ghetto, it was a transit camp. Because from there, again, at frequent intervals, you had transports that went to extermination camps, and Auschwitz later. Strangely enough although the proportion is very small, if you were sent to an extermination camp, then that was it. Out of say, 2,000 people, if two survived, it was much, or one, or zero. But if you went to Treblinka, it was zero. Once you started- they started being sent to Auschwitz, the proportion of survivors increased actually, for the simple reason that Auschwitz was not just an extermination camp; it was also a labour camp. And it was a distribution camp, where those who survived the selection on arrival, would be sent to other camps, outside, some in and some outside the orbit of Auschwitz. In other words, I was sent to a camp which was run strictly by the concentration camp of Groß-Rosen. So the property in our bodies was transferred from Auschwitz to Groß-Rosen on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 1944. And I've got the record of it.

**[0:39:44]**

*But, may we- may we go back?*

Yes, I have to – yes, I'm going ahead of myself again. Yes, children would disappear... and we... The, the- I got a class photo that still showed, that was- that would be taken in May, 1942. And that was still a full class, although some had already left. They're obviously not on that picture, because they had already gone. And. But I chased most of them with the help of two other survivors of the class. And... Most of, most of those who perished, would perish

within a few weeks after the photo was taken, yes, except for one boy who was on my transport, to Auschwitz. And who went to somewhere else, not to the camp I went to, to somewhere else. He went on a death-march and he died. But most of them died quite shortly afterwards, within a few weeks.

*While you were in Prague, still in Prague...*

Yes?

*...how did your parents live?*

**[0:41:14]**

Ah, that's quite simple. No mysteries. He, my father, once we had arrived, once we had established ourselves in that very small flat, he had nothing to do. He was a very gregarious man. He liked company, he was easy-going and he made friends very easily. And therefore he realised, and he went to the centre of Prague and he saw all those refugees milling around. Not knowing what to do with themselves, they had no money, they had nowhere, really, to stay. It was pretty grim. So he went to what was then the... Jewish authority which later became the *Ältestenrat*, or the ...something with elders; the... I don't know what you call it. And, and he said, "Look, here I am. I've got a bit of money from Berlin therefore I, I, I don't need a salary or wages. But I'm fluent in Czech and German. I know the Germans extremely well. Have you got any use for me?" And they said, "Wonderful. You're just the fellow we're looking for." Because they were overwhelmed. I mean they simply had run an orphanage and an old people's home... A funeral service, and this was about it. And so now suddenly they had to look after thousands and thousands of refugees. And pay them a little bit of pocket money, find them somewhere to stay. And after all the Germans had moved in on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1939, which was pretty soon after we'd arrived, really. And so he worked for the *Ältestenrat*. He, as he was rather efficient, they made him a, they put him in charge of a department. And so, he had a job. My mother didn't. She just stayed at home which was a bit unfortunate and she didn't know anybody, and she never learnt Czech. And she was on her own when I went to school. What I do- do remember, is the assassination of Heydrich. He was shot. He- this is typical really. The, the British SOE sent two Czechs, dropped two Czechs via parachute, to assassinate him. You see, the resistance was so minimal in Bohemia,

that they couldn't find anybody locally. They had to actually find somebody in England, to be parachuted back. And he was assassinated. And the reprisals were awful! It just wasn't worth the candle. I mean...Not only was a whole village decimated, they shot all the men of, of Lidice, which was a village. They took the women to concentration camps. They killed the children. A few they sent to Germany, to be with families, to be brought up as German.

*Yes, they looked German.*

They looked German. I've got a picture of the monument there, which is really moving. And my friend Kurt Hirschman, and his mother, were sent on a transport, directly to Poland and shot on arrival. They obviously had nothing to do with it. They were not – they were not sent to Theresienstadt first. This was the only transport that was sent directly to Poland, as a result of the, of the assassination. Two Gestapo men came to our flat, and asked where was I at the time. But obviously my mother had always been indoors. And I think I was on my way to-from school. And I didn't look as if I had a gun on me. And so they left, but they had to do their, to tick their box. [half-laugh] They looked typically - typically Gestapo men. They didn't wear uniform. They wore in civvies. But they all wore the same outfits, and the same raincoat and the same hat! And you know, you could see them from a mile. That was one aspect of it. Another aspect was that there were synagogues. Now we know that at Kristallnacht the synagogues were all burnt down in Germany and Austria. But that was before they marched in-into Bohemia. Therefore, we had synagogues, which were then used as store houses for the loot they got from the, the flats, houses, and you know apartments of people who had been deported. But to give you an example, my, one of my teachers asked my father would he mind if he prepared me for Bar Mitzvah.

**[0:46:58]**

And... My father didn't really care. And he said, "Yes, if you want to, go ahead." And so, I was on very good terms with my teacher, Dr Glunberg...a Doctor in Oriental languages. And so I went to see him, and he, as I say, I could read anyway so it was just a matter of reading a bit faster. And I remember that, it was Isaiah, 'Nachamu, nachamu ami...' ...I can recite it now. And... the day came, and they got cold feet. The organisers got cold feet because there were things like Razzias. Razzias is where a group of Jews would congregate, the Gestapo would appear, arrest them all, and they would never be seen again. Razzia is an

Italian word: R-A-Z-Z-I-A. And so they got cold feet, so nothing forward, so I had to learn a second portion. Again, Isaiah, and again I can recite it more or less. And that was to be held again, at a synagogue of course. And they got cold feet again. They were afraid that the Gestapo would hear of it, and they would disappear. So I had to learn a third one, and the third time lucky. But that wasn't held at a synagogue. That was held at a prayer room; this was the '*Shtiebel*' as they called it, from the German '*Stube*'. And, and they were only the right, minimum number - ten - around. People I didn't know, apart from my teacher. My father wasn't there. And no, I can't remember the third one. I'm gonna look it up one day. So, the, the, the atmosphere was one of fear. Apart from that, of course, we were also subjected to prohibitions and rules and ...discriminations, apart from having to wear a star. We had to hand in before we were deported, things that the Army needed which was anything from, from cameras to bicycles to woollens to typewriters to sewing machines. It's quite a long...long- And musical instruments, including gramophones and records. So my life was without music, altogether. You, you could whistle; that was about it. And... We could only shop during two hours in the afternoon, the afternoon was significant because things that were off the ration had already gone, and that was the idea, of course; there was nothing left. Our rations were far, far smaller than anybody else's. We had no allocation of fruit, or fish. Meat. We got no shaving soap. No soap, strictly speaking, at all. We couldn't go to a hairdresser. Hairdresser wasn't permitted to visit us. We couldn't get onions, vegetables only in season. But again, because they had all gone by the afternoon, there was quite a long list of what we didn't get. I've got the dates and when things became unavailable to us, in other words it was not in our ration book. To start, particularly clothing. We had no clothing coupons. Now, children did grow, although they did grow more slowly because of lack of food, et cetera, they did grow. And, and there were people who did have the clothing of their elder siblings or elder sons and daughters, whom, which they could have handed down. But they had signs that they wouldn't ...that they wouldn't do away, or do anything with their own property. That's because the Germans wanted to make sure that what- let's start again: Everybody had to fill in a form giving every detail of their property, from the number of cups and saucers, to knives and forks to spoons, to, to frying pans, to saucepans, to ironing boards, to irons, to jackets, to shoes and socks, to chairs and tables and display cases. The, the lot. It was a very detailed form. So the Germans wanted to know what sort of loot they could expect. And... So, because you had signed that you were not going to dispose of your own property, they hesitated. They said, "Oh, maybe they'll check. Once we are deported and they empty our flat, they will check against the list we made." Of course that didn't happen. They



just- people just came in, took the lot, got out as quickly as possible. And these goods were distributed to, to, to quite a number of - it was fifty in the end - store-rooms. They had store rooms for electrical appliances, and for pictures, and for lino and for carpets. And you know, they each had- it was extremely well organised. So that didn't always work. You see, although people had clothing that was larger and it was difficult to get hold of.

**[0:53:26]**

*Yes. Were the shops open on a Sunday?*

No, no.

*Not on a Sunday?*

No, no. We had to use ordinary shops, and they were there Monday till Saturday. You, you worked a six-day week then. And everything was open six-day week, but not on Sunday.

*Thank you.*

Now, where was I? We, we, we had this - because we had no fruit, no fish, and very few vegetables, we lacked vitamins and minerals. And that meant we were susceptible to infections. We had no resistance. The body had lost all resistance which normally, I don't know, you... you would rub your neck on your shirt you would lose a hair, you would know! But in those days, we...we got inflammation. We had, we, we suffered from, you know, lumps of inflamed tissue, where a hair had been removed. Bacillus would enter, which were after all, all around us. The body had no resistance, so it would get inflamed. And I remember having a huge one under my arm. And you, you would use hot compresses to what they call 'ripen it' and then squeeze it out. And that would heal...the next one would, would... appear. There was a case when my school had been closed. All Jewish schools in all occupied Europe had closed on the same day. My father got me a job on the...

*[Interjecting] Which day was that when the Jewish schools were closed?*

Well I'm not sure. I think it was June, but it could have been July. I, I... There is a- the dates are available; I'm not quite sure. I had a few weeks of private tuition. There was a fellow who worked in my father's office, and his daughter, they got together, and one of my teachers, the one who survived, taught us. That's the first time and the only time I started to learn Latin. And, and but the Germans got wise to that so they prohibited private tuition – as well.

**[0:56:11]**

*And in which year was that please?*

That would be '43, that would be July-August. And I started work on a cemetery. Now the climate there is quite hot and humid, and I was hoeing, barefoot. I had taken my sandals off and I lost my concentration for a second, and I hoed into my toe. Now, all right, you bleed a little bit. Normally you know, you would wash it out and that would be the end of it, but it wasn't. I began to feel queasy. So I went home. It was a very long walk, but I managed it. And I went upstairs and I said, I went to bed. I asked my mother to draw the blinds because light hurt me. And my father, when my father got home, he phoned the doctor. That's, that was another difficult aspect where we were exceptions. Jews were not allowed to have telephones. Doctors did, but that was in case of an epidemic so the Germans could get hold of them. But Jewish subscribers – there were no Jewish subscribers to telephones. And neither could you use a public telephone, so you were cut off. But as it so happened, it, this block of flats was new, and there was a telephone for the tenants, downstairs in the entrance hall. So my father used that. And he phoned a doctor whom, somehow he knew, Teitelbaum his name was. He died in the ghetto, and I happen to have his death certificate, or copy of. And he came. Now he couldn't use a taxi, because you were not allowed to use taxis. And he couldn't use public transport, because we weren't allowed to use public transport.

*Not even in the area, part of...?*

Not at all. So he had to walk from where he lived in the centre of Prague, to where we lived on the outskirts. And he had to carry his bag. Now from the description of, of my symptoms that my father gave him, he had a *Ampulle*, , a glass container on him, of thiazole. I was very interested in those days in pharmaceutical chemistry. And I remembered thiazole. And I had an inflammation of the skin over the brain, under the skull. That's why light hurt me, and

because I had no resistance. And it pulled me around because the injection goes straight into the blood stream. If you take a tablet, and for that you had to go to the chemist- You could only go in the, in the afternoon, and things like that. It would take much longer; by that time, I wouldn't be around anymore. So the injection saved me. And again, deviating, strangely enough, I've got a email from Russia, ...from Stalingrad, or what was Stalingrad. It was the great-nephew of that doctor. Who sent me pictures of him as a young man in Vilna. They came from Lithuania. You know. It's a small world. But he died of typhus; the doctor died of typhus. And I wanted to verify that what I'd remembered was the thing. And that it was a sulphamide. And that it was dioxydiaminosulphonimidothiazole, which sounds a long formula. And I wrote to the Swiss pharmaceutical firm about ten years ago, "Did I get that right?" And they said, "Yes, that's it." It's amazing the sort of nonsense one remembers if you're keen.

*So you were very fortunate to have that injection.*

**[1:00:38]**

And...so, that was it. And later on, fellow pupils from my class, also started to work on a cemetery, but was very short. It was a short while. It was in spring of 1943, and they disappeared. But at least I was not on my own. At one time I was the only apprentice as it were, working there as a young man. Of course the people working there, dealt with dead bodies all the time, and they would have great fun asking me, "Could you help with this corpse?" You know. "He's quite stiff as a board, you know. You just get hold of the feet and you helped them along. It was something unusual for a boy of fourteen or thirteen.

*It must have been dreadful for you...*

Well, you do it! You see it being done; you do it! And...well I suppose I was also asked by my father, could I help with taking the luggage of people being deported. That was taking place at night, so it wouldn't be seen. They would... The *Ältestenrat* would organise it. They would hire- You had horses, you didn't have lorries, you had horses. Removal van. And... you would help with loading the one piece of luggage, people were allowed to take, and you would go from one house to the next. And you'd do that at, at night. I didn't do anything really. I can't remember really helping. I was sitting up there with the driver, facing the rear-

end of a horse, or horses. [half laughs] But that's what I did at times, too. So what - what was significant was that we had very little food. ...Occasionally my father would get something on, on, on the black market. I remember he once got a kid, a small, you know, it was quite small, but you had no refrigeration. That was unheard of. So it was a bit on the off-side by the time we got it. But what you did was, you got from the chemist... super-permanganate. Super-permanganate is a red crystal. It's  $K_2MNO_4$ . It's manganese but it has four atoms of oxygen, and if you dissolve it in water, you liberate the oxygen. And that would get over, in a way, the ...the signs of, of, of the thing not being as fresh as it, as it should be. You know, you tried all sorts of things. We also had some coffee. Green coffee, which we'd taken along from Berlin. Now it was difficult to roast. We had a gas cooker, and we had a little gadget to roast them in, which was a cylinder which you could open, put your coffee in, shut it. You rotated it over the gas fire, and when the skin of the bean started to float out of that little container you knew you were ready. It was an excellent thing, but it was dangerous because it smelt lovely. And everybody, you know if you had an open window everybody would know you were roasting coffee. And that was highly dangerous. You know, you were not supposed to have it. You know, things like that that impinged on your mind. You had to constantly bear in mind. I remember, one day we went to visit school, class- no they were school friends really. They were not in my class. And they were the other end – the other side of Prague. And I went with a boy who - who lived in a flat on the floor above us, on the sixth floor. And we of course being silly we left it too late to leave so we were...

[1:05:26]

*Because of the curfew?*

The curfew! So we started to run, and we were completely exhausted by the time...Nobody would have taken any notice because we were in the Czech part of Prague, so there were no Germans. They wouldn't, didn't even know that a curfew existed, the people there, they couldn't have cared less. They didn't know any Jews. And- but the very idea, how, that it could be very dangerous. And so we started to run, and we were completely exhausted by the time we arrived home. Things played on your mind all the time.

*Did people feel, people around you, your fellow pupils or the adults, were they terribly depressed or demoralised by their circumstances - and you yourself?*

Yes, they were, after all, our youth wasn't ordinary youth. We'd. Our youth had been taken from us. We didn't go- we were not allowed to go to public meetings, to watch football, go to a concert, go to any meeting. We were not allowed to- into swimming pools or gym halls or any, any, any mixing with - with others. With the population at large. And so we were on our own. We – all we could think of was our own misery. You know, that you- I mean here if you were hungry you could buy a loaf of bread, but you couldn't do that. The bread ration was very small. There was no butter. There were no eggs. We got no milk. We got hardly anything! We got potatoes if- and a small ration. I remember on the cemetery I worked, people had been people there before me. They had all gone. And they had grown leeks. Now leeks, you can leave in the ground any length of time, more or less. It was winter, it was snowing; they were covered up. And I took two leeks home every day. That was our vegetable; that's all we had! Luckily, you know, I happened to come across a line of leeks which people had sown and heaped, heaped up before I arrived, and they had gone. So, yes, we, we did join Zionist organisations because we were fully aware, that unless we had a country of our own, if it ever appear, the situation would re-appear and we would still be alive, we would have somewhere to go. Because we were only too conscious of the fact that nobody had wanted us. The Americans had wanted affidavits, and all sorts of visas which came far too late. And, well, the fact was, nobody wanted us. And even if you had gone to France or Belgium or Holland, the Germans had caught up with you in any case. Switzerland would only have you if you were a millionaire. And there weren't many of those. And Israel, don't forget was, was prohibited area. The British government decided to stop all immigration as a result of the Arab revolt of 1936, '35, '36 to '38. And that was closed completely.

**[1:09:26]**

*There was a group that went to Palestine, but it was strictly restricted.*

Yes, some went- that's the point. Some went illegally. If they were caught, they were sent either- to a prison on Mauritius. And they weren't even released at the end of the war. They were not released until the state of Israel was proclaimed in 1948. And many of them died, because it was awful! It was absolutely dreadful. There were cases where people were caught, were imprisoned in Palestine, found friends there, who put down a deposit that would

buy them a visa. There is a fellow whose history I got in by correspondence with him. He lived in Wembley... who then joined the REME of the British Army. He was ...sent to Greece; he was taken prisoner there. And so there were a group of Jewish prisoners-of-war in British uniform, who were treated quite differently from any other Jews. Strange part was, that he wrote to his parents who were still in Prague, and they sent him a boiler suit and, and wellingtons, to his prisoner-of-war camp in Germany. And he became a- he was a driver; he became a lorry driver. And...anyway, he wrote his story, which was partly published in the AJR [Association of Jewish Refugees] some years ago. I've got copies of it. So to, you couldn't really go to Palestine. That was shut. We realised nobody wanted us. So we were Zionists for the simple reason that we knew that the Germans didn't want us, the Austrians didn't want us. The Czechs didn't really care. So Zionism was the only answer.

**[1:11:42]**

*Did any Czechs ever help you...Jewish or otherwise?*

Not...not really. No, we had these relatives by marriage, who would occasionally help us with food, but they would in return would get a... Turkish carpet or a gold coin or something valuable. You know, you exchanged things. In spite of the fact, we probably- My father probably hadn't put it on the list of our properties, to be able to bargain. People could do that- If they had any sense, they could do that. And they actually hid things for us. The fact that I've got my birth certificate is that was hidden among family photos, and that so-called portable typewriter which is my mother's, they hid, and I brought it to England. One of English I could never master and haven't mastered is the difference between 'bring' and 'take'. [half laughing] I'm not sure whether I took it to England or brought it to England.

*Don't worry.*

So they did help but you know, they did ...save things for us should we return. I had to leave a lot behind which was lost, because the Communists took over, and I couldn't go back because I was still a Czech citizen. I would have had to do their National Service. It was impossible. So the people who were still hiding things for me, asked could they dispose of it, 'cause it was dangerous. I was a westerner and the Communists were entrenched. All I could do was say, "Yes." So lots of photographs which were quite interesting, of the Trans-Siberian

Railway and of the far, far east, et cetera, were lost. So the answer is, strictly speaking, yes and no. Ordinary Czechs didn't really. We didn't know enough... about them; we didn't know enough of them. You didn't really mix. You'd. It was dangerous for them, and it was dangerous for us. I mean, we had a neighbour living next to us on...on the- on the fifth floor, and we knew he was listening to the BBC. [Jana laughs] However hard we'd try, we used a saucepan and you put it against the wall, you put your ear against it, we couldn't hear it. Because he kept it very quiet. You couldn't...you couldn't hear...

*Yes. He could be shot for listening to the BBC.*

Yes, exactly, he would be...

*Because also the Czech government relayed on the BBC Radio to...*

**[1:15:01]**

Yes, but it was difficult to - to actually listen to it. We had no- it's another thing we had to hand in; the first thing we had to hand in were radios.

*Yes.*

So we weren't allowed to - to read a newspaper. To buy a Czech paper was an offence. To be found in possession of a German paper, was a - a criminal offence. Now I do remember reading one. It was called "*Das Reich*". It was on pink paper. It was very large like "The Times" in those days. And it was the very speech that Goebbels gave on, when Coventry was bombed. And he coined the word '*Coentrieren*' - 'to Coventry' - to - to, to demolish every house and building anywhere. That's what they wanted to do, and they used, because they'd done it at Coventry successfully, they would, they would just carry on doing it. And he just coined the word '*Coentrieren*' and I remember reading it. It was highly dangerous. It was the only time I read that particular paper. So we didn't really know what was going on either.

**[1:16:22]**

*Frank, you've been describing your life in Prague...*

Yes.

*At what point were you then and your family sent to Terezin or Theresienstadt in German?*

Well, we were sent on what's known as Transport Di – capital 'D', small 'i' on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 1943. We... We were told, well we knew, you could take one piece of luggage which was... like a large duffel bag. And we were told to take blankets or eiderdown, because in winter it would be cold. So most of the space in the duffel bag was taken up by an eiderdown. I... A few bits of clothing. I would have liked to have taken another pair of shoes, because the shoes I wore were getting too small. My feet were growing, but I didn't have another pair of shoes! So that solved that. Young Doctor Bloch had given me two of his chemistry books, and I took the organic one. Now I had- instead of shoes, I took a book on organic chemistry. And... well we- somebody came along to collect our luggage – our three bags - on a hand-cart. We couldn't have carried them. They, they- and it wasn't worth sending a horse and cart. He walked along; he knew the route. And it was quite a long way... to what had been an exhibition hall. And... we signed in. We handed, we handed in our keys. Our keys had to be properly marked with the address and the number of the flat. And that was when we handed in the property which had been left in the flat. And we tried to make ourselves as comfortable as possible on a concrete floor, leaning against our duffle bag. And a rumour circulated; we lived on rumours. As I said, we had no radio; we had no newspapers. We lived on rumours. Now, with a rumour, you never knew whether it was right or wrong or somebody's invention. Or whether somebody just wanted to know how quickly it would return to whoever started it. But the rumour was, that the... the, the Allies had landed on Sicily. And as it turned out it was true. And they landed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July. So it had only taken more or less three - three days to reach us, which was pretty good going. And we said of course, well, you know, that's the end of the war the Allies are now in Europe. And of course it didn't.

**[1:19:38]**

*Did it give you temporary hope though?*

Sorry, did it...?



*Did it give you temporary hope that...?*

Well, you, you always try to find some bright...background, some- something to cheer you up. There was very little of it. That was something that would cheer one up. We didn't know how the war in North Africa had gone. So the landing - landing in Sicily was good news. Although of course it took another 22 months for the war to come to an end. And most of the people in our transport didn't make it. They didn't last that long. But you know, it was something to cheer you up. And again, you didn't know was it true, or wasn't it. And you didn't know any details at all. The next morning, we were put on a train. It was not a...a, a, sort of a cattle truck. It was a third, third class compartment train, whatever the Czech railways had on hand. It had wooden slatted seats. Curved, quite comfortable. And we were taken, we, we set off in the morning, the doors were obviously locked and we arrived in the ghetto. Now, we were lucky again, because a spur line had been built... from the nearest railway station into the ghetto. They, before that, people had to walk it, which in all weathers and all conditions – with women and children and babies and old people - was pretty awful. So the Germans didn't do it for our convenience; they did it so we wouldn't be seen. These long queues of people arriving and leaving, and sometimes meeting! Some people left and arrived at the same time. The inmates of the ghetto had built a spur line right into the ghetto. So we, a door opens and we didn't know where we were. We didn't have a street map or anything. And we realised it was overcrowded; there were people milling around everywhere. And... We didn't know, we didn't know where to turn. You know- what to do. Our luggage was taken from us. We wouldn't see it for several days. That was searched for any contraband. I don't know, tobacco or something. And- but one of the one of the members of the ...again, *Ältestenrat* of the ghetto came to our rescue. And it was a pretty awkward job, because they had to know exactly where a spare place was, where either somebody had died, or somebody had been deported so it was a free space and that could be anywhere. There wasn't- there wasn't any space anywhere for my father and myself, so they put us in, onto the loft of one of the old brick barracks built in 1780 by Emperor Leopold, the son of Maria Theresa. That's why it's called Theresienstadt after his mother, you know, Theresa – Theresienstadt. And- so we were put into this loft. Now the loft wasn't meant to take in, take anybody. It wasn't designed for it: it had huge wooden beams – something you don't see any more - to support the... ceiling of the floor below. And be like a loft, you know the sort of thing. The ceiling. And there were very few windows, which were very small; after all, it was only a loft. And there were tiles so it was very hot. There was no – no insulation. The tiles

would radiate heat. In winter they would radiate cold, but we didn't, weren't there that long. Not in that particular location. We were still in the ghetto. And it had no facilities whatsoever. The washrooms and loos were on the floor below. And the floor below was overcrowded, so... the facilities weren't sufficient for the people below and with the addition of us, they most certainly weren't.

*Did the people already there resent your coming, so that it was even more crowded? How did they treat you?*

**[1:24:55]**

Well, they were jealous of us, because we had, to their way of thinking, the good life on the outside whereas they had the tough life on the inside. Now, the life on the outside may not have been that good, but to them it was, whatever it had been in reality. After all, the ghetto was not a concentration camp. You could still walk around within the town. You had your own clothes. You know, people, sometimes people say 'the concentration camp Theresienstadt' - it wasn't. It was pretty awful but it was nothing, it was nothing like it. I think they resented us in as much as we had had the good life for much longer than they had. I think that's probably the attitude which describes it best. Eventually, we were part of them. We probably resented anybody arriving after us. You know, it's always the same. We were in, in this loft. At least there was room, you know, you had your place on the floor, but there were no bunks. You couldn't possibly support it on the – on the ceiling. And you had to climb over these beams if you wanted to go to the loo below, or washroom, washroom or whatever. The Danes appeared, a consignment of Jews from Denmark. Something like 430 or so. They were put there temporarily. They were found a house, they lived amongst themselves; they didn't mix with us. They were treated much better. They were not, not sent east. They survived, they were sent home before the end of the war. But that's neither here nor there. I wasn't- we weren't part of it yet. I was sent to, to a room on the floor below, like a youth room. People my age, boys my age. And...

*Could you remind us what age you would be then, please?*

**[1:27:12]**

Yes, I can. 1942... I would be fourteen and a half. Born in October, that would be July, June, July, August... I was sent to this, they had two-tier bunks, and there were boys. And, from there, you were sent to work. That is to say, there were temporary jobs you got, wherever somebody was needed. And people were always needed, because people were being deported; there were always vacancies, you know, that had to be filled with people who had just arrived. And because I'd worked in a garden, I volunteered or was sent to- to a garden, a vegetable garden. The produce was for the German administration. I wasn't very keen. I somehow- I knew it all, I mean, I knew how to dig and to rake and to plant and to water and to... Whatever is needed to raise things from seeds and seedlings, transplant. I wasn't very keen. I also suffered from hay-fever, and therefore, being in the open- it was outside the ghetto, and the people who took us there were Czech gendarmes. It wasn't the Germans. They were Czechs.

*How did they treat you?*

**[1:28:48]**

Didn't take any notice of us, I mean they just marched on one side, you know, maybe two or three along a long column of people walking to the vegetable garden.

*Did they beat you?*

They didn't talk to us. Although obviously we spoke Czech and they did, but there was no - no connection. It saved the Germans a number of SS men as guards. They used Czechs. I then joined- I then took up work in a workshop. It was... it was a...within the walls, these walls were enormously thick and they were actually hollowed out. They were brick – brick walls covered within with earth, and they were workshops. And I worked in a metal workshop. There were workshops that worked in timber; there was somebody who sharpened knives and scissors. There was a smithy, that did all the metal ironwork for the Germans. There was an arc welder. There was a smith. My work was in the, as a locksmith. I didn't do much as a locksmith really, but that was my department. I made hinges. It's quite easy with a... You make hinges from flat pieces of metal which you curl up at the end, in a press, with a tool that you lower it and it curves up and you put two together and put a piece of round metal in between, and there's your hinge. Large and small for windows and doors. I learned

how to sharpen a drill. I helped out in the smithy, which was quite difficult. There were say, three of us hitting one piece of metal. There was the smith with the red-hot piece of iron held in tongs.

And you would hit a particular spot and you had to do it in rhythm, so you didn't hit one another or you couldn't, didn't hit the fellow who was holding it. You know, it was highly dangerous. You had to be precise: one two three, you know, one two three. That was quite nice. It was a dirty job, because when you heated things you had to quench them in, in, in oil. It was swarf, which is the bits of metal that, that, when you, when you drill, that you cut and it forms spirals known as swarf. And the metal you touch isn't, isn't clean, and we had no working clothes. We just had to work in our ordinary clothes, which didn't do much good. We waited for the food to come along which was in the form of soup. And that was really all, all we were waiting for. We didn't- they did a lot of- the workshop did a lot of work for the Germans, and also for the ghetto. Next to me were tin smiths. They did, made jugs and kettles from tinned- sheet steel. They would cut it and then bend it up and assemble it, and they, got the right shape for coal scuttle or wooden, water jugs. They were excellent craftsmen. And then soldered... Soldered all the joints. And there was a – a fellow opposite me. He was a skilled German metal craftsman from the Ruhr. He, he- it was quite amazing what he could do. He got, he got me interested in metalwork. It was unfortunate as it so happened in the end. They made anything from prams for German babies, to a, a little machine from a sewing machine to sharpen a scythe you know, cuts corn. Quite amazing things, we made.

**[1:33:51]**

And I did that for some time. We took it in turn to get the food, which we collected from a central place in insulated containers. And once it was my turn, they always gave you a bit more so you wouldn't run out of it. You had a big ladle. And everybody had their own little... little, little cup or saucer, plate, dish. And I had a little bit left- left over. I rushed with it to my mother. She had no means of heating it. It had got cold by then. We didn't have any forms of heating really – there was nothing. So she ate it cold, and had an- she suffered an attack of the, gallbladder or something like that, and they rushed her to hospital. So my good ideas turned ugly, you know. A shame, really. But, she needed the food, but it was just too much for the system, or not warmed or something. My father found a job on a... a- on a- like a timber yard. We used a lot of timber to make, make furniture and beds, bunk beds or things like that. Doors. So we used to- and he, it reminded him of his days in Siberia. And of course,

he soon realised that he couldn't spend more calories than he took in, so he had to slow down. There was then a time when the ghetto *Wache*, which is the ghetto police, were all sent to Auschwitz. We didn't know at the time why; they were all young people, who stupidly enough, drilled. They, they drilled to commands, you know, instead of just taking it easy. And the Germans felt threatened by them. Also, and we didn't know that, there had been the Warsaw uprising. And this was, well- they are the very people who could maybe organise an uprising. So they sent them all to Auschwitz. That was the end of them. So they needed a new ghetto *Wache* of elderly people. My father volunteered and got a job. And it's because he was a member of the new ghetto *Wache*, we stayed there for fifteen months. We would have been sent east long before then if it hadn't been for, for that. So my father saved me, as it were, from an early transport from Prague, as well as from an early transport from the ghetto. My mother fared rather badly. She, as I said, had been on her own all day for four years in a flat. And now she was put in a room with cramped...there was no room for anything. Two floor...beds, bunk beds, among a hundred other women, who would you know, either talk in their sleep or weep or wail or cough or sneeze. There were bedbugs. It was people who were near the window wanted it shut, or away from the window wanted it open because they needed ventilation. It was absolutely ghastly for her, the change in particular and of course being surrounded by people she didn't know, and necessarily didn't, didn't care for. ...She then got a job mending sheets. So that's what she did. When you did work, whether it was like me, or whether you were a musician, or whether you were a ghetto *Wache* [*guard*], or whatever you did, you got a second meal. The second meal consisted of another portion of thin soup. But the elderly, or those who couldn't work – namely, or particularly the elderly - only got one meal. And you couldn't live on that, and they would die within four to five weeks at the most. I had an aunt from Berlin, Helen Koppel. I didn't know at the time. I, I had visited her in Berlin often with my mother. She was the sister of my grandmother, Emmi. And she arrived, and five weeks later she was dead - of starvation. So, the second meal kept you going, just about. Not more.

**[1:39:24]**

So we witnessed many transports going. I remember going to the place where they departed from, to say goodbye to my teacher, the one who perished, and the one who had prepared me for my Bar Mitzvah. And... It was our turn, at the end of...end of October...November, end of November, 1944, throughout October. I think it's from the 28<sup>th</sup> of November to the 28<sup>th</sup> of

October, 1944, something like eleven transports were sent in very quick succession. Maybe every two or three days. Anything between 1,500 and 2,500 people at a time, to Auschwitz, to make use of the gas chambers and the crematoria before they were blown up. Now, that left the ghetto half-empty, you know. It didn't, it didn't, function properly. But that didn't concern us later. It did mean that my mother found a room with just single beds. A small room. And, so she - she moved in, in, in there which was only for a week really before we were called. But on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, which was my birthday, she managed somehow, to get a packet of Oetker's - jellies. I liked- you can get Oetker's everywhere here, now. They make jellies and...things for cooking and baking. And somehow a bit of dried milk. And she knew I liked them in Berlin. We had gone to the KaDeWe, which was the *Kaufhaus des Westens*, which was a large department store, where they had these things on display. And they would always give samples to children to encourage mothers to buy some more. And I always had a sample and she would always buy some. And that was my birthday treat. And that was my last one. And shortly afterwards, we were called to be transported to the east. My father had already gone. I never said goodbye to my father. He just disappeared. It's- there's a scene in Julius Caesar where they say, "If we shall see again, so, well and good. If not, this farewell will be the final." But see, it was difficult. If you said, "Goodbye, I'll see you again." There was no point in saying it; you would see each other again. If you said, "I'm going. We shall never see each other again" -that would be a very difficult parting. So, we never met. He just disappeared.

[1:43:02]

*How do you feel now, about that? And how did you feel at the time?*

At the time, you took everything in your stride. People disappeared. You know, it happens to have been my father. You - you didn't have time to think. Things- the events were so quick. I mean when you have displaced the unit of 2,000 people every two or three days. So there was this going and maybe a bit of coming, but most of the time going. The place was being run down. The bakery- I got a job in the bakery! It was the last week, because they didn't have anybody! It wasn't very difficult but the advantage was, you got a quarter of a loaf per shift. It was great. So you wouldn't steal. That, that, that was the idea. But, it was great. I mean, you didn't have to know how to make bread; it was fully automated, really. The people who did know, there were a few who remained there. But that is how it was. I didn't have to make

hinges any ,any, any more. They asked for people to - to work in the bakery which would have been the most desirable job to have, had it been before the general... decline of the ghetto. Anyway, so, I did that for a week. And we were called to be on transport EQ, and that was a transport of 2,500 men, women and children. And- of whom 78 survived. Now, it says now 39 men, 39 women. Mothers with children did not survive. As soon as there was a woman with a small child, they would be sent to the gas chamber, because they really wanted people to work, and a child would have been a hindrance. So... I'm one of the 39 alive of transport EQ which left on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, 1944 and arrived in Auschwitz on the 13<sup>th</sup>. So on the whole, that is my life in the ghetto. Now... may I just go back to it? We... we were- I was sent down from the loft to this room for young boys of my age. We were then sent to a house. There were houses in the ghetto, not just barracks. And the houses in the ghetto had been built for those trades that supported the Army, the Austrian Army in 1780. And they would be, anything from tailors to harness- horse-harness makers, repair. Sort of saddlers and you know, people they needed. Not just soldiers, but what the soldiers needed. And they were empty so we got a room. It was very cramped. There were seven of us in a room about this size with three-storey, three-floor bunk beds. And among them, was one Paul Kling. Now, Paul Kling was a *Wunderkind* he, on the violin. He had performed with the Vienna Philharmonic at the age of seven. And he was fantastic. And because we had no music in our lives, he would practise or play something about... three feet away. There was no room, really. And it was in the Germans' interest to have musicians practice for their own nefarious purposes. They wanted to show that the ghetto was quite humane. And therefore there was music going on. And therefore any...

*There was the film wasn't there...?*

That's right, yes.

*...when the International Red Cross came, and this façade of comfort and luxury.*

[1:47:35]

That's right. Yes. And the- and he was one of the musicians. And they send, had a store of Jewish looted instruments, and they distributed some of these instruments in the ghetto. And Paul picked a good violin and a good bow. I understand that a bow is as important as a violin.

I'm no expert on that, but he was. And... So it was marvellous to hear him play. Because as I say, he, he – he was a genius and he carried on. He became concert master in Tokyo and Kentucky. And he retired as a... Professor of Music to Vancouver, the University of British Columbia. He died since. I met him in London. I then was taken ill; I suspect it was nephritis or nephritis (depending on which pronunciation you use) - inflammation of the kidneys. I had blood in my urine, or so I thought. I was rushed to hospital, to a children's hospital, or a young person's hospital. And I stayed there for a long time. They couldn't find anything wrong, but they still kept me. It was in their interest, and it was in my interest. And we had, got – because of our internal difficulties, we got white bread to eat. And I, I didn't eat much, but my parents visited me, and I would give them what I hadn't eaten. So I kept them on white bread up to a point, you know, it all helped. I was then released. And meantime I had been moved, to be with another crowd at another address, and I didn't get on with them at all. They were an absolutely awful lot. But it's all right, so what? It just made life a little bit more difficult. It was just so nice to be together with people whom you liked, because it wasn't just Paul Kling. There was Karl - can't think of his name, only his forename - who also was a genius. He knew more about mathematics and chemistry and history and politics, than I was ever to know. He knew it at the age of thirteen. His father was a brewery engineer. Now that was a great thing, because the Czechs are keen on beer. If you are an engineer, and knows all about brewing equipment, vats and you know, whatever happens before it actually matures in-into beer, it was a good job. And his parents were one of the *Prominente [famous people]*, one of the, you know, had a much better life, really. But they all perished. And he was very interesting. And what's more, that comes out later. We clubbed together, four of us. There was Paul Kling, his brother Alois, then there was... there was Karl and myself. And we asked a mathematician to give us lectures or teach us once a week, mathematics. And we paid him in bread, which was quite a- quite a thing to do, because he didn't have any. But the four of us managed. And he taught us spherical trigonometry. Now you might think that sounds absolutely fantastic, but it isn't. If you think of the earth like a sphere, which it is, and you travel from here to New York, you don't travel in a straight line. You travel along a curved line, along the sphere. And that is what spherical trigonometry is; instead of having the sum of all angles 180 degrees, it's 270. That was quite interesting. And I met this fellow again in Auschwitz. So our time came. We were on transport Eq...

[1:52:10]



*Was that with your mother then, on the transport, or did she go separately?*

No, I and my mother went together. And my father had gone separately by himself before then, about ten days earlier. Something like that.

*Did they ever feel like, or, to your knowledge...?*

Yes?

*Did you or they ever feel like taking your own life?*

No, nobody did. There were- that wasn't- I, I wouldn't know exactly but there was nobody in the ghetto who took his own life. Because we didn't know; we were told we were going to another work camp. We didn't know where we were going. We were not as well informed as German Jews, who probably would know maybe a German who would know, who would tell them. And the Germans did know. Because as I shall tell you later, the manager of a factory I worked for, had, had come into Auschwitz to select us. So the managers looking for workers actually went into Auschwitz, they knew what was going on. So they knew, they would talk possibly, you know, it wasn't... among the German population with- with which we didn't mix, really, at all, did know, very well, what was going on. Now again, we didn't go in a cattle truck. Again, it was a third-class compartment... train, wooden seats, slatted. Now the point with this – this is the important part now. It had large windows. You had a large window, and you had a narrow window with a slot at the top for ventilation. You could open it a little bit. And on, but the main window was one piece. And so we stepped in. And again, we weren't cramped. We – you know, everybody has a different experience. We had our one piece of luggage, and we, we had a seat, and we weren't – we weren't that uncomfortable. As I say, at least we had a seat. I'm not saying it was marvellous, but you know. We didn't know where we were going. And we started off; and it was nightfall or, it gets dark very quickly. It was October; it gets dark quickly in those parts. And we travelled at night. There's nothing to see; it's black, pitch dark. And in the morning, it – it gets light late, but it was light. We could see it was uninteresting. It was absolutely flat country. And then - we are slowing down. And suddenly there is this sort of line of fencing to our right, as far as the eye can see. It's a... it's a concrete post fence, with, with wire...with... what do you call it? *Stacheldraht*...

*Barbed wire.*

**[1:55:32]**

Yes, that's right, barbed - barbed wire. And then somebody said, "That's a concentration camp." Now, how did he know? Well the answer is quite simple. When- Sometimes people were taken off the street, and taken to concentration camps. And certainly in Austria, after the Anschluss. And they were told, "You can leave- we let you go, if you leave the country, and don't breathe a word of what you've seen or heard." But it wasn't easy. And as I say, nobody wanted us. And there was quite a number who didn't- couldn't emigrate; they just had stayed put! And he was one of them. And he realised that was very similar to what he had seen before, namely, a long line of barbed, electrified wire. You can see it was electrified, because it had these white porcelain insulators, you know, make it quite clear. Anyway, we come to a stop. And... we get out; we get told to leave our luggage inside. But before we stop, before the doors are open, we can see people in striped clothing, which we had never seen before. We see SS women, something we had never seen before, been acting as supervisors. And suddenly, out of nowhere, some of these people clad in pyjamas - obviously prisoners - crowd around our window, and ask for bread. Now, as it so happened, the two people in front of me, or us, a father and daughter, had bread. They had either accumulated it, or somehow got hold of it, they had travelled with it. And they asked for bread to be pushed through the ventilation slot, you know, that you could open. And he started, the old man, started to do that. But then he stopped and he said, "Well, if it's that bad out here, we shall probably need it." And he stopped. So they had to rush back, and carry on with their work. And it stayed with me because it didn't do him any good, and it didn't do the prisoners any good. Because, as we had to leave everything behind, he never got hold of his bread, and as he was elderly, he was gassed within the hour. So, nobody benefitted. So it, it... I can't quite- I never found the conclusion of, of that. Does it mean once you are- doing something carry on with it and don't have second thoughts, or, or, or what is the conclusion? But it certainly- that has stayed with, with me. That the prisoners didn't get their bread or what they could have done, and he didn't get it either. Right, so anyway... The door is, is opened. We get out. And there was nothing like when they say there are dogs barking and whips being used. Nothing like it! In fact, the SS were very polite and they said, "If anybody doesn't feel well or is elderly and doesn't feel fit, we provide a lorry into the camp." Well, there were some people who were

either blind, or lame, or old or felt unfit or felt the worse for wear after the journey or something. All right, they were put on a lorry and of course they were straight into a gas chamber. They didn't need dogs and whips. They just did it- did it with politeness.

**[1:59:32]**

And then, we were put into two queues. One for men and boys and one of women, children and girls. Sort of six abreast or so – I can't remember - something like that. And I was slightly confused; I was a bit slow on the uptake but you know you've never seen anything like it before. You don't know where you are, what's happening, what you're supposed to do. But there were orderlies, there were people in pyjamas who put you - into the queue and you just follow what they say. And - I didn't look out for anybody but my mother did see me. She wasn't that far; she came over, she broke rank. She came over, shook me by the hand, and went back. And I followed her. They disposed of... literally of the queue of women and children and girls. At first, you went up what they call a ramp, but it wasn't a ramp at all. It was flat; it was just a narrow passageway they made. And you went one after the other. And at the end, the far end were some SS people, and they apparently would point their finger either one way or the other, but I didn't notice that. I saw my mother go left. So when it was my turn, which was very soon, I simply didn't take any notice of what the SS man – I certainly didn't watch his fingers or anything. I simply went left. And I was hauled back, because apparently his fingers had pointed the other way and somebody had watched his finger to make quite sure – after all it was rather few out of the 1,500 of us. And I was hauled back, and told to go the other way. And then in the end there were a few of us who - who were in a separate group. And we were marched off and... had our hair cut off every part of the body. And had a short shower, but no towel or anything and it was jolly cold but nobody caught a cold, you know because it was, we were wet and yet very cold. And were issued with prison clothing, but it wasn't the stripe variety because we were in transit. We had been promised to – to a manager of a factory, and therefore we were only in transit. And therefore we were not tattooed; we were not going to be part of, part of Auschwitz. And I got a coat, a black coat; I was probably the sixth owner of it. It had a large cross painted on the back of it in dark red paint, brittle, which had partly fallen off, a pair of pants made out of prayer shawls, which in a round-about way did us good turn, because prayer shawls are made of best wool. So being winter, that was quite good. As for the rest, it was bits of rag; we had bits of rag, for socks, bits of rag as vest. We just wrapped them around us. But we had kept our

shoes; they let us keep our shoes, because obviously they would fit or – you know - something like that. Actually these shoes were taken off me, on the first night. And then, we - we were marched off to a hut and on this march, we passed... a-another hut where women were shorn of their hair. Now I'd never seen a naked woman before, and they didn't look like women, they looked like mannequins, you know, like you have in shop windows, because they had no - no hair left. They were just bald, you know, like you see them in a shop window! Before, before they're dressed. And...then we were, we were led into our, into our particular hut. And it's the kapo, the head of the... hut who told us that we are very lucky, that we were going to have a job... under roof, during a very cold winter, so we would be all right. He knew. We didn't, obviously, but it had all been very well organised. And it didn't apply to everybody; it applied only to a few really, as it turned out. So the first night was pretty awful. We slept on a concrete. We had one thin blanket for something like five or six of us. It was absolutely awful, and then... some people came around, looked at our shoes, and just took them. And we realised you couldn't say no. You couldn't argue with people there, you know, that, that wasn't a thing to do. So I had no shoes. I had to ask and...ask for anything to put on my feet, and they gave me... wooden clogs. That's what you had. And of course the trouble with wooden clogs is that they don't bend. It ruins your feet, you know, you get flat feet and you... it's- particularly walking on ice, it's absolutely awful. Anyway, that's what I got. And then, looking forward, I met the fellow who took my shoes in... Teplice. So that wasn't a good start when I started living in Teplice.

**[2:05:43]**

*But in Auschwitz, did you feel totally dehumanised? Or did you feel angry, and- in a fighting spirit? How did you react?*

You felt – you felt the sooner you get out of it the better. And that is what I come to. The- it was- It was utterly ridiculous! It was... You can't describe it, because you are- you don't- It's indescribable, really. I mean for instance, once a day, you would have an, somebody would have a look at you. I mean, you passed your first examination at the ramp every day and if your ribs showed up too much, you would be sent across the road, to a gas chamber. You had to learn the first thing, the most important thing you had to learn is to take your, your cap off when you see a German approaching. You had to be very quick; you had to take it off quickly, and then put it back on again as best you could, once he had passed. ...And,

and there were Russian prisoners-of-war, which was very odd, I thought. And there were- I remember a, what was obviously a... gay man, try to strike up a conversation. He was German, and you know, it wasn't a place for small talk. [with incredulous half-laugh] So he asked me, in German, you know, where did I come from. And I said, from the ghetto of Theresienstadt. And he said, "Were we *anständige Leute* – were we decent people?" What a strange thing to ask, but as I say, small talk is a difficult - difficult thing to strike up! This is what I- what I remember. There were artists there, there were painters! The Germans wanted their portrait painted! And there is a famous case of a ...girl painter who painted gypsies before Mengele, before they were executed. And she can't get her originals back. They are in, in, in, in the Auschwitz museum. They don't want to let them go, although they're really hers. I think... she may be dead now, but certainly it was a big hoo-ha, and I, I, I've got her story. Yes, and she painted them, these poor wretches you know, before they experimented on them and then they disposed of them.

*There were a number of artists at...?*

**[2:08:42]**

Oh, yes! Oh, yes. And- so the second night, which was dark- it was very dark inside the hut, because there were only a few thirty-watt bulbs. But the door opens, and in comes... a civilian. Again, a civilian in typical Nazi outfit, a gabardine raincoat, with the Nazi round emblem, Nazi Party membership emblem in his lapel. We don't know who he is, and he's got two SS men with him simply to guide him to the right hut. After all, all the huts look exactly the same, so you can't let him go by himself. You've got to guide him. And he didn't move from the door. Now the reason he didn't was that the light from the outside was better than the light on the inside. And the light on the outside was better, because it came from the fixed - the lights fixed to the concrete posts that held the barbed wire. Each of these posts had a large lamp, a large high-wattage bulb... to stop people trying to escape, not that you could. I mean, it was two lines of barbed wire; you just couldn't. And if you touched it, you crumpled up. But the, the light on the outside at night was very strong, and that shone through the door and that was why he just stood at the door and didn't move – didn't move to the inside. And I happened to stand near the door! So he sees me, and just like Mengele before, he points his forefinger on his right hand at me, and I'm his...you see? He, he...I'm his... sl-slave worker. Now there's a fellow on my class photo... who stood at the back somewhere, at the time.

And he didn't see him. He didn't pick him. Therefore, he was sent somewhere else. He was taken on a death march, and he died in Dachau on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, 1945 in the arms of his younger brother. I know that because I traced the widow of his younger brother to Melbourne, in Australia, and he told her that his brother died of starvation in- after, at the end of this death march, in Dachau. So, because I stood at the right time, in the right place, and he didn't, I'm still here, and he isn't. That's— small things like that mattered. I liken them to links in a chain, you know, they all have to be put together to make a chain. There must be no interruption.

**[2:11:28]**

So, we- He picks a few of us. He did, he had been promised 165, and I'm quite sure that there were 165 – or could have been - fit people, to do the work he, he needed. But as he hadn't moved from the door he hadn't picked that, that, that many. And so... we were - the 165 were made up by people who arrived the next day, and also some Slovaks and some Hungarians. So it didn't quite work out the way he'd been promised. He'd, he'd been promised the survivors of the next transport, from the ghetto of Theresienstadt who'd survived the selection on arrival. Now, what he'd also asked for was a mathematician, because he had the contract to make propellers from aluminium castings, or duralumin castings. And they each- The property of each blade had to be found. Because, if say you mount three or four propellers, sometimes five, onto one hub, which is the end of the engine, the front you know, where the propeller goes. Normally you have two, but in war-time you had three, four or five. If there was any eccentric force it was, it would just shatter the engine; it would shatter the drive-shaft and it would go. So, they either had to cancel each other out, you know, these eccentricities, or they all had to be the same. So, why not get a mathematician when you pay the same money for... I think he had to pay twenty pfennigs a day for each prisoner he hired from the SS. And...so...

*That's is cheap labour, eh?*

**[2:13:43]**

Oh, yes. Yes, but why not get the best? It's the same with that Italian Jew who – Jewish man, the chemist who wrote the story, "Is This a Man?" [Primo Levi] He was an analytical chemist and they made use of him as an analytical chemist. You know, they wanted... Anyway, the next day we were – we were on parade, we were asked, "Who of you is the mathematician?" And there wasn't one! A great embarrassment, because the reputation of the ghetto was such that even if just a few survived the selection, on arrival, there would be at least one mathematician among them. And there wasn't. Well, somebody piped up and said, "Yes, there is..." so and so... And he was naturally thin, and during the daily selection he was found wanting. And he was put into a - a hut, so when they had a few minutes to spare at the gas chamber, he'd be sent over. So they rushed there; they got him out. And he is the fellow who had taught us mathematics. So- he had worked for my father, actually, in Prague, and I knew him! And, so that saved him. And so they did get- in fact when you look at the list – I've got the list from the International Tracing Service - of our transport of 165 Jews transferred from Auschwitz to Groß-Rosen, he is listed there as *Mathematiker*, which is most odd, because everybody tried to have a trade. Either to be a car mechanic or a...a fitter or anything. But he is listed as a mathematician. I can send you all that; it's quite easy. And so, that's what he, he did. To be quite honest, anybody could have done it because it was done according to forms. You hung it up, you used the blade as a pendulum, and from that, you could, you could work out what the properties was. So, but you know, anyway, why not get a mathem-? Actually he, he was a, a, a [stammers] statistician. He wasn't really- he specialised in something else, but never mind. And so we were on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, in the evening, we were given half a loaf of bread and a piece of sausage and put into a - this time - into a cattle truck and there was [stammers] there was room, room, room only to stand. There was standing room only; we were pretty compressed. And off we went. We didn't know where we, where we went to. It could have been anywhere; we weren't told. The next morning, we stopped somewhere, and it turned to be, it turned out to be a small station on a single-track railway line. A place called Friedland. Now there were lots of Friedlands around there. There was one where Napoleon... Napoleon won, won a battle against the Russians. And it's not that far. And there is a Frydlant, spelled F R Y D L A N T, only sixty miles away, in Bohemia. It's not that far. In fact, I thought that's what it was, but it turned out not to be. And so... we had arrived, we were marched to our camp. Now, again, in a way, we were lucky. Because the camp had been occupied by Italian prisoners-of-war. When the Italians changed sides, all Italians in Germany were...were turned into forced labourers. But they were treated better. They weren't treated as forced labourers; there were two-tier bunks, rather than three-

tier bunks, and the huts were the same huts as everywhere else, but from that point of view it was a bit better. And- so, very shortly after arrival, probably a day or two, we were marched to the factory which was at the other end of, of the village. Now, I know now, I didn't know it - we didn't realise it at the time; it had been a cotton mill. And therefore- which had been abandoned. But it was it was a factory! It was a factory with solid floors, and solid walls so it could take the machinery that the manager needed for making these aeroplane propellers. The factory had come from Hamburg; they had been bombed out near enough, or they had been...they, the place had been bombed, as we know. And so they had to find somewhere else and they found this in a remote place. I mean Friedland is in the middle of nowhere! Near the- very near the Czech border. And- so they, they moved in, they put the machinery there. And he already had a consignment, from Auschwitz, of 300 Polish Jews from the ghetto of Lodz.

**[2:19:52]**

Among them was one who had come from Prague, or to be quite honest, Olmütz or Olomouc, whom I tried to trace and... I couldn't, or found- by the time I found him he was dead. And I found his niece. So...What happened was, he employed Czech and French workers. And they showed us the ropes for the first fortnight, how to do it. And you had to take the casting, and one operation was to... to cut the edges of the cast of the mould of the casting. And another one on a band-saw and one was to cut the thread at the end which you would put into the propeller shaft, and - or hub - and trim it down to shape and one thing and another. It was a conveyor belt system, of course. And they showed us how, how to do it, and they were sent home, which was most odd. Because even then, October, 1944, the Germans were still recruiting labourers for work in Germany. And yet there were, the French and the Czechs were sent home! I know that, because I sent a message to the widow by then of my uncle Oswald, in Prague, and it was delivered. When I went- after the war I, I went to see her and yes, it was delivered. And then we, we, we started to work and it was a twelve-hour shift. Which was ridiculously long, I mean apart from the twelve-hour shift, we had to march there and back, we had to stand on *Appell*, on the barrack square, to be counted. We were counted coming and going, and we were counted again in front of the factory. And that all took, took time, because we had... our SS guards were Ukrainians, and they weren't, they weren't very, they weren't very good at numbers. They - they couldn't count, so it, it took time. And that deprived us of sleep and sleep is what we needed since we didn't have enough food and...



apart from that we were lousy, and one thing and another. And my job was to- take the finished article, and see whether the centre line was straight. You had a metal straight-edge, a piece of flat metal which was dead straight, and you had to put along the central line of the propeller, on the flat side which was slightly curved. And you, if there was a bump up, you had to put it on a hydraulic press and try to get rid of it. Or if it was a hollow you had to turn it upside down, and press it from the other side. That was a hard job, because the hydraulic press was foot-operated. And you had no feeling, you know, you just let it, let it down. And then when it made contact you then pressed a bit more. And if you, if you had had an upward bump, you, you put two hard- pieces of hardwood on either side, and you put the piston down on it and if you didn't - hadn't pressed enough, it would spring back. So that was a waste of time. But you had to carry it to the bench, had a look whether it was straight or not. On the other hand, if you overdid it, it got a permanent set the wrong way. You know. So that was no good; you had to turn it over and start again. But you couldn't do that too, too - too often. Because what the metallurgists call, you got 'brittle fracture', you know, the metal just doesn't stay elastic.

**[2:24:14]**

*Were you punished if it wasn't done properly?*

[half-laughs] Well, I'll come to that in a minute. By that time, my output was very slow. Very little. I did hardly any, properly. It was hard work and it was twelve hours. And it was not only having to carry these- Although they were aluminium, they were solid. And they were quite long – long and heavy. And what happened was, the Russians were coming up. They were on the horizon. We didn't know how near, but the foreman who was a German, knew. And so did all the other foremen and managers and whatever – and farmers and labourers. And so, he did some for me. And he did it with the greatest of ease! I mean, it was his job, you see? He did some for me! And, in fact, he told me that he'd been a Communist in his youth. Now, why should a German foreman tell a Jewish boy of sixteen that he was a Communist? Well the answer is again, the Russians. He, well I might put a good word in for him, you see? You just don't know! The – things had changed 180 degrees, you know. We were now a, a de-desirable means of getting brownie points! And so he even, at odd times, gave me some very hard crusty...they were meant for his – for his rabbit, but he said I probably needed it more. And it was really hard, but you know, it tasted, to me it tasted like

cake, you know, it was absolutely marvellous. And we did that. And, and, and we got- not only didn't we get the ingots, not only didn't we get these aluminium castings, because the Allies decided to bomb railway tracks rather than cities. We couldn't get them out, we couldn't get the finished articles out either, because that would go on the same – same railway. So we had to do some more work. Some... We had to earn our keep. And so at first we dug tank trenches. That is to say, very deep trenches across fields [coughs] to stop Russian tanks. Well, I, the - the farmers didn't want a deep trench a-across what they thought was their fields, although they would have to abandon them anyway, but they didn't know that. So then we were told we had to cut down trees growing along the road and put them across the road, again to slow down Russian tanks. But for that we were put into groups of four, and there weren't enough guards for, you know, that large number of groups of four. So they... commandeered the...the, the elderly people. There was a – the Germans had a name for them – '*Volkssturm*'. They were the -last resort, you know, they were way past their military age, and they had just old...old rifles. And they were strictly afraid of us. I mean, we were not only harmless, we had no means of attacking them! But they, they didn't know how to cope because they'd been told, "These Jews are awful. They are dreadful, they are absolutely...absolute devils." And they- they believed that! They were frightened of us. It was a ridiculous situation! Apart from that, they didn't have the proper tools. They had only small axes. And a small axe - you can't cut a tree down. You need a - what we used to call a 'Canadian saw' which is a long one with a handle, handle on either side, and you pull and push, you pull rather – you pull only. But they, they, they didn't have that. And they weren't very keen on, on that. They didn't want to have their, their, their village ruined. I mean, however well you'd put trees across a road, one shot from a tank gun would have demolished it. You know, it was ridiculous! But they, they weren't very keen in any case; they weren't very keen to make us work, because it would have meant they would have obstructed the progress of the Russians and God-knows-what they would be doing to them. So it...it... the situation had turned. And also a lot of, of German, refugees really, were fleeing. And they were driving -past our gate. So those who worked- who were there during the day – I mean if you worked during the day you wouldn't see them - told us they had seen Germans with everything they could pull -or push or horse or not ...or cattle too, pull their wagons...driving west! So we knew they were near. We had also heard... planes in the distance, and gunfire in the distance. But they, they were the Russians on the way to Berlin. They left us. We were, we were of no interest to them. You know, they were straight on to Berlin. And that, we heard them - and we didn't - you know, they'd already passed.

[2:30:22]

*Did you feel let down, or disappointed by that?*

No, we didn't know what was happening. We didn't know what the shots came from. You know, we thought it would be probably Russians, but we didn't know. Also what happened was that people put on a 'death march' passed our gate. They were from camps further east. They were on their way to Theresienstadt, probably. They had lots of dead who were exhausted. You know, they were like skin, skin and bones. And they had died and they were put on a wagon, on a farm wagon. Similar to that... which you see on a drawing... something by the English painter, something mill- something crossing a millstream...

*Cameraman: 'The Hay wain'.*

'The Hay wain'[John Constable]. That's it. Very similar. Sloping sides, very open and they were stacked inside. And our job was to bury them. Now the question was, where. And the - the church didn't want them. It was a Protestant church, cause they were Jews. They didn't want Jews in sacred ground. The farmers didn't want them in their field. So it was decided to put them outside the church wall. So we dug trenches, or a big trench at the time...just outside the church wall. The point was it was winter, and it was ice. And the soil was frozen to a depth of at least a metre or a yard. And the most difficult job really was to- dig down. You know, to even hold a pick, was more than we could manage. But there were one of two of us who somehow managed to get food or something. They were fit, and they managed to get - break through the ice, which was like rock. It really is. And once you get below the ice, you're all right, but it's getting through this frozen bit. And then you dig down, and my job was really to hand them to- I got a body handed to me from somebody on my right. I would hand it down to somebody... on, in the trench. And he would put them sardine fashion. Make maximum use of space. You wouldn't just throw them there, you would put them head-foot...Head-toes, head-toes. And then lye would be spread over them to dis- disintegrate the bones, or to dissolve the bones. And it would be back-filled with soil.

[2:33:45]

*Do you have nightmares about that?*

Sorry?

*Do you have nightmares about that?*

No, I don't. [half-laughing] You took it for granted! That's what you did. You were asked to do it. Somebody had, had to do it. You couldn't just leave them. And I know that some of them were Italians, because there was one fellow whose – who obviously alive and sang, in Italian. Where the others came from, I don't know. They were probably Italian – Italian Jews. I don't know. I was on a burial squad twice or three times. I can't, I can't quite remember. Probably. Certainly twice. Maybe three times. And- so that – that was another thing... we, we had to do. Now again, on the plus side, were not put on a death-march. We were already in Germany, and for some reason or other they, they left us be. They, they just let us be. And in the, in the end, we, we - we couldn't manufacture any more blades. We didn't dig any more trenches. We didn't cut any more trees. And the Russians were very nearby. The- We were called on *Appell* and the – the Commandant gave us a - a talk. We should remember, he said, that he treated us fairly, which in a way was true. Compared, I mean- now I know that other Commandants had been absolutely awful! But nobody had been shot; nobody had been hurt in any way. We died, because we were- we suffered from, from malnutrition. But in other places you'd be shot or you'd be hit by the guards with a rifle-butt, or even be hanged! And we weren't any of, of that. Partly because we were semi-skilled therefore they needed us. There were no more prisoners coming from Auschwitz, which had been blown up. So, we were quite lucky in a way. Certainly I, if we had been put on a death-march I would, I, I wouldn't be sitting here. And he gave us a talk, and...then he and his deputy disappeared. They went by lorry. They did have lorries but ...Army lorries. And he disappeared. We were still behind electrified barbed wire, and we still had the Ukrainian SS guards, who would have liked to shoot us. They took...they had machine guns on top of the towers. And, and they took ammunition up. And they put us in a position where they could shoot more effectively. Not close together but separately – you know – more of a gap between each. And we thought, that's it. But they talked to one another. They had a conference and they decided they wouldn't. They were probably more interested in their own skin, because if– as the Russians were near - if they were caught, and it was found that they had executed us, they, they wouldn't stand a chance. They probably didn't stand a chance

anyway, but they certainly didn't. So they would, they really saved their own skin rather than ours but that's what happened. That's fine. And they left. [half-laughing] So we were still behind electrified barbed wire. So somebody from the outside, and I definitely think they were French forced labourers, because one or two of us worked in a sawmill. They were, they were not making propellers. They were working in a sawmill. And they were French forced labourers there. One of our boys, was Arnost Reiser. 'Arnost' is really 'Ernest' but he called himself Arnost, even when he went to America. [break in filming]

**[2:38:00]**

*You clearly draw upon your past experiences in talking to school children and students about your past and your family. Do you still read any German literature, or do you reject it now?*

Oh, utterly. I, I. To be honest, my eyesight is so poor; I've lost sight in one eye altogether, that I don't read. Even looking at the screen is a bit of an effort. I don't read German if I can help it. I can understand it. I can speak it, although words fail me at times and I have to make use of a dictionary, which is fine. I've never been back. I have no- I would always say to whoever I meet, you know, "How many Jewish children did your grandfather kill?" So I'm, I'm not... Why should I, you know, make myself miserable? As far as leisure time is concerned, I had, I had none before I got married, really. Being...I got married in church. Although I'm not a member. I'm, I'm sure the vicar didn't know. I'm, I'm a bit of, of a snob, in spite of everything. And my wife comes from a village in Kent, which has a very old church. The originals were put there by Queen Ethelburga, that's before, this was 900-odd [600-odd], long before the invasion by the Vikings. And the, the vicar had been, in my days, had been a Padre in the First World War. And his study was full of shell cases, you know, and armaments. And he was actually a...a teacher of mathematics too, apart from - from being a vicar. And, and... I...I obviously couldn't go to a synagogue; I wasn't a member. And...so I...

*Do you go now, at all? You said earlier, that you feel Jewish, but God deserted you.*

Yes. In completely secular way. Yes.

*Do you go to synagogue at all?*

No.

*Or at Yom Kippur? No...*

No...no. Particularly. The only Jewish community around here, and there are very few, are the Reform ones, and... I, I joined them for a year, and I, I'm not with it. That's not – that's not my, my idea. I, I left them. They're very nice people, but I just don't go with what they believe in. Particularly not what Israel is concerned. No. I, I, I don't. The only connection I have with Jewishness is the AJR. That's about it. There are no Jews around here. There's one family lives on - on the Heath, but- we met them once, but we are, we are not in contact and he suffers badly from Alzheimer's and he is in a wheelchair.

**[2:41:55]**

*Ah, that's difficult.*

So that's not very good. And...Otherwise, I don't really know anybody else. We have a very small circle of -friends. We – I mean, we know our neighbours and we say 'Hello', and that's about it. In a typically English fashion, we don't go into each other's houses. You know. I, I. We know who they are and they know who I am, but that's about it.

*Reflecting overall on your life, do you feel bitter about your experiences?*

Yes. Yes, I was - I was done in-injustice, and no justice was done. It wasn't seen to be done, and it wasn't done. Because when I needed some material support, shortly after the war, when I needed a roof over my head, they weren't there. The Germans were so slow in paying restitution. I joined up with URO, which was the United Restitution Office [Organisation]. And they were so slow, and so awful about it. They treated us as if, as if it was... they did things out of the goodness of their heart, and they were very bureaucratic about it. They were unbelievably awful! They said at one stage that my father didn't exist!

**[2:43:26]**

*Oh!*

Yes! Because they couldn't find him in the tax re-re-returns. And the reason was, that the tax returns of foreigners, were loaded into a truck on the last days of the war, and were lost! They were bombed. Why they did it, I don't know. But he certainly did exist. They asked for – for witnesses which they had killed themselves. So there were no witnesses about, which is... the whole point of it. They were very slow in paying. The last payment I got which was for loss of education, which came to nowhere near what I really lost, I didn't get until 1967. ...I lived in Yorkshire at the time, and after all- the war had come to an end in '45. I'd applied round-about I don't know, 1950. So that would be seventeen years later. By that time, I'd pulled myself up by my own boot-strings. I needed it then and there. They, they were just so slow and awful. In...Indescribable. And I got nothing. Yeah! I got nothing from them, really. What I got was very little, too late. It helped me to pay for the house in Ontario. But that's about it. After I retired, I felt that I was hard-done by. So I – I wrote to the pension office in Hamburg. And I said I'd worked for the firm, whatever it was, in... Friedland, and could I get a pension for it? And they said, something like, "You stupid Jew. Of course not, because you didn't have a proper contract of employment. And therefore your boss had not paid any contribution in old Deutsche Marks, and therefore, will you please go away?" So, that was no good. And then somebody in the AJR...I can't remember how I contacted him or he contacted me, said, "Ah, yes, true. But you could get something if you become a German citizen. It wouldn't be restitution; it would be just as a German citizen living abroad. Your pension would be the difference between a German pension and a British pension. And a German pension is better. But first you have to become a German citizen. And I know a fellow," he said, "from Memel which was German occupied, who did that." Now as it so happened, I was born in Berlin, in what turned out to be the Western sector, after the war. The eastern sector, East Germany didn't want to know at all. [audio interruption] [2:46:52]

.....?

[2:47:09]

*Frank, despite all your hardships, and all the injustices...*

Yes.

*...You have pulled up yourself by your 'boot strings', as you put it.*

Sort of.

*And...Thank you very much indeed for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR project.*

Let me just finish, with saying, that eventually I did get German citizenship. And I've got a certificate. But what...And I collected it from the German Embassy in London. And with it came a little note saying, that if I get into drunken brawls abroad, the German Embassy would not look after me; I have to go to the British one. So if I ever - don't go into drunken brawls. It has never applied. And it doesn't apply to my children. It's only. The citizenship is for me. It finishes with me. But as a result, I got a German pension.

*Bravo!*

You see? It may, it may not be much and the exchange rate has reduced it, but it's not, it's not...it's, it's simply as a German citizen. It's got nothing to do with Jewish past. I mean, the... my guards who came to England, the Ukrainian SS who came by the regiment, gets the same. Because they got German citizenship. And their Army boss paid...paid contributions into the pension funds. Although it's worthless - in worthless Marks. So they're better off than I am - or were.

*Oh, that's a strange irony of life, isn't it?*

It is.

*But thank you very much nevertheless for sharing your experiences with us.*

You're more than welcome. [pause] Yes, the name of the fellow who put me on to that was Ely Elli. And he, he, he has died since. In fact, most people I know have gone. That is one of the snags of being old. All your friends and relations have gone.

*Yes.*



And in fact this Arnost Reiser, who went to New York and became a Professor at the New York Polytechnic University, did some very tremendous inventions. He, he died a year ago. The violinist who was so brilliant, he died in California. The relative in ...Australia who met me in London, and who had an old Apple computer he wanted to give me, but it was so useless I had to throw it away. He brought it all the way from Sydney, and brought it through Frankfurt Airport, all the way back, back here. It was utterly useless. It had wires going all over the place. So. He is dead now. They were older, you know. I – I was the youngest one.

**[2:50:32]**

*Does that make you feel terribly sad?*

No, that's the way it is. [laughs gently]

*That's very philosophical.*

Yes. I just keep going. But... You know, I'm losing things. I've got my- my kidneys aren't working and I've lost the sight of an eye. I fall asleep during the day. I shuffle instead of walk. I've got signs of old age. There's no question about it. And particularly you asked about what we did in our spare time, or free time. We always tried to live near the sea, because my wife likes to swim and I do too. And, and but last year I couldn't go into the water. Even how calm it was, I didn't feel safe. You know, I would topple over. Not that it would matter; you go on all fours and you get out. But I haven't got- my sense of balance has gone to a great extent.

**[2:51:35]**

**[End of interview]**

**[Start of photographs]**

**[2:51:37]**

Right. That picture is of my mother holding me in her arms. It was taken in Berlin, in the villa we lived in, in Berlin. It's Bundesallee 5. And I was a few months old. It would be 1929.

That would be presumably the summer of 1929, which makes me about six months old, six or seven months old.

This is my father holding me in his arms, in the garden of the village, villa we lived in Bundesallee 5, Berlin West End. Presumably summer 1929, when I would be anything between six and eight months old.

This is my first day at school. Berlin. School was the Jewish Reform *Gemeindeschule* in Joachimsthaler street, again - Berlin. The - sort of cardboard tube was filled with sweets, which was meant to make the first day at school sweeter. I don't know why, because I rather liked the idea. I didn't, I didn't need it to be made sweeter, but I probably had the sweets after all. That would be 1935, April. And I would be six-and-a-half years old.

Yes, this was my father. I'm not sure when it was taken; it was taken in Berlin. I assume it was 1935, in which case he would be thirty-eight years old. But I don't know the exact date, let's assume that's what it was.

That is my mother and I, taken at a family gathering in Slovakia, in Trenčianske Teplice probably in 1936, when I would be seven-and-a-half years old.

**[2:54:04]**

Yes, this is my father. He was an Austrian soldier taken prisoner by the Russians. So he's, he's in Russian hands, prisoner-of-war in Siberia, in Irbit, in as I say Siberia. The address on the back gives him as working on the railways, which means the Trans-Siberian Railway. There's the address of his mother, in both Roman and Russian script.

*When would that have been, roughly?*

You can take the back of it. That would be 1916...He was taken prisoner in 1915, The revolution was in 1917, so as a guess it's 1916.

That is my mother, Toni Wasservogel, at the age of nine, taken in Berlin at a studio. That would be ...1901 probably.

That is my class photo of the Jewish School in Prague, class 2B, taken probably in May, 1942. You can see certainly on those with the light blouse, or shirt, we were wearing a star. The star is yellow, but of course it's a monochrome picture so the colour doesn't show up. I'm – I have the arrow pointed at me at the very top, last row. I'm beginning to grow a beard. You can see signs of it, if you look very carefully. That would be '42... I'd be thirteen-and-a-half.

That is my class photo enlarged. I marked those who perished, who were murdered within the following two years, within a red square. So it's easily visible. Those who survived have a blue square. There is one teacher on one side who perished, and one who survived. And there... It doesn't cover all, all of my fellow pupils. We couldn't discover the names of all of them, but most of them. They are somewhere we just - I just don't know.

That is a- oh dear - a certificate which says that I am a Czechoslovak citizen. That I was a political prisoner. And it's issued by the Ministry of Defence. And it uses my Anglicised name, so I don't have any, any problems to have to translate my name. The... when I applied for a passport here, the Czechoslovak Embassy in Prague, and it's years ago, said they couldn't issue me with a, my new name; I had to use my old one. Well that was useless, so I said, "Thank You. Good day."

**[2:58:00]**

This is my Certificate of a German citizenship, bestowed on me by the Senate of Berlin. It enabled me to claim a pension, not as a Jew who'd been through a concentration camp, but as a German citizen. And they bent over backwards to repay me any, any outstanding money as a German. As a Jewish former concentration camp prisoner, I was refused any payment for the work done as a slave labourer by the Hamburg -pension office. Because there hadn't been a proper contract of employment, which obviously there wasn't. There was no... meeting of minds, as the law has it.

It's an - a document. It's the Honorary Doctorate issued to me by the Suffolk...oh dear, University campus. And it's issued jointly really by the University of Essex and the

University of East Anglia, for the lectures I gave them on the Holocaust, the History Department.

**[End of photographs]**

**[2:59:57]**