

Josef Kleinmann (Peter Grünfeld) and Marta Kleinmann

(from a CANDLES interview of Peter Grünfeld in 2010)



Eva Kor with Peter Grünfeld at this apartment in 2010

My name is Peter Grünfeld. I was born in 1940, but my birth certificate says 1939. I will explain later how that happened. When we arrived in Auschwitz, they gave me a number, tattooed a number—A-2459—and they called me Pepicek. I remember the camp somewhat foggy. I remember arriving to Camp (Auschwitz). It had to be summer because it was very hot. I remember my twin sister (Marta), and seeing her by the barbed wire fence.

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, I remember the blocks/barracks. My bed was on the first story (lower) bunk bed. I was four years old. Now, when I meet with the other twins, the bunch that I was together with, they say, “Yes, your bed was on the first row.” They all remember that and I remember that very clearly.

I recall Efraim Reichenberg (helping me) just as it would happen today. He took me by the hand and gave sugar and chocolate and sweets. (And) we went for a walk always to the tests, lab, experiments. Lots of white robes in the lab.

Then, I keep remembering the football field and there was a pit with water, maybe it was a swimming pool, but I remember people in the water.

I do remember that every time I went to the lab, they gave me a shot in the head, and that at one time they removed a piece of skin from my forehead for some testing.

I think we ate something like cabbage soup. I remember being hungry all the time. I remember one of the kids stole my piece of bread. I remember Efraim Reichenberg singing a Hungarian children's song with/to me. He had a beautiful voice, how sad that he has to use a vocal instrument. (Mr. Reichenberg had tracheal cancer and lost the use of his larynx.) The song went like this: "Boczy, boczy tarka" (Little calico calf), "Shé füle, shé farka" (without ears or tail).

Summer was gone, and it became very cold. It was all white with snow. I could see lots of big tanks everywhere. They got us out of the barracks. They began burning papers, clothes, everything. I put on some warm clothes on top of my striped pajamas. Then I recall a short person, that I now know was Zvi Spiegel, making a list of us, and we left in a group.

I do recall the Somogyi brothers (Peter and Thomas). Everybody remembers the Moshkowitz girls, the midgets. I walked with Zvi Spiegel a few meters, not kilometers. I was very tired and very weak, and I sat down on the snow on the ground. A man (named Smuel Grünfeld) came by and picked me up and said, "I will take you home with me because I am sure no one survived in your family."

He took me to Ungvar, a city in Hungary, now the Soviet Union. I lived with him about a half year or so; he found his old house, and he opened a small restaurant to make a living. And, this I remember very well, too. One day my adoptive father was serving food to some Russian officers. They demanded free vodka. He served them a couple of rounds and then asked them to pay or he would not serve them anymore. One of the officers took out his revolver and shot my poor adoptive father on the spot.

Next door lived a relative by the name of Hershkowitz, and he ran over to see what all the shooting was about. My adoptive father told Mr. Hershkowitz, "If anyone from my family comes back, please promise me that you will tell them this little boy is my son." And he died.

In a couple of weeks, Mr. Grünfeld's daughter returned from a camp. Mr. Hershkowitz told her that her father's last request was to raise me as a Grünfeld son. So this is how I came to stay with the daughter, Ms. Grünfeld. She lives in New York now, and her married name is Grünberger. She raised me.

She began looking for my family; she knew that my birth name was Kleinmann, I was born in Prague, and I had a twin sister. I had forgotten my mother's name. She wrote to the Red Cross, the Auschwitz Archive, but got no answer; they just could not help. What year I was born in I did not know, and no one else knew that. In 1947, as I was preparing to go to school, a medical panel decided I was born in 1939.

I was in the hospital many times. I was sick a lot. I got many treatments for health problems and lack of vitamins. I didn't speak very much. I spoke a little Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, and German. Then when they enrolled me in school, the clerk who registered me asked for my name. When I said "Pepicek," he said there was no such name and registered me as Peter. He had to write down whose son I was, so he wrote down Peter, son of Smuel Grünfeld, my adoptive father who died. I received a few rubles every month from the national insurance until I was 18 years old.

As time went by, I forgot completely that I was Pepicek Kleinmann. Mrs. Grünberger raised me as Peter Grünberger and told her own children that I was their stepbrother. They accepted me. After grade school, I went to high school, then to college to study to be a Russian language teacher. There I met my wife, Olga, who was studying to be a music teacher.

Olga and I were married in 1962, and we have three wonderful children. One day we saw a movie to remember the Holocaust, and the movie was exactly like my life story. The movie ended with the statement that the story came from the Auschwitz Museum, and it showed an address. So Olga wrote to the Auschwitz Museum without telling me about it and gave them my (tattoo) number.

Three months later, we received an answer that the person with that number arrived in Auschwitz, and his name was Josef Kleinmann. He was born in Prague, had a twin sister by the name of Marta, and was liberated on this date. So this is how I learned who I was. I did write to the consulate in Prague; they did not answer my questions about my family, so I realized that no one returned from the camps.

It is possible that my sister is somewhere in Poland because she might have been picked up by a Polish woman and raised Polish. She wouldn't know that she is Jewish except for her number. I have written to the Auschwitz Museum; they don't know anything about her whereabouts. The museum has told us that by each name, they have listed whether the person is alive or dead. By my sister's name, Marta Kleinmann, however, they have written that no detail is available. Her number is A-4931.

I have documents on the experiments done on Marta and dates when they were done. I get angry with experts who say that our experiments were pseudo. I am sure the Russians took a lot of the material from Auschwitz that relates to our files as well as information on my sister, and they don't want to help us. In the Soviet Union, they have all kinds of documentary films from Auschwitz; they must have a lot of material because they liberated Auschwitz, but they don't want to help us.

My health is very poor. I feel an inborn nervousness that makes it difficult for me to sleep, to eat, or relax. I have had many ulcers, and I am blind in the eye on the side where they gave me the shots in the head—the left side, and they took pieces of skin from the right side of the forehead. I have lost my teeth as a young person, I have had skin problems, and I am forever looking for my twin sister. She is like a part of me that is missing, and I remember seeing her by the fence shortly before liberation. I feel that she is still alive somewhere in this world.

My father was murdered when I was one year old; at that time, my mother, older sister, and Marta, my twin sister, and myself were all taken to Theresienstadt.

I am asking you, the reader, somebody, please help me somehow find my twin sister. I have been searching for her since 1945. If you have a heart, help me find my twin sister. Her number, tattooed on her arm, is A-4931; her name was Marta Kleinmann. I don't know what her name is today.