

April 23, 1992

Slate #1349-34

Interviewee: Tom Grossman

Interviewer: Sue Sussman

Notetaker: Rose Shames

0:00- Tom Grossman born in Budapest may 1, 1927. Father was retired officer of Army and Railroad. Mother was homemaker. Tom had two sisters. Father also had business of wine production, firewood and railroad ties in Tokai region.

2:40- Jews mingled freely among non-Jews. Population 4000. Antisemitism.

6:00- In 1938, new laws- no new Jewish business, no Jews in University.

8:24- 1941-42 Work camps, wear yellow arm band. Tom was not personally affected because Father had high position which provided exemption.

10:45- 1944- Germans over run Hungary; schools closed, curfews, yellow stars. Now things changed dramatically for Tom.

13:30 - Tom in 6th grade gymnasium boarding school in Kachizeh. March 16, 1944 - SS tanks.

14:45 - Tom goes back home. Next few days changes again - people in homes 6AM-6PM so could not go shopping. This led to hunger.

16:50 - Jews had to report to town hall to turn in all vehicles and valueables.

18:10- Hungarian military policeman comes to house and throws them out. Everyone rounded up into synagogue for 48 hours.

19:50- To railroad station and then 2 1/2 hours to Ghetto in boxcar.

21:00- Province of Zemplin: in Ghetto for 6 weeks, 16 people in room 12x12. Began to hear rumors that they would be taken to work to help in war effort in Southern Hungary.

23:13- Transports begin. Tom in 4th transport of train. About 80 people in railroad car. Train really headed for Poland.

27:00- Description of Ghetto; very frightening, beatings.

29:00- 72 hours in train. Arrived in Auschwitz in middle of night. Some died during ride.

32:38- Arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau. SS with dogs; beating people to get them out of car "cruelty beyond imagination".

34:40- Sign read "Arbeit mach frei". Tall SS officer pointing to left and right. Dr. Mengele- able bodied to right and old and young to the left.

37:00- Tom marched to large room with shower heads. Had to strip, leave clothes, hair shaved from bodies, given striped suits and hat. Also prisoner number given.

40:00 Description of gassing.

41:00- Now Tom with Father but separated from Mother and sisters.

41:45- Description of Birkenau. Transport to small mining town. Worked in stone quarry building airplane strip. April 1944-February 1945. Description of camp; hanging of prisoners who tried to escape. Tom beaten for trying to escape.

45:00 - Begin to hear Russian army approaching.

46:00- Description of continuing selections in labor camp. Only in labor camp did he learn about burning at Auschwitz. The guards told them about it.

48:00- February 1945- labor camp evacuated. 700 prisoners marched out. Two weeks later still marching; finally arrived at Flossenberg. Only 200 people still alive.

50:00- Flossenberg; extermination, torture, starvation, beatings. Extreme brutality- punishment by hanging. There were 12 people hanging at entrance gate.

52:00-Tzel-appel (counting) description. No working, just slow killing. Every morning he woke up to a corpse.

54:00- Tom sentenced to hang- saved by Swiss Red Cross. Sent to Dresden to work for 2-3 weeks. Description of bombing.

56:00- Incident with knife attack over an apple.

58:00- Marching again. Two air raids. Tom and friend came upon SS on flat bed truck. The SS shot all people who got on truck. (dramatic description)

61:30- Roll call- variety of prisoners. Marching to be shot but orders come to stop. So marched back. Next day prisoners given boiled potatoes. Then they were freed by Czech police.

68:29- Taken to Thierensenstadt. Met people from home town. (ran out of tape)