

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

**Name of interviewee:** Beressi, Salvator

**Date of interview:** 7/31/1989

**Summary:** Salvator Beressi was born in Salonika, Greece on August 14, 1919 to Jewish parents who had come to Greece from Spain. The family first lived in a Jewish community, until Salvator's father moved their family to a Christian neighborhood. He faced great hardships as a child because he was Jewish in a Christian area, and got into many fights. He had his first job at the age of eight. Salvator remained in Salonika until 1940, when at age 21 he fought in the Albanian War.

In 1941 the Nazis came to Greece. With the aid of a letter given to Salvator by a German officer, he was able to work with his uncle in the port of Salonika. At the end of 1942 and beginning of 1943 Jewish people were told they must register and wear a star. Salvator did not do either, he received some phony paper from the Greek Intelligence and joined an underground organization until he was denounced by a friend and arrested.

His family was then put on a transport to Yugoslavia and then to Auschwitz. When he arrived in Auschwitz he was singled out because he knew German (he also spoke French, Italian, Spanish and Yiddish). After the men, women, and children were separated into various groups, the "healthy and younger" group was marched to Birkenau, where they were cleaned, had their hair cut, and given numbers. He was assigned to barrack #30. Because Salvator spoke German he was made a foreman. He would not hit people or make them work if they could not, so he was beaten. He was able to transfer and went to work with his father and uncle on the railroad. From that point on he would not speak German in the camps. He held many different jobs within Birkenau. He was a mechanic, carpenter, roofer, and made cement.

Some time before August of 1944 he was taken to the Warsaw Ghetto to dismantle what remained (take bricks from homes, etc.) and build barracks. He helped build the camp within Warsaw, "Paviago?" In August of 1944 the Nazis feared the Russians were coming and marched the prisoners to Dachau. Salvator did not think Dachau was as bad as Auschwitz, and he remained there for only three days, when he was moved to Mühldorf a small camp outside of Dachau, near an airport. In Mühldorf he almost escaped on an airplane, but the day he was supposed to escape he was put on a transport and taken to "Ponik?" (Munich?) and told that he was liberated and the war was over. Shortly after they got off the train an SS officer came back and tried to get them back on the train and killed many. Salvator and his uncle hid in a cave in the forest. They had taken cheese and civilian clothes from the camp storage room. Salvator was thirsty so they went to find water and were approached by a German. Salvator,

## **Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project**

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

now speaking German, told the man that they had come from Austria to find work. The man found them a job working on a farm for a woman until May 1, 1945 when the first U.S. troops arrived and they were liberated.

After the war Salvator married an Italian woman, and was a successful businessman in Germany. He realized that he could not stand to be in Germany and on August 27, 1950 he immigrated to Stockton, California. He worked for various upholstery shops and his first wife owned a flower shop. They eventually divorced because she could not have children. He remarried a Swedish woman in California and they had two sons. One of his sons was killed in a vehicle accident one month after his eighteenth birthday. Salvator had become rather wealthy and in 1989 was "living comfortably" off the property he bought and the money he made running his own business.