

## HVT-182

E., Ernest 1928-

Ernest E. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-182) interviewed by Musia Schwartz, June 3, 1996.

3 copies: 1 SVHS first camera; 1 SVHS second camera; 1 VHS copy.

**Summary:** Ernest was born on February 9, 1928 in Kralovsky Chlumec, Czechoslovakia, 3 kilometres from the Hungarian border. His parents raised six children in a modern religious home. Ernest had three sisters and two brothers. Their father was a liquor distributor and their mother was a homemaker. The family spoke Slovak and Hungarian at home. Ernest attended public school in the morning and cheder in the afternoon. Ernest also participated in the B'nei Akiva youth group. Two synagogues served a vibrant Jewish community of 300 families.

After having occupied southern Slovakia, the Hungarians confiscated Jewish businesses in 1940. Jewish boys were forced to do agricultural work in lieu of Hungarian military service. In April 1944, the Jews were concentrated in the Ullhely ghetto, which was located 28 kilometres from Kralovsky Chlumec. The ghetto was surrounded by a fence. People who knew each other lived together. Otherwise, people were assigned randomly into overcrowded apartments. In June 1944, the Hungarians co-ordinated the liquidation of the ghetto. Ernest and his family were told they would be taken to an agricultural colony, but they were deported to Auschwitz. Ernest recalls that the train was overcrowded and there was one pail in the middle of the car that served as a toilet.

The train arrived in Auschwitz at two o'clock in the morning. The Jews were removed from the train and separated by gender. After the selection, Ernest's parents and one of his sisters were sent to the gas chambers. Ernest and his brother were sent to Lager C in Birkenau. His two other sisters lived in the women's camp. Ernest recalled that Kapos beat inmates with cables day and night for no particular reason. He describes long lineups, poor sanitary facilities, and the food. After spending two days in Auschwitz, Ernest and his brother were transported to a forced labour camp in Warsaw to clean the ghetto after its liquidation. Occasionally, the Poles sold some of the bricks being collected to different people. In exchange for his silence, Ernest received ham and bread. Ernest and his brother found various belongings in the brick piles and exchanged these items for food. In the fall of 1944, the Germans evacuated the camp. Those inmates who were incapable of walking were shot and the rest were marched out of Warsaw.

Ernest and his group walked through Lodz toward Germany. Each person received a blanket, a metal plate, and one container of canned beef per day, but no water. Upon arrival at a train station, the prisoners were packed into boxcars. Two guards occupied one-third of the car while 90 Jews were crowded in the rest of the space. During the journey, many Jews were shot and their corpses were thrown from the train. Over 2,000 men perished on this journey. When the train arrived in Dachau they were sent to a forced labour camp in Mühldorf am Inn. They worked building an underground factory. Each day, Ernest carried 50 kilogram bags of cement uphill. Eventually, he could no longer lift the bags. Ernest's brother arranged for him to work in the kitchen peeling potatoes. During this time, Ernest's brother developed typhoid fever and was quarantined. Ernest begged the Wehrmacht officer in charge to release his brother because he knew that the infirm were sent to Kaufering subcamp to be exterminated. The officer brought them extra food and instructed a patient to take Ernest's brother to an ambulance when the attendants were not watching. This man did as he was told and the two patients waited in the ambulance until the others were sent away. The camp was eventually liquidated and the prisoners were put on a train. On April 30, 1945, the train arrived in Tutzing, at which point the guards left the train. A few hours later, American tanks approached the train and the soldiers threw food packages to the prisoners. A soldier spoke

Yiddish to the Jews and they were taken to Feldafing DP camp.

The Americans took Ernest and his brother by train to Prague. They then went to Budapest and registered as survivors. They met a friend from their hometown who informed them that their sisters were still alive. Their sisters lived in a nearby town with an aunt and uncle. Upon their return home, Ernest and his brother found the neighbours wearing their father's suits, the family's furniture was in other peoples homes, and their father's Talmud and their mother's prayer books were in a garbage pile in the backyard.

Ernest moved to Kosice and was trained to be a dental technician. In 1948, he left Czechoslovakia because he did not want to live under a Communist regime. Ernest and his siblings went to Prague and bought visas for South America. The French Embassy provided them with papers so they could stay in France for three days. The Joint extended this time limit and found Ernest and his family an apartment. On October 23, 1949, Ernest and his siblings emigrated to Montreal with help from an uncle who had moved to Canada one year earlier. Ernest and his brother worked in a jewellery factory. In 1955, Ernest married. Ernest and his wife have two children.