

## HVT-27

L., Steven 1921-

Steven L. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-27) interviewed by Musia Schwartz and Dr. David Lissak, July 5, 1994.

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

**Summary:** Steven was born on June 28, 1921 in Krakow, Poland. Steven's family was traditional and observed all the High Holidays. The family lived in a predominantly Jewish area and, as a child, Steven associated mainly with other Jews. Steven's father was a weight lifter and played soccer for several teams. Steven was the oldest of three children. He was a business student before the war began and he participated in the Maccabi student organization.

The Jews in Poland were well informed about the developments in Germany. Steven remembers that they became increasingly scared after the Kristallnacht pogroms in November 1938. They feared that the widespread antisemitism in Poland might cause similar violent attacks. During this time Steven was working with his student association helping Jewish refugees from Germany to find places to stay in Krakow.

In March 1941, Steven's family was taken to the newly created Jewish ghetto in Krakow. In September 1942, Steven's mother was sent to an unknown destination. He remembers his father subsequently telling him and his siblings that he had to avenge the death of his wife. In 1943, when Steven was in the Plaszow forced labour camp, he found out that his father had managed to escape from the ghetto and joined the Krakow Jewish underground. Later he was captured and put into a Gestapo prison, where he was tortured for seven weeks. He was executed in Plaszow.

In October 1942, Steven and his brother were among 250 Jews from the Krakow ghetto who were taken to work in an airport. Steven worked alongside Poles and Germans repairing trucks and cars for the German army. In September 1943, when this camp was evacuated, Steven and his brother were sent back to Plaszow.

The conditions in Plaszow were horrible. There was neither enough food nor appropriate clothing and up to six people slept on a bunk built for two. Steven describes Amon Goeth, the commander of the camp at that time, as a sadist who randomly killed inmates. Steven estimates that on average there were between 20,000 to 25,000 people in Plaszow at any one time. After round-ups that took place regularly, thousands were sent away to unknown destinations, while at the same time thousands arrived. For some time Steven was among a group of 20 people who were forced to pile up corpses that were burned at a killing site in Plaszow.

On October 15, 1944, Steven and his brother were taken to Gross-Rosen where they remained for five days. On the fifth day, Steven's and his brother's names were called from a list and they were taken by train to Bruennlitz where Oskar Schindler awaited them. Schindler was accompanied by SS officers who escorted the Jews to a munitions factory. Steven thinks that he was included on Schindler's list because of his experience as a metal worker. Alongside Schindler were his accountant, Isaak Stern, and the bookkeeper, Marcel Goldberg. Steven worked at Schindler's factory for the duration of the war. Steven thinks that Schindler acted less out of compassion for Jews than out of opportunism. But whatever his motives were, he is grateful for having been saved by him.

The night before liberation, Schindler held a meeting with his workers before he fled

to the American occupation zone. On May 8, 1945, three Russians entered the factory and declared everyone free. Later, members of the Czech underground came and instructed the Jews to return home and do as they pleased with the German houses that had been marked with white flags. A group of survivors, including Steven, went to a nearby town. Steven entered one of these flagged houses and found a frightened mother and her young daughter. Steven did not want to scare them any further so he left empty-handed. He joined four friends and they procured a carriage with a few horses. Heading for Krakow, Steven and his friends drove through Czechoslovakia. Wherever they stopped for provisions or to rest, Steven and his friends were well received. Eventually, they reached Krakow. Friends welcomed them with food and shelter. After a few weeks, Steven and his friends recuperated and Steven returned to his old home. He searched for items his family might have hidden in the house, but found nothing.

Steven and his brother were the family's only survivors. His father was shot in Plaszow, his mother probably died in Treblinka, and his sister was killed alongside her aunt when the Krakow ghetto was liquidated.

Steven remained in Krakow until 1950, when he emigrated to Israel. In June 1953, he moved to England where he lived with some relatives. Four months later, Steven settled in Canada.