

## HVT-171

R., Norbert 1926-

Norbert R. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-171) interviewed by Gerry Singer and Sheba Goldstein, May 13, 1996.

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

**Summary:** Norbert was born on October 19, 1926 in Oradea, Romania. His parents raised three children in an orthodox Jewish home. His father was a manufacturer. Norbert attended cheder and the Vizhnitsa Rabbi's yeshiva. His sisters attended an orthodox Jewish high school. At fourteen, Norbert began reading philosophy and wanted to study secular subjects.

In 1940, Hungary occupied Oradea. In 1944, Norbert and his family were forced into the Oradea ghetto with 35,000 other Jews. They had a Hasidic neighbour who hid three Polish Jews. These Polish Jews told Norbert's family about the destruction of Polish Jewry, but the family did not believe them. Norbert's family built a bunker and stored canned goods.

In June 1944, Norbert and his family were deported. After a three-day journey by cattle car, the family arrived in Auschwitz. A Polish guard forced Norbert's sister to give her baby to her mother. Norbert's mother and his sister's child were murdered in the gas chambers. The others were sent to work. In December 1944, Norbert's father died. His uncle died three weeks later. Norbert and his sister's husband worked as painters and later in a water-supply commando, digging ditches. Eventually, Norbert worked in the officers' rooms cleaning boots.

On January 18, 1945, Norbert was among the 30,000 inmates evacuated from Auschwitz. They were marched to Gross-Rosen, where they stayed for two days. Then, they were sent by train to Dachau. Norbert remembers this six day journey vividly. Many of the men in the train were forced to stand. Fights broke out and people killed each other for a place to sit. They did not receive any food or water, and there was no fresh air. Some of the prisoners removed the belts from the dead so they could lower a utensil through a crack in the door and retrieve snow to eat. Fourteen men died on this transport. After spending three days in Dachau, Norbert and the inmates were sent to Mühldorf to work in an underground air plane factory. They did not receive any food. A typhus epidemic broke out and Norbert spent three days in quarantine with a high fever. Following his recovery, Norbert was transferred to Kaufering. After a short stay, he was transported back to Dachau.

On April 29, 1945, the US Army liberated Dachau. The inmates were given canned beef. Many died from overeating. Norbert was unable to swallow food. He was taken to a military hospital. The nurses tried unsuccessfully to feed him. The hospital sent for a professor from Munich who came and treated him. This doctor prescribed opium for six days. After six days, Norbert felt better but he was now addicted. Norbert was taken to a German military sanatorium. His brother-in-law visited him with a doctor and they took Norbert to Munich.

In August 1945, Norbert returned to Oradea. He found both his sisters and another brother-in-law. As the Soviet Union solidified its power in Romania, Norbert decided to leave the country for France. Norbert lived in Paris for three years. He studied architecture at the École des Beaux Arts. In August 1949, Norbert emigrated to Canada with the help of an organization that sponsored war orphans. He arrived in Montreal and worked as a salesman. Eventually, he became the governor of a Montreal university. Norbert is married and has two children and two grandchildren.