

HVT-67

S., Joseph 1923-

Joseph S. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-67) interviewed by Alex Cherney and Dr. David Lissak, February 13, 1995.

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

Summary: Joseph was born on April 23, 1912 in Parczew, Poland. His mother died when he was two years old leaving his father to raise four children. The children were brought up in an observant Jewish home. Joseph's father owned a brick factory. The family lived well and attended many cultural events. Joseph went to public school, cheder, and later, a yeshiva in Lublin. After his father's death in 1936, Joseph returned home to run the family business. After some time, he married an active Zionist woman. He does not remember experiencing antisemitism before the war.

In March 1939, Joseph's older brother was drafted into the Polish Army. For the first eight months after the war started, the Germans came occasionally to Parczew. Jews were forced out of business and their once vibrant cultural life came to an end. Jews were arrested in the streets and pressed into forced labour. The Germans created a ghetto. The Judenrat played an active role in assigning Jews to work details. Joseph was one of 200 men directed to work in a saw mill. There were many deportations and murders. In 1942, all Jews were rounded up and many were killed. Joseph was deported by train, but he managed to escape through a small window. A Polish person gave him some bread and suggested he travel at night. Joseph returned to Parczew where a Polish woman offered him a hiding place. She also brought Joseph's wife to him from the ghetto. Together, with four other people, they lived in hiding in the barn of this Polish woman's brother for the duration of the war. There were several instances when the Nazis almost found them. Joseph suspects that many people in the town knew that he was hiding there.

When the Soviet Army arrived in Parczew, Joseph and his wife left the farm. They returned home, but didn't want to stay there. Joseph worked at the family brick factory, now being used as a mill, crushing corn to make flour. He also formed a Jewish committee to handle complaints over stolen and damaged property. As a result of a government law stating that two witnesses could prove ownership of property, many Jews returned to their homes. Under the Communists, Joseph received five percent of the mill's profits working as its administrator, but he was not permitted to own it. The Russians informed Joseph that some Poles were still killing Jews. Joseph and his wife journeyed to Sweden where he worked in a ceramic tile factory for one year. His first son was born in Sweden.

With the help of a friend, Joseph and his family arrived in Montreal in 1948. They rented a five room apartment and rented out three of the rooms to other people. In Montreal, they had a second son and both children attended a Jewish school. Joseph became the chairman of the Labour Zionist Campaign. He entered into a successful business venture with two partners and later sold his shares and began a construction business. Recently, Joseph donated a waiting room to a hospital in Jerusalem in memory of his family.