

## HVT-271

S., Dave 1926-

Dave S. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-271) interviewed by Musia Schwartz, June 17, 1997.

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

**Summary:** Dave was born on February 10, 1926 in Simleu Silvaniei, Romania. Dave and his five siblings were brought up in a religious, working class home. The house was kept kosher and the family attended synagogue on Sabbath and all holidays. Dave's father transported wood with his horse and produced liquor to support the family. The family spoke Yiddish, Hungarian and Romanian at home. Dave went to cheder from the age of four and then to elementary school. The language of instruction in the public school was Romanian until Hungary annexed Northern Transylvania in 1940 and imposed Hungarian as the language of use. When Dave was twelve years old, he started a tailor apprenticeship.

Throughout his childhood, Dave was confronted with antisemitism. In school there were fights between children, and windows of Jewish homes and stores were routinely broken around the High Holidays. Nevertheless, Jews interacted with gentiles, and Dave had Christian friends. After Hungary annexed Northern Transylvania the Jews were subjected to increasingly severe restrictions of their civil rights. Kosher food ceased to be available, their economic opportunities were restricted and Jewish private schools were closed. In 1941, Dave's oldest brother was taken with other Jewish men to a forced labour camp. Two years later, the Jews were forced to wear the yellow badge.

Dave remembers that at the beginning of March 1944 the Jews in his town were rounded up and assembled on the property of a large Jewish school. A few days later, Hungarian Gendarmes marched them to a ghetto on the outskirts of Simleu Silvaniei. Jews from the surrounding areas arrived in the ghetto. The Jews were beaten and tortured. Many Jewish women were raped. Dave was forced to work in the ghetto. Once he was hung up with his arms tied behind his back for twenty minutes because he 'did not work fast enough'. In April 1944 deportations began. Dave and his family were on the third and last transport. The Gendarmes told them that they would bring them to labour camps. They were put into cattle cars without food and water. In the border town of Kassa, the SS took over the transport.

They were transported to Auschwitz. Immediately after the train stopped, a selection took place. Dave and his two brothers were selected for work. His parents, his grandfather, and his sister with her baby were sent to the gas chambers. Dave's hair was shaved and he received a striped uniform and a metal bracelet with the number 72587. After one week in Auschwitz, he and his older brother were transferred to Mauthausen. They were kept in a crowded barracks for ten days and then transported to Ebensee.

Dave was assigned to a labour commando working for 'Steinkugel Strassenbau'. He had to dig trenches for sewers and to dig out the roots of trees that had been cut down. Dave gives a detailed account of the terror and the humiliation prisoners continuously suffered in Ebensee. Dave witnessed prisoners being tortured and killed randomly by SS guards and the prisoners who collaborated with them. He remembers that the 'Lagerälteste', a German criminal, was particularly sadistic. For no apparent reason he beat people to death. In the late summer of 1944, Dave witnessed an SS guard shooting two boys and later telling reporters that he had prevented their flight. Dave remembers that there were casualties in his block every day.

Dave describes how conditions in the camp deteriorated during the final phase of the Holocaust. Beginning in October 1944, the already insufficient rations were cut continually being reduced. In early 1945, Dave's health was so poor that he was put into the camp's Jewish sick bay. In the hospital Dave saw his brother, who had been working on the

construction of a tunnel in Ebensee. He had been beaten so severely that his spine was broken. Everybody in the camp knew that there were mass-killings going on in one of the hospitals. According to Dave, every day thirty to forty people were brought from the 'Schonungsblock' to the crematoria. In February a death march arrived in Ebensee. Among the arriving prisoners was Dave's cousin. All of the marchers perished after a short period of time because they were not given food and shelter. The situation in the hospital was so desperate that one day around Pesach, Dave witnessed an incident of cannibalism. A few times, Dave was forced to bring paper bandages from the hospital to the crematoria. He witnessed how corpses were burned. Early in spring 1945, so many people had died that not all of them could be burned and the bodies were piled in the camp. Dave was among a group of people who were forced to dig mass graves. In two mass graves, about 3,800 corpses were buried. Dave remembers that one day, shortly before the war ended, a group of Lithuanian and Ukrainian SS men arrived in Ebensee. They wanted to bring the inmates into one of the tunnels that had been built and then blow it up. Due to the inmates resistance, this plan was never carried out. The SS then left hastily, and shortly thereafter, the camp was liberated by American soldiers.

After liberation, Dave and his brother returned to their home town in Romania. Dave remembers that so few Jews from Simleu Silvaniei and the surrounding areas returned that a minion could not be formed. Dave operated a small bar for one year and drank heavily to forget what he had experienced. In 1946, he brought his brother to a sanatorium in Bucharest. He never recovered from the injury he suffered in Ebensee and died in 1948. When Dave was due to join the army in 1947, he decided to leave Romania. He journeyed to the American occupation zone in Austria via Hungary. He stayed in Linz until the beginning of 1948 and then emigrated to Canada. When he came to Montreal he worked in a textile factory. In 1951, Dave started his own factory and later he organized a taxi company. Dave married in 1956. He has three children and now operates a real estate enterprise.