

## HVT-97

V., Leslie 1924-

Leslie V. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-97) interviewed by Susan Date and Bea Schachter, July 27, 1995.

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

**Summary:** Leslie was born on February 18, 1924 in Ajak, Hungary. He and his sister were raised in a traditional Jewish home. Leslie has no memory of his four other siblings who passed away before the war. Shortly after Leslie's birth, the family moved to Kisvarda. His father made shoes at home for a Jewish store owner. The family was very poor. Leslie went to public schools and received some Jewish education after regular classes. He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in Kisvarda. Leslie remembers being active in a Zionist youth organization which collected money to purchase land in Palestine. In 1938, Leslie's family moved to Budapest. There, his father opened a small shoe factory and the family's living situation improved significantly.

Leslie remembers the rise of antisemitism in pre-war Hungary. In Budapest, he had to drop out of high school two weeks prior to his graduation because he was Jewish. Later, he was refused a contract as a printer-apprentice because the printer's union refused to accept Jews. Instead, he started working in his father's shoe factory. When discriminatory laws forcing Jews out of business were passed, Leslie's parents hired a non-Jewish friend to act as the factory's owner. In 1940, Leslie's father was assigned to a Hungarian labour battalion. Two years later, his father was sent to the Eastern Front. During that time, Leslie helped his mother run the factory. In 1943, the family was notified that Leslie's father had been killed. Leslie was assigned to the labour service, too. He had to wear a yellow arm-band and did construction work. Leslie remembers that despite the discrimination, and the news they received about the situation of Jews in other countries, Jews in Hungary did not feel threatened.

On March 19, 1944, Germany invaded Hungary. Ghettos were created and Jews were required to wear the yellow star. Roundups commenced. On May 8, Leslie had to report for labour service again. He was assigned to a group of 120 people who had to clean up after air raids. In October, he escaped with 9 other men. Later, Leslie found out that the other men had been captured and executed. With a friend's help, Leslie managed to acquire false identification papers. He went into hiding in abandoned homes and traded the goods he found for bread. Leslie vividly recalls living with the constant fear of being detected by the authorities or even by his former friends. One day in December 1944, two officers stopped Leslie and discovered that his identification papers were forged. He was put in jail and later brought to a place where people were shot. Leslie's life was spared because an air raid forced the soldiers to disperse. Leslie went back into hiding until the Soviet Army liberated Budapest on January 15, 1945.

Leslie was hiding in a basement when he was found by the Russians and taken as a prisoner-of-war. Leslie was transported, with 5,000 people, in a cattle car to the Romanian camp, Polosty. On April 1, 1945 he was transferred to Kajejka, Ukraine and forced to work in a quarry. Former SS officers lived together with the Jews in this camp. Due to the harsh conditions, Leslie developed scurvy. He lost his teeth, could not eat, and walked with canes. At the end of 1946, he was transferred to Kursk where he worked in construction. In June 1947, Leslie was moved to Kiev and then to Debrecen, Hungary.

Leslie's house was empty when he returned to Budapest. He learned that his mother and sister had left for the United States. They had been informed that Leslie had died. Shortly

after they had left Hungary, Leslie's father, whom everybody thought had been killed in 1943, returned home. He divorced Leslie's mother and remarried in 1946.

Leslie spent three months in a sanatorium in Budapest. Afterwards, he stayed with relatives in Kisvarda. Leslie tried to escape from Hungary by paying men to smuggle him out of the country. Unfortunately, the smugglers were arrested by the Hungarian secret police. Leslie was married in 1952 and had a son in 1955. In 1956, they tried to leave Hungary for Austria but were caught by a Hungarian border guard and Leslie was ordered into the army. The family went into hiding and one week later they successfully crossed the border to Austria.

On June 13, 1957, Leslie and his family arrived in Montreal. He worked for Volkswagen washing and undercoating cars. Leslie later worked in a shoe factory and was eventually promoted to the accounting department. His wife worked as a dressmaker. Today, Leslie and his wife have a son and enjoy spending time with their three grandchildren.