

HVT-169

W., Andrew 1927-

Andrew W. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-169) interviewed by Elliot Kramer and Barry Stahlmann, April 17, 1996.

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

Summary: Andrew was born on January 22, 1927 in Kantorjanosi, Hungary. When Andrew was six months old, his family moved to Nagyecsed, Hungary. His parents raised ten children in a Hasidic home. The children were taught to respect non-Jews. Andrew's father was a merchant of farm products and his mother worked at home and sold yard products. Andrew attended cheder and public school. At the age of fifteen, Andrew attended the yeshiva in Nyiregyhaza with his brother.

Andrew remembers Hungarian antisemitism escalating in 1940. Jews were beaten on their way to synagogue and Jewish businesses were destroyed. In 1943, Andrew heard rumours of round-ups and deportations. His older brother hid to avoid recruitment into the labour battalions. In March 1944, the German Army invaded Hungary. Andrew watched newsreels of Germans burning synagogues in Budapest. When Andrew and his brother came home from yeshiva two weeks before Passover they witnessed Germans ridiculing the Jews of Nagyecsed. They took one of Andrew's friends and cut his payes. The Arrow Cross also tormented the Jewish population by beating them and looting their shops. Andrew was afraid to leave the house when it was dark outside.

Two weeks after Passover, they were forced to wear the yellow star. The Hungarian Gendarmerie then rounded up the Jews and told them to pack their best clothing and linen. The Jews were marched to the railway station and were taken by train to the ghetto in Mateszalka. Andrew's family lived in the loft of a stable. Jews began arriving from Transylvania. Andrew's family heard rumours about the gas chambers and crematoria. The family stayed in Mateszalka for approximately three weeks until then the ghetto was liquidated. The Jews were marched to a railway station and put into cattle cars. Each cattle car held more than forty people. Hungarians wearing SS uniforms guarded the transports. Andrew recalls a young man asking a guard for some water for his ailing baby daughter. The man was shot instantly.

When the trains arrived in Birkenau, the Jews were instructed to line up, leave their baggage, and march through the gate. Andrew held his mother's hand. They marched single file and faced a selection. Andrew and his brother went to the left, and the rest of his family was sent to the right. Andrew never saw his family again. Andrew and his brother were marched into a barracks. They found one of their uncles and some school friends. They showered and received uniforms. In the evening, they received a bowl of turnip soup and a piece of bread. Each person kept their bowl and wooden spoon. Many refused to eat because the food was not kosher. During the next few days, the group did not leave the barracks except for roll-calls and meals.

After two days, the inmates were sent to Mauthausen for one day. Andrew saw people behind barbed wire. He was given a number on his uniform and a bracelet (#72195). Andrew was separated from his brother and sent to Gusen Zwei, where he was imprisoned for 11 months. Some of the inmates were forced to carry bags of cement weighing 50 kilograms each from the railroad to a work site. Others were assigned to dig a tunnel and to work in an air plane parts factory. The men received tobacco for their work. Andrew traded his tobacco for bread. Once, a German shepherd bit Andrew, infecting his foot. A doctor from his hometown opened the wound with a nail and treated it with grease. The Jews endured hours of roll-calls each day while the dead bodies were counted. Anyone who became ill was taken

away immediately. When the British Army began heavy bombing, the inmates hid inside a tunnel they built. In March 1945, the inmates were evacuated to Mauthausen, where many people suffered from typhus and dysentery. Andrew found his brother in a hospital barracks.

On May 5, 1945, Mauthausen's inmates awoke to silence. Andrew left the barracks and saw American jeeps. He was so exhausted that his brother had to carry him. After passing out, Andrew woke up in an American field hospital. Many died after raiding the food facilities in the camp. Andrew remembers barracks loaded with corpses. Andrew and his brother took a freight train from Vienna to Hungary. They stayed in a hospital in Budapest for a while and then they returned home with the help of Russian soldiers. Their family home was destroyed and Gypsies were living in it. The family's farm animals and furniture had been stolen. Andrew and his brother remained there for two days. They located their uncle in a nearby town. Andrew and his brother are the only survivors of their immediate family. Their parents and siblings were all murdered upon their arrival at Auschwitz in 1944.

Andrew and his brother joined the Agudah. They were smuggled into Vienna without documents and later brought to Munich. Andrew and his brother stayed at a DP camp in Winzheim and Andrew became a tailor. They received assistance from an aunt in New York and the UNRRA. The Canadian Jewish Congress sponsored them as orphans and they went to Canada. While other orphans moved west, Andrew and his brother remained in Montreal. Andrew worked in a knitted goods factory. His brother moved to New York. Andrew became a clothing cutter and designer. Presently, Andrew is married and has two sons and one granddaughter.