

## HVT-170

W., Susan 1922-

Susan W. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-170) interviewed by Alex Cherney and Anne Friedman, May 13, 1996.

2 copies: 1 SVHS first camera; 1 VHS copy.

**Summary:** Susan was born on November 5, 1922 in Uzhgorod, Czechoslovakia. Jews comprised approximately one quarter of the population of 40,000. Her parents raised ten children, five boys and five girls, in an orthodox Jewish home. The family owned a delicatessen and lived in an apartment above the restaurant. Susan remembers the Czechs as decent people. She did not experience any antisemitism growing up. Susan spoke Hungarian at home, while Czech was the language of instruction in school. As a youth, Susan attended both a Czech school and a Jewish school. At the age of fourteen, she went to a business college for two years. After finishing school, Susan was employed in a friend's business. Susan was also a gymnast in a Maccabi sports club.

In 1939, after Hungary annexed the part of Czechoslovakia in which the family was living, Jews were subjected to Hungary's discriminatory laws. As a consequence, Susan lost her job. Jews were increasingly restricted in their business opportunities. In 1942, Susan's father passed away and her brothers were sent to various labour camps. Susan then managed the family delicatessen.

Shortly after Germany occupied Hungary in 1944, the Jews in Uzhgorod were gathered in a brick factory. Susan's family was held there for approximately one month, and then deported to Auschwitz. Susan and one of her sisters were separated from the rest of the family during the initial selection at Auschwitz. They were taken to the showers, had their heads shaved, received clogs and a uniform, and were sent to a barracks. Susan remembers the Germans being very strict about cleanliness in Auschwitz.

After two months in Auschwitz, Susan and her sister were transferred to Stutthof. Susan remembers the Ukrainian guards in Stutthof as being particularly cruel. Nevertheless, she considers herself lucky because she received favours from the guards due to her fair appearance. In the autumn of 1944, Susan and her sister were transferred to a labour camp. The women worked on a farm digging bunkers in very cold weather. In the winter of 1944, 1,000 women including Susan and her sister, were sent on a death march. They marched 25 kilometres each day.

One day, Susan and her sister met a group of British POWs who were being kept by SS guards in a barn. Susan's sister spoke to them in English. The British prisoners bribed a Czech guard who allowed Susan and her sister to sneak away from their group. They hid with the British POWs until the group of Jewish women continued their death march. After hiding in a bunker in a forest for one night, the British soldiers brought Susan and her sister to their living quarters. They were treated very well by the soldiers. Unfortunately, a new guard discovered the girls and forced them to leave. The POWs put Susan and her sister on a milk truck and sent them to a nearby town. The girls received rosaries and were instructed to tell people they had been working on a farm and had somehow lost their papers. Because of their appearance, Susan and her sister were not bothered by the local populace. A German who did not know that she was Jewish took Susan to the hospital, where her frozen foot was treated. Later, when the hospital was evacuated, Susan's sister received a permit from the German authorities to stay in town. Susan and her sister stayed with a Polish caretaker for about two months. They paid him with food they had stolen in the hospital.

The day after Susan left the hospital, the Soviet Army liberated the region. When Susan and her sister returned to Uzhgorod, they found their family home destroyed. They travelled

to Prague and were reunited with one of their brothers. Susan and her sister found jobs quickly. A second brother came to Prague after being released from a Russian camp. Susan and her sister stayed in Prague for three years. In 1948, they emigrated to the United States with the help of their sister, who had settled in New York City before the war. Susan married in 1949. Her husband opened a tie factory in New York City. After Susan's husband experienced problems with his business partners, they moved to Montreal. Susan eventually left her husband's business and became an artist. She and her husband have two children.