

Leizer Finchelstein In The Forced Labor Camp



This photograph was taken when I was part of a labor detachment in Predeal, around 1943. I'm the one on the left, in fact I am the tallest one in the group. The one on my right was a young man from Târgu Frumos, and the one on the left was from Iasi as well. The photograph was taken by a Jew from around Brasov who managed to sneak in the detachment a very simple photo camera which took 6 cm x 9 cm photographs. I remember that he gave the film to an acquaintance to develop it, after which each of us received one photograph.

After the pogrom of 1941, we subsequently stayed for 6 months in Podu Iloaiei, until the end of November 1941. We were distributed to live with other Jewish families in their homes, and were sent to perform labor during the day.

I returned home, in Iasi, in November 1941. I returned by train. It wasn't long and in May 1942 I was taken from the street to the recruiting centre during a raid. The sergeant asked me if I presented myself to be recruited, I was already 18. I told him that I hadn't. He then took me inside the cellar of a police precinct located across the street from where the Europa Hotel stands today. I spent the entire night among delinquents. Early in the morning they made us form a column and took us directly to the recruiting centre, I was given a so-called medical inspection, they measured me and sent me straight to the Socola train station. I was again boarded on freight cars, and this time I was sent to Bessarabia. I thought that I would once again go through my entire experience on "the death trains." Still, this time the train cars weren't that fully loaded and we also received some food.

I served my first period of labor at a stone quarry in Bessarabia, at Saba, Cetatea Alba, on the Dniester riverbank.

Then, a year and a several months later, I was transferred to Predeal, straight from Bessarabia, that is. I remained in Predeal until 23rd August 1944. I worked on a strategic highway there, cutting

down trees and things like these. In Predeal, we were part of roads regiment 1 but, at a certain point, the precinct of that regiment entered repairs, so they built a small workshop inside the concentration camp and we performed carpentry work there. There were many people from Iasi and its surroundings in this detachment. Although they weren't carpenters, they claimed to be carpenters in order to escape the hard work building highways, and even if they didn't know the trade, they stayed close to me and I helped them. The conditions were those of a concentration camp, there was no toilet, only a ditch dug outside, the food was very bad, there were wooden bunk beds with no bed clothes, and the boards weren't level, so that I had marks on my back for a long time after returning home. You covered yourself with your own clothes.

I was so thin when I returned home [from Predeal] that any doctor could have X-rayed me without looking at the Roentgen machines. Every bone was on the surface of my body and you could see all my internal organs through my dried up skin. When I was in the labor detachment I slept on some wooden bunk beds whose boards were placed along the length of the bed. And the boards were of uneven thickness, one was sitting higher, another lower, so that it was years before the marks on my back caused by these boards healed. But I stayed alive. I returned home almost barefoot, wearing shoes that were tied with string and wrapped in pieces of sackcloth.