

Zoltan Menzel As A Forced Laborer



This is a photo my future husband, Zoltan Menzel, sent me in 1943, from Suraia, where he was drafted to forced labor. He had to dig up trenches with the other Jews from Brasov. He is the first from the right, sitting in the front row.

Zoltan was born in Budapest in 1915, but after World War I he moved with his parents to Brasov, when he was in second grade at elementary school. He went to a German High School here in Brasov, called Honterus. He graduated in 1933, when Hitler came to power and anti-Semitism started to spread. I think he was in a special class: all of them remained united and close until they grew old and died. Every year they celebrated the anniversary of their High School graduation, either in Munich, Germany, where some of his former colleagues were living at the time, or here, in Brasov. My husband also went to the Jewish school here, he took some classes while at High School; he was Rabbi Deutsch's favorite student! His mother tongue was Hungarian.

I met my husband, Zoltan Menzel, during the war, in 1940, in this very house I live in today, just upstairs, in a Jewish club called Ahava. I don't know if it was a Zionist club or not: it had several rooms, in some the ladies drank tea, and in others the men played cards. They organized balls from time to time, but that's all I know about the club. Zoltan wasn't a Zionist though, and neither was I.

During the war, Zoltan was drafted to forced labor, together with other young Jews from Brasov, and he had to go to work in construction, digging all over Brasov county. We got married when the

war was over, in 1944. I don't know if it mattered so much to me that he was a Jew, but I didn't like anybody else. We didn't have a religious wedding, that cost money and we were broke, both unemployed.