INTERVIEW WITH ZOLMAN STERNBERG

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Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
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INTERVIEWER: Okay, today is December 29, l993. And I am interviewing Mr. Zolman Sternberg, who is the father of Shelly Sternberg, and they come from, currently they live in Hamilton, Ontario, and we'll proceed with the interview. I'm now turning the microphone over to Mr. Sternberg.

So our first concerns are about your background. If you could tell us the name of the town you were born in, how many people in your family, parents, just start with those basic...

ZOLMAN STERNBERG: Well, the place I come from is a small town in Hungary by the name of Bodrogkeresztur.

INT: Could you spell that?

ZOLMAN: To spell it is B-o-d-r-o-g-k-e-r-e-s-z-t-u-r. And it's a small town of about three and a half thousand, of which there was about seven, eight hundred Jewish people living there. They were also very famous of a big rabbi, the (?); people who knew the Hasidish world would probably recognize the name. And in our family there was seven children, four girls and three boys. Yes, and my father was involved in different type of businesses. He was involved in the community, he was a city alderman, he was...

INT: Notary public?

ZOLMAN: Not a notary public, no. We had a store. We had a wine, he sort of, we made wine and we sold it.

INT: Wine?

ZOLMAN: Wine manufacture. Winery. We had a winery. And we also, my father was the official, for the whole area, for all the wine barrels which had to be checked for, like in the liters, you know, it contained official liters. You know, it had to be, he was the official person for that in that whole county. Also he was an insurance agent. But most of those were taken away with the rise of the Hitler era in l939. Slowly they took out the different...

INT: Rights.

ZOLMAN: Rights, like the papers where you were permitted to function, you know, they were…

INT: As early as l939?

ZOLMAN: Started, yeah, in l939. And of course, I was nine years old at that time. Also my father was called in to the labor camp, like they had in Hungary for anyone over eighteen up to

forty or something. They had to go in and serve in labor camps, which made it very hard on our mother and with seven children to look after and to survive and...

INT: Where were you in the scheme of things?

ZOLMAN: I was the third one from the oldest. I was born in l930. My oldest brother was born in l927, and the one in between us was my sister, who is the only one alive beside me, was born in l928, and she also lives in Canada beside Hamilton, in Toronto, and we're the only two of the seven children who survived. My father and brother were killed the day before liberation. (Pause)

INT: And your mother?

ZOLMAN: My mother with all my smaller sisters and brothers were taken to the gas chambers. And then we arrived, which was in l944, Erev Shavuos. We were deported a day after Pesach from our town, taken into a ghetto by the name of (?), and we were there approximately six weeks, when they took us away to Auschwitz. And we arrived there just Erev Shavuos at night.

INT: What do you remember about your own upbringing?

ZOLMAN: It was a very close family. My father was an extremely well-educated and a well-liked person in the community. He was well liked both by the secular, where he was involved too, in different positions, and was also well liked between the religious community. He was learned. He was a learned man, both in secular and in Hebrew. He spent times both in higher, and gymnasium and university besides spending time in yeshivot. And he also was a, as far as I remember, I've never seen such a beautiful life.

INT: And did you go to school yourself? You were nine years old, so you were fairly young.

ZOLMAN: Well, that was in l939. I was (?) till l944. We were deported when I was fourteen years old. And we went to school, but when the Hitler era started, and when the Jewish pogroms started, sort of, they separated the Jewish kids from the Christian kids, and we were separated and taught practically nothing. We were just more or less kept together in a separate class. So from that time I was grade five or six and all the parts of my schooling was practically worth nil because all we did there was just sort of wasting time, you know.

INT: What about your own Jewish education? Was it formal, or did you study with your father?

ZOLMAN: Well, it was formal. I went to a cheder, and as a matter of fact, my education started at 5:00 in the morning in a private cheder, and I was there till usually 8:30 in the morning, and from 9:00 I was in the public school. From 9:00 till 4:00 I was in the public school, and from 4:30 to 7:00 I went back to the cheder. And of course Sundays when there was no public school I spent from 5:00 in the morning till 7:00 at night, all day, in cheder learning. And of course I was just bar mitzvah when the, just before the deportations, so I didn't end up going to

yeshiva or to any higher education, but my father always dreamt of sending us, like my brother was supposed to go to dental school, be a dentist, and I started out already, but the war, with all the problems came in, so he had to be brought back home, because in our town we had no higher education. We only had up to grade eight, and especially since my father was away from home, needed all the kids to help out the family.

INT: What about your sisters? It seems that they were much younger.

ZOLMAN: Yeah, they were all younger. There was only one sister who was older than me, the one who survived, but all the others were younger ones. One was born after me in l93l, and then there was l933, and a l935, and then the youngest brother was born in l939.

INT: So do you remember more interactions with your sisters, or with your brothers, or just the family always together, the children. It sounds as if you were fairly close in age range.

ZOLMAN: Well, yeah. Sort of more of a family type of relationship. And were very close to our parents. I mean, my father and mother were both very dedicated to the children, and there was never a thing, although my father was busy with half a dozen different businesses he was running, he always had time, he told every one of his kids to sit down and to help them with their homework, or to help in any other way, if you had a composition, to help or to write or something. And it was never too much to ask from him. He was always readily available. And what I started to say before, I never saw such a closeness as a husband and wife (pause, crying) as my parents. I never remember in my life, that they would ever call each other by any name other than "dear." The worst problems with all this, just console each other, with no worry. It was the will of G-d. (?) We can't help, and they would always console each other, but never lift or raise a voice against each other. Never in my life.

INT: How would you describe your mother in terms of personality? You describe your father as a very strong, and yet generous man.

ZOLMAN: I don't know. Somehow I seem to remember a lot more my father. He was much more big, go to cheder, he would sort of listen, at the end of the week, to what we learned and to report to him, and of course the whole family, all seven children, we were A's in schools. We didn't think of it to come home with a B, it was sort of a shanda, so to speak, in my family, and it was known in the school that the Sternbergs, they were taking all the honors in every class, because whatever the other pupil. And it was a real close family with lots of love.

INT: And it sounded as if you were very, you were quite young when you went to the camp itself. Were you with anyone, your brother, or...

ZOLMAN: I was together, the Mengele, when they did the selection in Auschwitz, in the camp, Mengele sent me, I was holding my father, and my brother, so he sent us together, and that was at night when we arrived there. And then the next morning when they started to line us up and look us through, they asked everybody who is under sixteen, or something like that to step

forward. And I didn't realize it, why they were saying it. And of course I stepped forward, and they took me away, and that's the last time I saw my father and brother.

INT: And where were you sent?

ZOLMAN: I was sent to a children's barrack, what they called, it was all children who went through the selection, I mean, they weren't that young, so there were something like over a thousand kids in a barrack. The kids were between the ages approximately fourteen to sixteen, fourteen to seventeen. And then after a while that was in Shavuos, after a while they started the big selection, especially on the High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, they took away almost three quarters of them were selected. To go away. As a matter of fact, the first one, Rosh Hashanah, the first selection, I was in it, too, I was already sent into a block where we were supposed to be all sent to the gas chamber. And what happened, usually they kept you there overnight, and somehow the next morning, Mengele came back to that block and re-picked the children, and I don't know with what luck I was taken out and sent to the right side, sort of to speak of, you know. And all of the rest of the kids whom I was to be (?) two landsman, two kids from the same town, one was the rebbe's son, and one was the gabbai's son, the rebbe's son, who were with me, and both, actually they were a little older than me, they were still both sent away to the gas chamber, and Motzei Rosh Hashanah, the trucks arrived and they loaded up all those kids, and I never saw them after.

And that was Rosh Hashanah, and then Yom Kippur we had another huge selection when they took us to a football field that they had in the camp there, that they took out a boy who was a really decent height and they nailed a board across the top of his head, you know, what his height was, and that's how everybody had to walk to measure your height, and if you reached it, you went one side, and if you didn't reach it, you know, you went to the left side. So of course, it came to me, I knew I wouldn't reach it, so I made myself look like I was bending down so I shouldn't bump my head into it.

INT: Clever.

ZOLMAN: And then one of the SS grabs me, he says, "You Schwein, what are you trying to play some tricks on me?" And all of the sudden, I don't know where I got the strength from, I just jumped out from his hands when he was grabbing me, and I just jumped in front of Mengele, who was the, you've heard of Mengele, who was the selector, and I just sort of told him in German, "Bitte schon, Herr (?) ich (?) arbeiten," and that would work. And he was sort of shocked. He looked at me, and just patted me on the back and says, "Jawohl," shaken that this youngster, "Send this little boy to the right side." And that's how I escaped. That was part of the escape of that day, which I went through some more after, when I was sent to the right side. A few kids tried to break through the cordons, you know, they knew what was coming, they were trying to escape, so their numbers were counted, how many they selected, and the numbers had to be there. So after they were finished, there were some missing, so they started to gather a few more, you know, whomever they thought escaped or something, of course, they picked one of the kapos who was going to pull me out, and I just jumped in. So they gave him a right hand on

his (?), and I just run as fast as I could to the first barrack I found and I hid in a washroom there until the (?) was over, and that's how basically I escaped that day from the second.

And then every day when we had to stand in Appel and they came to count us, they had to, I always started to, tried to be in the middle of the row, because I always had stones put behind my heels so that I looked taller than I was, and I was standing on them sometimes for hours, you know, trying to fool them with my height. And it was a constant danger for me being there, because like I said, actually altogether we were there about three barracks with kids, about three thousand, and towards the end, I don't know. The numbers probably could be counted on a few hands what was left. And the only way I escaped eventually was after Sukkos when there was a transport out from Auschwitz, I hid behind the kitchen in a garbage bin, and when they were marching out, I just ran out from the bin and just got into the roll, and then marched out with them. And that's because I figured I had to leave Auschwitz, or Birkenau, because there my end will be eventually, they're going to, they didn't do anything, didn't work there, but just sort of keeping us there for different selections.

INT: So in other words, the children didn't work.

ZOLMAN: Didn't do anything there, no, no.

INT: So how did you, what did you do all day? It sounds to me as if you were very alert. Did you spend a lot of time scheming, "how will I get the stones, how will I do this?"

ZOLMAN: Always thinking of something, scheming where you got your food, how to get an extra, maybe an extra portion, you know, try to sneak it, you need an extra portion to survive, because the portion what you got was hardly enough to survive on. And also we sort of, being kids, there was in the same camp there was the Sonderkommando, the ones, all the people who were working in the crematoriums, and they brought back with a lot of food then, usually. They always brought us something, for the kids.

INT: You shared accommodations, so to speak?

ZOLMAN: No, no, they were in a different block, but we were in the same camp. In Lager C, for instance, there was, I don't know, twenty or thirty barracks. And each barrack held about a thousand people, so they were in the front barracks, and we were somewhere in the back or the middle. And they would sometimes bring us some extra food what they would bring home from the victims whom they, you know, collected from the trains, and they would give us things, and after a little while I sort of found my sister, who was just across the other camp, which was the women's camp, and we used to talk across the electric wire, barbed wires, and we, having sometimes a little extra food, I used to throw over some extra food try to help her to survive. And of course that went on only until I was there, and then she was taken away from Birkenau, and like I say I escaped after with this transport going out from Birkenau, and I ended up from there in Dachau.

And from Dachau they, of course they asked anybody who is sick or young, and I always volunteered to the healthiest, and to the heaviest work, because I was always afraid that if I tried to go to the sick, I knew what the end results would be always. So I ended up from Dachau they took us to a place called Landsberg, where they were working in a, the Germans they were building a huge factory, I think it was from (?) or something, a huge underground factory. It was called a Molekommando, and I was always picked working, and sometimes I was lucky. The kapos or the SS would have pity on me, and after a couple of hours they sent me into the bunker, to say, "Go and take a rest." And I even had one SS who sometimes would give me his lunchbox, whatever it was, but saying with harsh words, not with kind words, "Go and clean up, wash my lunch box," and in the meantime he left it with all kinds of food in it for me, but you know, to make it look like he's not trying to help you or anything, he was treated me as like to a dog. "Go and wash it, clean my lunchbox and bring it back to me later."

INT: Let me ask you something. Before you said, how many languages did you speak at this time? What did you learn?

ZOLMAN: Basically I spoke Hungarian and Yiddish, and I understood German after a while.

INT: You picked up the German.

ZOLMAN: Because I spoke good Yiddish.

INT: How would you describe yourself as a child? I'm guessing that there must have been a certain, not just because of my sense of you now, but because of what you're saying, there was probably some kind of charm to you. You caught people's attention. How, you were a chederdik child. How do you remember yourself?

ZOLMAN: (laughs) I don't know. It's so hard to remember, like I say. It was such a trying times. It wasn't much harder than it was. It was really always a thing of survival. In the school, and the anti-Semitism. You had to doubly be good and you had to prove yourself doubly better than the Christians because otherwise your grades and your, would always be lower than even what you deserved. So to be able to come home with A's you had to really strive really extra hard. And to say that I had more (?) than the other ones. It's hard for me to tell.

INT: Do you remember any particular friendships with Jewish children or adults?

ZOLMAN: Well, friendships I had were in the school, with classmates which were close. As a matter of fact, I still have one or two. One lives actually in Toronto, and one lives in Israel, whom I saw a couple of times. Which we were close as kids, but the one in Toronto we're still quite close. Any simchas, we still invite each other, so whenever there's something happening in the family, and this is, call on each other. But the one in Israel I saw him a couple of times, but this is a deep friendship, and also, being in Israel, being in Canada is two different lifestyles. Actually he was a police chief at one time in Beersheva. He was quite well, and after he ended up in Jerusalem. He was the chief of police or something.

INT: Since there was so many children together… (I think it would be helpful to move the microphone to make sure that you…)

Since there was so many children, and as you were saying you were not put to work, how did you spend your days? Do you remember improvising any games, or…?

ZOLMAN: Well, they always kept us, either we had to stand outside, they were counting, or what they called Appel, you know, you had to stand, and the odd time they would take us to do some manual work outside the camp maybe, line us up, and marched out and helped with cleaning up certain things, or cleaning some farm up there around that neighborhood. But basically there was no specific work, like what you would call, you knew every day you'd have to go and do certain things. And like I say, it was constantly the selections and coming and going, and all the new kids would come whom they took out from the, who were selected and then re-selected again, and that's all the kids that were taken to the gas chambers, so you had a constant, not too many were the original ones towards the end. It was always changing.

INT: So it sounds as if, were you able to form any friendships among the children, or was it just too...

ZOLMAN: It was just, nobody, never was together too long with you. With anybody to form any closeness or to...and of course a lot of them, from sickness, they passed away. The death rate, especially towards the end when we were, just before liberation, two days before liberation when they took us out from the camps and they started us marching, like trying to get away from the...

INT: The death marches.

ZOLMAN: The death marches. Try to get away. The Americans were getting close. So I think we left about ten thousand from Dachau and I don't know if we survived a thousand after three weeks of marching. So they were just falling left and right and then I had actually somebody who I made friends with who was originally from the same town as I was. He was more like my father's age, and he took sort of a liking of me, and a lot of times when we were marching I was ready to give up, because every time if you just sit down, they would shoot you, when they passed by when you were left sitting there. A lot of times I would say, his name was Gezer (?) Mr. (?) sort of. Says, "I just can't do it any longer." He said, "Just hold onto me, and let's go," and I would sort of walk with him and fall asleep walking with him and holding onto him and sort of just walk and walk until finally May the second, l945, in a village called Kaiserdorf, just near (?), just fifty or sixty miles from Munich, Munchen. When the Americans came in and we were liberated.

And of course a lot of people even passed away after, when suddenly they started to eat and of course, then the condition, I don't have to tell you, the lice, and you pick the lice up by the handful. They were all over, and there was no sanitation. We were sleeping for three weeks out in the woods. We'd stop and other times you know, I would take a dead body on one side of me, and that body against my head to keep his stomach for a cushion, and another dead body on my

other side to keep me warm, to take his blankets away and to keep me warm overnight. And that's how we used to get up in the morning, usually, if you laid down with three, four people, everyone who got up, you were lucky.

INT: So especially since you were so young, how did all this death around you affect you? You started to take death as a natural occurrence, or you didn't think about it?

ZOLMAN: There you were like an animal. You didn't think of it. You were just, you had the urge of survival, and that's all you, when you saw some people (?) I mean, for survival they grab a piece of bread, which is sometimes tantamount to killing the other. But I, the only thing I would ever do, was like if I saw they were dead and they have a blanket or something, you know, I would take it to keep myself sort of covered or, like I said, lots of times I'd pull over a body just rest my head on it to keep some soft spot. It's unbelievable. It's...

INT: Did you ever think about home? Did that give you any comfort or strength?

ZOLMAN: Comfort, of course. That was the only thing which you tried, I thought maybe my father. Because after a while I found out that my mother and the younger ones all went to the crematorium. I knew that. But I knew that my father and brother...

INT: How did news like that travel?

ZOLMAN: That was in the camp. After a while they told us. The ones who were there longer, you know. Because at the beginning we didn't know nothing what goes on. We didn't realize. When we arrived already we saw that this is not so good. We smell the, we saw the smoke stacks and the smell, you could tell what was going on. As a matter of fact, when we arrived there, in the box car, the cattle box car, what my father called us together there, and he started to say, (cries) He told the kids, that's it.

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE. GO DIRECTLY TO TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

INT: What helped you survive when you got there?

ZOLMAN: Well, the thought that my father, you know, my brother and a sister who was also to the right. So of course my sister I saw in the camp and I knew that she was, she was still alive, and that she might survive, because she was sent to a labor camp after from Auschwitz. And of course my brother and father they were marched out the first day when I told you I was separated from them, and I never saw them again, they were marched out in the left, you know, Birkenau. Because Birkenau actually was just sort of a transient camp. Either you went to the gas chamber, or you were sent out the next day or the second day, you know, to different lagers in the country you know, to work. So my father was sent out the next day. As a matter of fact, the next day I saw them marching off with my brother. And I never saw them after. So that was driving me. It's more or less to sort of not to hurt my father, nobody comes home, that you know, at least that

some of the kids will come home, because I knew that my mother, whom he was very close, I don't think anybody could probably replace it, wouldn't be there, but maybe if three of us were there, the children, maybe we'll survive somehow after. But...it's just instinct to survive sometimes. It's greater if you don't give up, and you just try with an extra little piece of bread, to work a little extra to make that extra piece of bread, and that sometimes what made the whole difference, you know, to give you the strength to last another day and another day and to survive.

INT: You talk about the closeness of your parents. How did they meet? Was it a shidduch?

ZOLMAN: No, actually what happened. It was a funny thing. That my mother's sister married my father's brother. And at the wedding when my father met, they fell in love with each other, and actually they went through quite a problem with different rebbeim, they had to get permission, because it was two sisters marrying two brothers, and there was some halachic sort of questions, if it's permissible, so there was quite a, but eventually they got permission from the rebbeim, and like I say it was sort of love at first sight, and they got married. And like I say, I've never seen, any marriage, I mean, my marriage or anybody I met in my life, I've never seen such a clear closeness and with such a total devotion that was like I said, my father would never call my mother even stupid. Little things, sometimes you say it but not meaning anything by it. But even such a slight slangs, never, it was always with the kindest word, and call her "dear," you know, and...

INT: Were they more or less the same age?

ZOLMAN: Yeah, my father was born in l902 and my mother in l905, and they were married in l925.

INT: Did you have many aunts and uncles on either side?

ZOLMAN: Actually in the village there were four brothers who lived in the same town where we lived. My father had four brothers who lived all in the same town, and my father only had one more sister, who lived in the capital city, in Budapest, which was only one actually who survived. None of the four brothers survived. They all perished in the Holocaust. And from my mother's side, she came actually from Czechoslovakia, from a place near (?), in Czechoslovakia, and of course she had, I don't remember exactly what the family was. There were five of them, I think. And there was...only one, no there were six of them. One who lived in the States, came up as a young boy in the twenties. As a young boy, and he survived, and then one uncle who lived there survived. Of course, all the others perished, with all their families and everything. And between all the brothers from my father's side, there was only one other cousin, actually two of them who survived, but I had a girl cousin, who actually, she was home already when I got home in l945, September, because I didn't get home till September. She was home, and when I arrived home on a Thursday night, and...(crying) and on a Saturday we had to take her to the hospital. (crying) They were killed alive from there. She had some brain damage or something. We don't know. In those days they, medical, this was a young eighteen-year-old girl who went through the Holocaust horror, lost her parents, also there were five sisters and brothers, nobody came home except her, and I don't know if it wasn't just the idea that she lost everybody.

(crying) She never survived in the hospital. They took her in a Thursday night and buried her a couple weeks later.

INT: So you had a lot of first cousins.

ZOLMAN: Yeah, at that one time. Before the deportation, yeah. Every one of them had big families. Like this cousin who came home, there were five of them, and she came home alone. There is one other cousin who's still alive, lives in New York. Also a Sternberg. There were two of them. He only survived. And he's about the only one beside me and my sister and of course like I say, my father's sister who was living in Budapest, and plus some of their children which emigrated to Israel already before the war, they survived. And she survived in Budapest because most of the Jews survived in Budapest. Hitler never had a chance already to...so she really survived. I think the whole family except one child was taken out to (?), was shot by the Germans. But other than that, the whole family survived, and most of them live now in Israel, and we're fairly close with them.

INT: Was there a strong Zionist movement in your town?

ZOLMAN: Actually my father was a very, very strong Zionist. And I hear more now than I knew then as a child. You weren't told all those things, but from the relatives and so forth telling us that my father was a very strong Zionist and was always involved, like in those days he was the main for the JNF, for the Jewish National Fund, in those days he was the head of it in our town, you know.

INT: Was there a youth movement, like Betar, or even Hashomer Hatzair, or B'nai Akiva? I really don't know how old B'nai Akiva was, but do you remember any of this?

ZOLMAN: Like I say, I was too young to belong to any of that. And in those days, like I told you, I was in school from five in the morning till seven at night, six days a week, and on Sabbath, even Sabbath we went in the morning to shul, and in the afternoon we still had to go back to learn. So really it was a full profession. We really didn't know much of the outside world what was going on.

INT: Did you know your grandparents?

ZOLMAN: From my father's side, the one who lived the same time that I lived, they all died. My grandmother died before I was born. My grandfather died when I was one year old, or two year old, so I didn't remember it, I don't remember him. From my mother's side, I remember I went to visit them, they lived in Czechoslovakia, and it wasn't too simple to go there. You had to have passports, and usually my parents would go once a year, and every year they would take a different child with. So I remember I was there in l935 with them, and that's the only time I remember seeing them. I was supposed to go l939, and before we got to my grandmother's we start toward another city. We had an uncle lived, and the war just broke out there, and we stopped our journey. But I still remember. I was five years old when I saw them l935. I remember my grandfather, they had a store there. He would come into the store. He carried me

in, and he had a big glass of candy, like he carried a jar, yeah, and they said, "Here guys, help yourself." I'll never forget. And of course, my grandmother, I remember when we arrived there with a horse and buggy, like you know, in those days, she was waiting with the special cookies like, you know, similar to what my wife just served. And it was a big poppy seed, and it was just delicious. And that's about all I knew of my grandparents, so basically it was just the parents and some uncles and aunts in the same town.

INT: Did your parents and grandparents belong to any particular Hasidic sect? Misnagdish?

ZOLMAN: Actually in our town, they had the Hasidic part, and they had the Orthodox, I mean the modern. Actually my father was very modern Orthodox.

INT: Did he wear a beard?

ZOLMAN: Well, sort of a little, what you call a trim. At one time. But later on, after l939, when he had to go back and forth to those labor camps, he shaved off. He never had any beard you know, in the later years. But he respected, we had the famous Karostirer (?) rebbe in town. He never believed in going and but he had the interest part of it, and he used to come Purim, or before Yom Kippur, when they used to send Matanos, he would send it, we had three rebbeim in the city, like the Hasidic rebbe, and the regular Orthodox rabbi. Of course everybody was Orthodox. There was no Reform or Conservative in those days. But we were very modern.

INT: Did your mother cover her hair?

ZOLMAN: Oh, yeah, I think she covered her hair. And she wouldn't go uncovered. And she had a wig. But like I said, my father was very well educated secularly, which was very rare, you know, in our town. As a matter of fact, I remember when all the rebbeim when they had any problem, legalistic problem, like they had to write some papers to the governments, would always end up in my father's desk. He would have to compose and write the letters to them, or intervene, and since he was involved in, he was, what do you call it, in the community, like an alderman, sort of.

INT: So was there a gymnasium in your town?

ZOLMAN: No, he had to go, and as a matter of fact, I also heard stories that my father had to hide on the (?), and he did most of his gymnasium on, what do you call it through correspondence, because the grandparents...

INT: Weren't too happy about it.

ZOLMAN: Weren't too happy about it. And when he finished, when he did the matriculation, what they call when you finish, the professor from the gymnasium came in especially to my grandfather's town to beg him to let him continue in university because he never seen in his life a brain like my father was, you know.

INT: What town did your father come from? The same town.

ZOLMAN: Yeah.

INT: So how far were you to the closest, biggest city? Which was the biggest city?

ZOLMAN: Six kilometers.

INT: Six kilometers?

ZOLMAN: Which was a famous city, Tokay, where the famous wine comes from.

INT: Oh, Tokay? T-o-k-a-y. I didn't know.

ZOLMAN: And actually we had quite a big winery, like cellars where we were producing it and making the wines in the fall, and then selling them during the year, and shipping it, you know.

INT: So how were you liberated finally?

ZOLMAN: Well, as I told you, we were marching for just about three weeks before the end of the war, and the majority of them didn't survive even, because it was practically a death march, no food, nothing, we were picking whatever you saw, grass or rotten potatoes if you found on the ground or something. Sometimes somebody would have mercy, maybe throw a little something at you when you were marching through the towns.

INT: In other words, you were visible. The townspeople saw you.

ZOLMAN: Yeah, when we were marching, sure. Sure, they saw us. They knew what was going on. They knew what was going on. And when we, like I say, we were liberated May 2, l945, and all I remember was a jeep ride, which was mainly, I don't think it was even Negro, but it was Indian, sort of, like Indian type, American soldiers, but it wasn't like, it wasn't white people, it wasn't Negroes, the Black people, it was some sort of mix something, like Indian or something.

INT: American Indian.

ZOLMAN: American Indian or something.

INT: Or a mulatto, possibly. Or somebody who was from mixed race.

ZOLMAN: Mixed race or something. All I know is that, you know, I was a young kid, so they grabbed me, they put me in the jeep, they gave me some chocolate bars.

INT: Is this the first time you'd ever seen a person of color?

ZOLMAN: That's right. I never saw anything. And on their walkie-talkies they said there were all kinds of people who were half dead, and ambulances and trucks arrived. They started to pick up whoever was still alive, and taking us away from there. And we ended up in Munich. We marched back to Munich. From there, like I say, it was about fifty kilometers from Munich. And there I stayed for about, that was in May, until almost September, June, July, August, almost September. There was some camp set up there for the refugees in those days. There was two big camps there.

INT: Could you spell that, if you could?

ZOLMAN: (?)

INT: These were displaced persons camps, run by...

ZOLMAN: It was before SS camps, or something, there was still, they made it into refugee camps.

INT: This was in the American Zone.

ZOLMAN: In the American Zone. And not long after I got a position in the kitchen there. So as far as food, I had no more problem, and really I didn't want to go back, you know, to my hometown, other than, I wanted to go to see who survived, because I was hoping that you know, between my brother and my father and my sister there'd be some survivors, so I finally decided to go back and see, and whoever is there, will probably just get them and get up and go back to Germany, or try to get out to the States. So I came home and actually I found, my sister was home. I didn't know yet. I was still hoping my father and brother would show up.

INT: Was your house still standing?

ZOLMAN: Yeah.

INT: Was everything in order?

ZOLMAN: No, my house was standing, everything empty, everything, you know, people looted everything. As a matter of fact, when we came home, we saw some of our curtains hanging in some, so we went in for them, and they drove us, they said, "We didn't expect you to come back, and you shouldn't have come back."

INT: When you grew up, did you feel...

ZOLMAN: **Very** anti-Semitic. The place where I grew up, Sunday it was dangerous to walk on the street after they, the Catholic church, what came out from church, it was dangerous to come out. Especially some of the kids who had long peyos, what they called the curls, they would pull them by that, or if somebody had a beard. Sunday around noontime we always tried to stay out of the streets, not to get into their way. And there wasn't really one person in the whole town,

and especially when my father was so well liked and known, and did so many favors for most of the non-Jews. He was involved in everything. There wasn't one, who would come along and even just to say, "We are sorry what's happening." No, they were just all waiting, and behind the curtains, to see how soon they would take us, and they were ready like vultures, just like vultures, and grab whatever they could, and take everything what they could, and never notice when we came back, to say, "We're sorry, if anything." Whatever we found. Like I know I found like in one place was a cow, what I found. I had to go to court to try to get it back, and finally when the court gave me the right to take it back, the guy who had it already poisoned it. So he said, "Here, now you can have it back." That's how much hatred. And other things I can tell you. Like when I came back I found, some of the machineries, in the winery, which I found, and they just made up stories, two or three of them, each one was witness for the other, that they bought it from my father before they deported us. It was a total lie. Even the judge was still the same judge from before, who was totally anti-Semitic, and without any hesitation, you know, he rejected my claims and those guys, they had no receipt, no nothing, but their word was good. My word wasn't good. And knowing the circumstances.

That's why I have no, even before I got home, I had my mind made up I don't want to stay there, but then when I arrived back home and my sister was there, and I told her that I don't intend to stay, and I was only fifteen years old, and I don't intend to stay, and pack, get things together, and we should try to go. And after a little while I said to my sister, "I want to go," and I even packed up and everything, I arranged even for a taxi for the morning, and when the taxi arrived, she started to cry. She says, "How can you do that?" She was only seventeen, I was only fifteen. Where are you going to go in the big world? Here where we lived, there was four uncles, there was all that real estate. Land we owned and all that. "Here we have everything, and we have to live. Where are you going to go?" And I said I don't care. But anyhow she cried, and I said, "Okay, I'll stay for a little while," and after that...

INT: How long did you stay?

ZOLMAN: I stayed until l948. It was three years. I started to re-, sort of re-make life there. I started to sort of straighten out some of the properties we owned. I tried to get involved. But after the Communists took over, and they took away this thing, and they took away the other thing, so I said to my sister, there was that Canadian offer, that Canadian Jewish Congress, they were looking for war orphans, so we applied for that with my sister, and we were accepted, and we got the papers, and when we were ready to leave already, my sister found a husband, she got married, and she stayed behind. And I said, "I'm going, I can't stay." And I left and she got married, I stayed for the wedding, and...I left. They got married, a couple of weeks later, they escaped, they went to Austria. Of course, I came out to Canada, and I tried my life here. I applied to the Jewish Congress for their help, to help to get papers for them, and I brought them over.

INT: How did you live those three years? Financially, how were you able to support yourselves?

ZOLMAN: Well like I said, with all the properties, we were getting some of the incomes, from the rents, and the land that we rented out. And also we had a lot at the beginning, we had the Joint, American Joint Distribution, we had a kitchen for the first year or so. Seven or eight hundred Jews that came home, we were only about fifty of us, so we had one kitchen, everybody went into the same place. We all went home to sleep in our different houses. We almost lived like in a kibbutz, that most of us were just...and the young girls tried to get married.

INT: Did your sister know her future husband from before?

ZOLMAN: Yeah, he was from our town. From the same town as we were. And like I say, I was brought over by the Congress, and then after I brought out my sister, and that's how I ended up in Canada.

INT: Did you spend much time, which past did you think and talk about? The immediate past of the war, or the past before the war, with your sister, during those three years? What was more often the topic of conversation? The horror, or the life that you remembered?

ZOLMAN: Both, but basically, the days before, sort of. The horror, you didn't want to live. As a matter of fact, for the first ten, twenty years, actually, I started to write my memoirs, I had about a hundred fifty, two hundred pages written.

INT: Then. You started to write it then?

ZOLMAN: Back then, right after the liberation, while I remembered it. I probably could have written for thousands of pages what I went through daily. And after I got tired and just burned it and just destroyed it.

INT: Oh, you did.

ZOLMAN: Yeah.

INT: Why did you do that?

ZOLMAN: I just didn't feel how to finish it, and I didn't want to leave it unfinished, and so I just destroyed it.

INT: Do you think you might ever reconstruct it?

ZOLMAN: I don't think I could. I don't remember ninety percent of it. It would be hard to remember, you know, all the minor things what went through, and what went down, it would be really...but it was every day in those years, were like living, you're going through hell, and it was, they say in Yiddish, (?) to get through a day and survive, it's unbelievable. You cannot explain it, and people would never really understand if you hadn't gone through it. Because it was so inhuman, and so, and so, you know, so low, that you never figure that people would come

to that stage, or they could do to other human beings those things, those bastard things, it was just unbelievable.

INT: So what year exactly did you arrive in Canada?

ZOLMAN: I arrived here in actually l949, March. I left home in December, l948.

INT: How did you come over? What kind of a vehicle?

ZOLMAN: How do you mean? I came by boat. SS Somalia. I remember, and it was it came from Le Havre, actually I stayed three months in Paris, because there's no Canadian consulate in Hungary. In those days there was no Canadian consulate, and so we had to go to Paris, and until we were processed there, and until we arrived here, it took three months or so to get here. But...

INT: Were there only Jewish immigrants on the ship?

ZOLMAN: No, actually there was more non-Jews, also refugees who were coming. Lots of Ukrainians.

INT: I was going to ask. Lots of fascist immigrants?

ZOLMAN: Yeah, fascist, lots of the SS, the Ukrainian brigades. I mean, it's unbelievable, because after the war, all those guys really who came out, the only reason they came was because they couldn't go back home, they would have been executed. Most of them were SS, or they were, in Hungary they were fascist guards and all that, so...and they had no problem getting here. And there's a book written about us kids, we were the first ones, actually Canada admitted you know, and there was a book written by Bella Berman, "None is Too Many," that we were the first Jews.

INT: What is too many?

ZOLMAN: "None is Too Many." We were the first thousand kids who got permission as Jews to enter Canada. So they wanted to actually, our reception wasn't the greatest. When we arrived from Halifax, we came by train to Montreal, and in Montreal we had to wait there, we get a further transportation, and we were on a street, that they took us out to eat something. And there was some demonstration there, and some communist demonstration or something, I don't know, but we had nothing to do with it. But we were a few kids there, and the police came over to us and said, "You have Jews, move you bastards." That was in Canada. In those days, that was l949, in Quebec.

INT: How was your reception by the Jewish community?

ZOLMAN: I wasn't overwhelmed. I was here for a year before my sister arrived, before I brought them over. And I didn't have one Jewish family invited me to their house in Hamilton.

INT: How did you get to Hamilton, by the way?

ZOLMAN: Well, the Jewish Congress sent me there, and I mean, they were nice, they paid for my board and room until they found me a job and until I worked. But really, you know, they weren't, there was maybe, I was already the second wave, like you know there was other kids that came before me. I was already towards the end of those thousand kids who arrived. But like I say I wasn't too impressed.

INT: How many Jews in the town of Hamilton?

ZOLMAN: A thousand families.

INT: A thousand families.

ZOLMAN: Yeah, and, I mean, you know, basically, like I say, the Congress, they did whatever they could. I mean, I can't complain. The Executive Director was nice, the social worker who looked after me was very nice and very helpful. I mean, I can't complain, the warmth, what you expected, wasn't there. People really, I don't think they had any inkling what we went through as a young kid.

INT: Would you have any speculation about why they didn't reach out?

ZOLMAN: Because they didn't know what we went through. I don't think they believed what was happening. Especially at the beginning. I don't know if they really knew it, or even knowing it, maybe two years after it was already...

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)

INT: How did you re-establish yourself in Hamilton? What were your first steps for beginning again?

ZOLMAN: Well, I tried everything. I started out by going to work in a jewelry factory. I was, a jeweler like a diamond, ring maker. And I worked there for thirteen months, and I saw I wasn't getting anywhere. I was making, I started at forty cents, I ended up at fifty cents after a year an hour, and making sixteen dollars a week and paying fifteen dollars for board and room. I would have to walk to my work because I couldn't afford to buy six tickets for a quarter to take a bus fare. So I tried, there was a friend of mine, came out from the same hometown, he was a friend of my father. And from back home he was in the cattle business, like he was in a farm, he talked me into, maybe I should try cattle dealership, which I never heard of it, I never knew much of it. But I figured anything. I was able to drive, he didn't know how to drive, so we figured, my driving, he needed a ride to be able to go to the stock market to be able to buy and deliver the stock, and he bought a truck, and that didn't last too long, either. It was six months we did it. It

didn't work out because he had his farm he had to look after, and that was his first priority. Of course, he had children and family to look after.

So after that I got a job with a floor covering company as a truck driver. Since I had experience of truck driving. And I drove the truck and after a few months, they saw my potentials, they put me into the store for selling, and after a year or two, they had three stores, so I was put in charge of one of the stores, and I became a manager after a while. Actually maybe it was four years or so before I became manager of their stores, and I worked for them for, till l96l. From l950. For almost ten years. And there was another chap, another, who I was very close friends with, who worked for the same company in another store. He was a manager in the other store, and I was the manager in one store. We got together, and we discussed it, and it was three years before we finally decided we're going to start on our own, because we wanted to make sure we will have enough money saved in case, for a year or so you can take with no wages, but we were very lucky, because when we started, with all the bank guarantees what we got, and with all the worries, we had enough to be able to take out. We never had to look back, we never had to take a loan from the bank. Never in our thirty some odd years in business, did we ever have to take a loan from the bank.

INT: What kind of business was this?

ZOLMAN: Floor covering. Like carpets, linoleums, ceramics.

INT: How did you learn English, by the way?

ZOLMAN: I went to night school. And also they were real nice to me, the company I worked for in the floor covering. They were Jewish company. They were very nice to me, and they got me and this other friend, who we started out together, they got us an elocutionist to sort of, I don't know how much they improved, we still have probably our accent, but it helped a little bit. But we spent quite a few years in night schools.

INT: Were there mostly other Jewish people went to school with you?

ZOLMAN: No, that was a public, it was a city-run. A few of my friends were there. That was part of it. I did some high school. At the night school. When I took English I took it with high school grade ten, eleven, I finished.

INT: Did you ever have the opportunity or the inclination to talk about your experiences? Did people ever say, "Where are you from? What happened?" Non-Jews, even.

ZOLMAN: Not too much. Not too much. Especially like in the first twenty, thirty years. (laughs) Never even.

SHELLY: At home though.

ZOLMAN: At home. Even not that much. More later. Lately than originally. Actually, when Shelly was in school here, she was asking me to present to her class in grade six. Which was how many years ago? Twenty-four years? Twenty years ago. She wrote a paper on me, like from the Holocaust, wasn't it? And then she asked me to go to the class and sort of answer the question and answer period to tell them. That's about the only time I really got involved to explain or to get into it deeper than the occasional. Of course, when I'm together with friends, you know, friends who also went through the same things in Holocaust, it always comes up. There's hardly any get-together where some sort of a remembrance or reminiscing doesn't come up. It always ends up somewhere, you know.

(unintelligible)

INT: How far was your town from Elie Wiesel's town?

ZOLMAN: Ah, about sixty, seventy kilometers. Sixty. He was what's called (?), the Carpathians. I was from what they call the Mamaland, from the mainland. So it was, but he speaks Hungarian too, I think. And he...basically he explains it I think more eloquently. A lot of the things. And believe me, even what he says, how eloquently he says it, you cannot explain it, really. The things which you went through. I remember once when I was in Auschwitz, or in Birkenau, actually, and I just stood up and there was a ladder or something there, and I just went up so I could see past the fence into the crematorium area. I saw how dump trucks are dumping bodies into the ovens. You know, I mean. It's, people today, they are denying that the whole thing is true. And I saw there with my own eyes how they were dumping the dead bodies like they dump ground, or earth, or something like that.

SHELLY: Garbage.

ZOLMAN: Garbage.

INT: Do these, how often do these images of the war come into your mind?

ZOLMAN: It's hard to say sometimes. I'll wake up and my wife will wake me up, I'm screaming. But not too often lately. Not too often.

INT: And when you were younger?

ZOLMAN: After, almost nightly, at the beginning, yeah. I remember when I was separated from my father in the camp there, for about three days, three nights, I just didn't stop crying. I was just laying in my bunker there, and I just couldn't believe what was happening there, and I just couldn't believe, just silent, just laying there crying. Until finally, you know, you just had to try to come out of it, and try to fight for survival. And that's what it was, basically the whole time, in a sense, to be a Hungarians, who were lucky, because we only went through a year with that. I mean, if you call it luck, to go through a Gehennom like that. But some of the [people] from Poland where they had to go through four or five years, you know, it was, I mean, you

wonder if anybody came out normally. It's a miracle. Because all the bestiality that you went through there, it was just unbelievable. Just unbelievable.

INT: And when did you decide that you would like to have a family? Did you ever have any doubts that that would be the route you wanted to take?

ZOLMAN: There was no question I wanted very much so to have a family, and to have, to prove to the Germans that we survived, and we are going to survive, and the other one is going to be condemned. No, there's no question about it. And I was lucky I found...

INT: How did you meet?

ZOLMAN: Oh, it was the girl next door. (laughter)

INT: "Next door," meaning, the other side of the earth.

ZOLMAN: She came for a visit, and she forgot to go home. (laughter)

INT: Did any of your beliefs, particularly about G-d, undergo any changes?

ZOLMAN: Oh, yeah, a lot of times, but somehow, there was always one thing behind, how my father, when I was taken away from him, which I didn't realize it what was happening, the last words he said, (crying) "From G-d you should never forget. Never forget your G-d." Those are his instructions. (Pause) I was (?) as a young kid, and after the selection when we arrived there, and they asked the young kids to step out, and he sort of said, he realized maybe what was happening because he said, "Go, maybe it will be better for you." But he said, "Never forget about your G-d."

INT: Did he speak to you in Yiddish or Hungarian?

ZOLMAN: Sometimes Yiddish, sometimes Hungarian. Both. A lot of time Yiddish. This word he said in Yiddish. "Im Gott kann mann nicht vergessen."

INT: So that has sustained your faith?

ZOLMAN: Always, even when I wasn't too Orthodox, I wasn't keeping the Sabbath at times, when I was younger, I always had a sort of something, was like I don't know how to explain, it was something I felt, remorseful, that it's not, in other words when I really decided I want to be completely shomer Shabbas and get back to what it was, you know, to be kosher and everything, I felt a lot better.

INT: When did you make that decision? Before or after?

ZOLMAN: During while we were married. During. As a matter of fact, when the kids were already sort of starting...My sister, she was already sort of observant. She wasn't a Hasid or

something like that, but they were always observant, and she always sort of tried to impress, no, at one time in the beginning she didn't bother me. Because she realized that after the war, you know, I mean, I wasn't Jewish or something. I went to shul. But I was up on a Sabbath, but I had to work sometimes, but at home, the home was always kosher. Even when we got married, although I wasn't outside kosher, but the house was a hundred percent kosher. I got married, and that's one thing I said. About a kosher home. But it was after a few years when we were married and with the children. The children went to the day school, and they sort of came home, they weren't too comfortable with Daddy going into the store on Shabbas. So we decided one day when you had some big problems, with my partners, because, but eventually it came to the point where I told them, either we split, or we keep Shabbas, and that's it. And so...

INT: Did you split or did you keep?

ZOLMAN: No, we keep the Shabbas. I mean, he keeps the Shabbas too. Although he is not observant, but he doesn't work, we both leave Friday at noon, at 1:00, regardless summer or winter, and we both, like I observe it for real, he just doesn't work.

INT: How much were you prepared to tell your children on your own? Were you hoping that they would ask, or were you hoping that they wouldn't ask about your past?

ZOLMAN: I was never too willing to sort of, to give information. Did I ever?

SHELLY: I never felt like that. I always felt that you always answered questions.

ZOLMAN: I always just answered. I never really willingly to volunteer. Somehow it always came hard to talk about it. I never felt like really volunteering to talk about it.

INT: Why do you think you didn't want to?

ZOLMAN: Because I just get emotionally too upset. I get emotional, even today, and it just...

INT: Are you afraid of scaring death?

ZOLMAN: Not really. It's just that, for myself, for the sake of, just to try to, to sort of get away from it. Because like I say at the beginning, I would dream constantly. And after a while, you dream once a week, and maybe once a month. But if you talk about it, then you dream about it, because like tonight probably I'll be dreaming all night about it.

INT: I so appreciate your willingness to talk. I know how difficult it is. I think we all agreed that this is sacred work. We sort of made a pact.

ZOLMAN: I hope it's enough. Is there anything else important?

INT: Well, we could talk a lot more, but I know that you don't want to go, overstep your kindness. What would you say was a key element that helped you to reconstruct your life in

America [Canada]? And what would you say that you wanted to, and continue to want to live as a moral, spiritual legacy for your children and grandchildren, and maybe great-grandchildren?

ZOLMAN: It's basically my parents. I always thought of my parents, you know, that they would have wanted me to be at least what I am, if not better yet. Because I saw how devoted and good parents, and good husband and wife, and what an exemplary life they lived, and that they would have, at least, I should try to construct, and I have some legacy, something from them.

INT: How would you describe your life after the war qualitatively?

ZOLMAN: Qualitatively. I really don't think there was much quality in it, you know. Not for a long time. It was still somehow behind your mind you were still trying to survive, sort of, you know. I was running from the Communists, and it was a constant fear. When you arrived here with nothing, nobody. Four walls, as a kid, I don't have to tell you, it was always a constant fear, and it was always a constant fight to try to make it, or to try to do something, or to be something, or make sure that tomorrow you get up, you don't have to worry that you'll have that piece of bread on the table. So for a long, long time, that went on for quite a few years.

INT: Did you ever feel it wasn't worth it?

ZOLMAN: A lot of times. Not that it wasn't worth it. A lot of times. I would cry at corners, in bed. When there was nobody around.

INT: When did it start to feel like the quality was coming back?

ZOLMAN: It was just when I married my wife. It was really, and when the children came along, that was really...

INT: What do you think your wife added to your life?

ZOLMAN: Everything.

INT: Well, I know how lovely and charming she is personally.

ZOLMAN: Just everything, really. I can't imagine, you know, my life without her. Of course the kids, I don't have to, the greatest two daughters I have. And they were always my jewels, and that's what kept me a lot of times, going, and tried to fight for it. Went through a heart operation, which wasn't easy, but you know, all the help, and it was really them that gave me the extra strength to fight, to survive.

INT: And how are you feeling? I know that one of your daughters just moved to Israel. How do you see that in terms of the history of your family, in addition to your personal feelings about it?

ZOLMAN: It's really complicated, because as children they were brought up as being Zionist, and being Zionist is the ultimate goal is to live and raise your children in Israel. So keeping that in mind, as much as I personally felt it was a great tragedy personally, because depriving me of my young grandchildren, not to see them, how they grow up.

INT: Not to see them too often. I hope you will see them.

ZOLMAN: Well, but not to see them to grow up. Because it's at that stage when they grow up, it's really the nicest years, and the nicest time when you enjoy your grandchildren, and you see them one year, two years, three years, and you're sort of deprived of that, it's (?). But on the other hand, I never tried to discourage her. I never tried to blame them or say anything, because I can't blame them. I imagine if I would have been in their shoes, I probably would have aimed for the same thing. You learn all those things, and if you want to accomplish what you're supposed to do, how can you blame them?

INT: Going to Israel, by the way, was that ever either a practical or a ideological choice for you after the war? Was that a possibility?

ZOLMAN: Yeah, oh yeah, they wanted me to go to Israel. After the war they wanted me to go to Israel, but it didn't work.

INT: Who's the "they"?

ZOLMAN: The Congress. Because, as a matter of fact, when my sister escaped and they wanted to come also to Canada, it wasn't so easy, so they suggested why don't we all go to Israel, while I was still in Paris yet. But somehow, I don't know why, I was just so scared of the wars, like in Israel it was still a war going on in '48 and the tension, and even today, that's the only thing I'm afraid of with my kids there. It's just, there is no peace and no war. Although they say it is much easier in New York or in Chicago, or Philadelphia, to get G-d forbid killed, but still it's always the hatred you see coming out of there from the Arabs, they annihilate the Jews and drive them out. It's always such a fear. And it's hard to explain unless you went through those camps in Auschwitz, the mentality, it's a similar mentality there. Still they would do the same thing. But the gas chambers, if they would have the possibilities. So that's the only reason really that I could never really bring myself to it, as much as I think that life is much nicer there, because there's more meaningful life there than there is here. Because here is really it's only the almighty buck.

INT: Since your marriage and your children, do you have a sense that your own life has been meaningful, sof kal sof?

ZOLMAN: Oh, definitely. It meant everything to me. Since then, I don't think of the past so much. I can sleep most nights, because this is no question about it. If G-d wouldn't have given me those things, I don't know what life would have been.

INT: Are there any secrets that are still in your heart?

ZOLMAN: Secrets, no not really. Not really. A lot of doubts. There's always those questions. You know, why and where, and you can never answer it, and nobody really is trying to answer it, and especially when you went through it, somehow you're looking for an answer. Because I have a very good friend of mine, we were in the camp together and everything, and he still says, he's Jewish and everything, but he doesn't keep too much, and when he comes he says, "Where was G-d in Auschwitz? When you're telling me religion, where was G-d from Dachau?" And you can't tell anything to him, because, but when kids, and pious people and kids who never sinned in their life, and then saints like our parents, he just can't accept it. I mean, you can never accept it.

INT: Do you answer it for yourself, or…?

ZOLMAN: There's never an answer. There's a block always there for that. A block on your heart. Which you try to say is G-d's will, but then again, why? Why? And why so harsh? Why would somebody take away some, one or two?

INT: So what is your consolation?

ZOLMAN: Like a parent with children. And that's the only thing to counterbalance, but if you ask me if there's any secrets. It's not a secret, it's something which is too real. I mean, you just cannot answer it to yourself. I mean, not that I'm fighting over it or something. It's just that, I'm observant and everything, but there is a shaalah. There's a shaalah.

INT: How would you summarize your own sense of your own accomplishments?

ZOLMAN: I would summarize it personally that I was very lucky, first of all to survive as a kid, I mean, we just, not too many like I said, from the 3,000 kids which we were in Auschwitz, and I don't know if there is any of us who are alive or who came out alive. And then of course, the type of family, the wife and children G-d gave me, and I feel superbly, maybe compensated, but you can't say that, because you can't say you'd be compensated. But I feel very fortunate at least that part of my life has been rewarded with some extra special people which I don't know how I would have survived without them.

INT: Do you feel that you had anything to do with the way things worked out?

ZOLMAN: I don't know.

INT: Your wife.

ZOLMAN: That's right. I don't know. But like I say, there is the ifs and the buts, they're still there, but yet, still thankful, thankful for where we got today, and what we have today, and thanks G-d that, you know. (Pause) I think with that maybe we'll say goodnight to you.

INT: Yes, I want to thank you very much.

(END OF INTERVIEW)