**Then One Day it was Quiet**

In his 1980’s style Fairfield kitchen sits 90-year-old Zoltan Guttman. With big icy blue eyes, thin snow-white hair andwrinkled hands and face, he smiles gleefully as he sips his steaming tea. In his right hand, he plays with his small iron Star of David, rotating and twisting it around his right hand.  Beneath the left sleeve of his warm maroon sweater is the crude black tattoo A-10030, which he received when he was taken to the concentration camp Auschwitz.

Zoltan Guttman, who is beginning to lose his memory, was able to speak for over an hour about his life during World War II and the Holocaust. “I grew up in a small town in Czechoslovakia. My father was a businessman and my mother worked. I lived with 11 other siblings,” he says with a childlike glee. Zoltan and his family were a part of the Jewish minority in their town. “There was a small synagogue in the community. No more than 20 people went to services, and my family and I went once in a while,” Zoltan explains. “The Christians didn’t bother us and we didn’t bother them.”

Czechoslovakia was a very safe country for Jews at the time. In addition, he said the President of Czechoslovakia was a good democrat who “was good to the Jews, and he was very similar to Lincoln.” The tone of his voice becomes darker, and his eyes colder as Zoltan explains how the President at first didn’t allow the Nazis to come take the Jews, but eventually allowed the Nazi’s to come to their town. “The Nazis said, 'Every Jew is to come with us, and you may only bring two bags.'” Zoltan and his family were taken to a ghetto. “We were brought to a corner of Budapest...and it was terrible.”

“After two or three weeks, we left the ghetto and were forced on to cattle cars for Auschwitz.” he explains. Zoltan sighs. “For a couple days, there was no water, nobody spoke, no one bothered me. I did not know anyone on that train. I just sat there quietly and all I could do was wait,” he says firmly. “I had no idea where my family was I was alone.”

“After a few days of travel, we arrived at Auschwitz. When I first arrived, I was able to find my father and he went to a Nazi officer and asked, “What’s going on here?” To which the Nazi replied, ‘“See that smoke?”’ as he pointed to the smokestack. “That is going to be you in 30 minutes.” Afterwards, my mother, my little sister, and my little brother where all taken, and gassed at once,” Zoltan says as he briefly winces.

There is a hardness in his voice as he recalls the atrocities he saw every day. Some days, he would watch as a Nazi officer would line the Jews up, drop a coin in front of one and ask him to pick it up, and when they were bent over, the officer would pull out his pistol and shoot the Jew in the back of the head.

“There was suicide everywhere – people just couldn’t take it” Zoltan describes the many times he watched people intentionally get shot by Nazis, run into the electric fences, or find some way to hang themselves to escape from the horrors of Auschwitz. “It is like the guys over in the Iraq right now – evil men just like the Nazis,” he says.

“Hmm..” he murmured as he grimaced for a moment and shakes his head.

“There were no friends in Auschwitz,” Zoltan says darkly as his eyes turn to ice.

He shifts his hands, and describes the move to Buchenwald from Auschwitz as the Nazis knew the Russian’s were closing in. “They wanted to kill us all before it was too late,” he recalled. Again describing the horrific conditions at Buchenwald There was little food, rampant lice infestations, and death all around him. After having to march day and night to a different concentration camp from Buchenwald as a result of the Americans coming, Zoltan tried to escape.

Zoltan’s escape failed. “Luckily I was just put in another group of prisoners on the way to the camp,” he said. Once they arrived at the camp, the only thing that kept him alive was eating the grass at nighttime. “I was like a cow, eating all the grass I could,” he said laughing.

In addition, at the camp, the Nazis told Zoltan to skin a cow which had to be put down, yet to stay warm, Zoltan cut the fat, and put in under his shirt to stay warm in the subzero temperatures. “I would occasionally nibble on the fat,” he said as he acts out eating a piece of imaginary fat.

A short time later, Zoltan ran away from the camp and managed to hide under a bridge in a German town. “As I hid, I heard marching, gunshots, explosions above me and then one day it was quiet” he said. “I knew that the war was over.”  After all was quiet, Zoltan left the bridge and walked in the town and went to a man and asked in German, “What is happening? Is the war over?” The man told Zoltan that the Americans arrived and it was all over. After raiding a house for food 16-year-old Zoltan, weighing no more than 60 pounds, was taken by the Americans. “I still kept some of the cow fat” he said. Zoltan was taken by the Americans to Paris where at first he wanted to join the American Army and fight in Japan. Upon arriving in Paris, Zoltan changed his mind, “I told the officer, I need to go back to my home and find my family,” and the young officer was very understanding. “Before I left Paris, the officer gave me $40 and told me ‘“his is for a bus ticket when you get to America,’” Zoltan says.

When Zoltan arrived in his old town, he could not find any family there. “It was dead,” he recalls. After he returned to his town, Zoltan moved to America where he met his wife, and started a family. “Sometimes I don’t know why they didn’t just kill me like my mother and brothers, but for some reason, I survived.” JW