Tony Zettl Interview

This interview was conducted in January 2008 by Brian (Coach) Landry in connection with his PhD dissertation in Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University.

Coach: Okay. Good morning, Tony. Today is January 14th, 2008 and I'm sitting here with Anton Zettl who has asked me to call him Tony. Good morning, Tony. Thank you for participating today.

Tony: Good morning, Brian.

Coach: I appreciate your time and your efforts towards this study and research. Why don't we go ahead and get started with opening with a little bit of narrative from you. How about you start off by telling me when you were born, where, and what life was like as a child in Gakowa.

Tony: I was born April 25, 1935. I lived with my parents, grandmother, and my sister Ana who is five years older than I am, now living in Chicago. My parents had a small farm which they worked by hand, basically. There were no tractors; they used horses, plows, and did almost all the -- no washing machines or anything of that kind.

But for me as a child, until about age 9, I had -- looking back on it -- a wonderful childhood. Living on a farm, running around, had the freedom of the village. Our parents did the work; they were very busy during the summer and spring and fall. So we kids just ran around. We had the freedom of the village, played ball, played games. We made our own toys. I remember making my own chess set out of -- carved my own pieces out of wood. So there were no fancy toys, but we made our own. And life was really good. We had enough to eat, nothing fancy.

And I went to school for three years -- first grade, second, and third. I just remember that I was very shy. People who knew me then still tease me that I was so
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shy I avoided eye contact with adults. I would walk, not on the sidewalk, but I would cross the street to avoid people and dogs while going to school and coming back. Also, in school I was sort of the teacher's pet; bullies would pick on me.

Other than that, there was nothing remarkable. I think I was a good student, but not outstanding. Nothing really remarkable. One strange thing, thinking back on it now, having taught myself for many years now, instruction was in German, although during those years we were part of Hungary. But the teachers instructed us in German but we had to learn Hungarian.

And I just remember having to learn Hungarian words, how they're pronounced and all that, but no effort was made to teach us the meaning of the words. So I remember getting up very early in the morning, learning to recite a Hungarian poem; and then going to school, reciting the poem, and then forgetting about it immediately the next day, the next week, after I recited a different poem.

So that's basically my childhood.

**Coach:** Okay. When did life as you knew it as a child start to change?

**Tony:** Well, it changed dramatically after age 9 when Tito established a concentration camp at Gakowa. Then I remember initially we were -- the whole village was told to -- well, let me go back a little bit. The whole village was told to leave their houses and go to the center of the village where three houses were designated. The whole village of roughly 3000 people, we were housed in these three houses in the center of the village and had to vacate our own house.

**Coach:** Let me interrupt you. Before that, though, didn't the German army --

**Tony:** Oh, yes. There was an incident before that that indicated that things were changing dramatically. I remember a really dramatic experience. At one point my parents gave me very strict orders not to leave the house. So I was curious and went to the
front window to look out to see what was happening, and I saw men being marched-- our house faced the main street going through town, which was a dirt road, not paved. And I saw some men being marched on the road and beside the road on each side there was a ditch. And these ditches were full of water which by then was brown; it must have rained a day or two before. And on the side of the ditch there were soldiers marching with billy-clubs. And just in front of our house, one of the men broke rank, ran to the ditch, took off his cap, dipped water from the ditch. And as he did that, a soldier with a billy-club hit him over the head with his club. And then the man got back in line.

And later on I was told -- I didn't witness this because I wasn't allowed to leave the house -- that there were three dead bodies. Three dead men were found on the street of our village, up the street. I don't know how long it was, but probably no more than three or four kilometers.

Coach: So who were the men being marched through town, do you know?

Tony: I don't know who the men were, but I asked my father and he said that he thought these were Jewish men that were marched north by the SS soldiers.

And then I asked, "What happened to these men? Did they all get shot?"

He said, "No, they were marched to some place in Hungary and those who survived the march were freed. But those who could not keep up and fell behind were shot."

Coach: So once you're seeing is this poor man tried to drink from the muddy ditch, being hit with a billy-club, how did that make you feel?

Tony: Well, that was really a traumatic experience. It still affects me talking about it now, as you can probably hear from my voice. That was one of the traumatic experiences I remember as a child and it stayed with me for over 60 years now. And then shortly
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Coach: Hold on a second before you go on. When you say it was traumatic and it choked you up and you get emotional about it, what are you feeling? Is it an emotion of fear? Is it an emotion of guilt and not being able to help him, for example? Or is it something else?

Tony: Just feeling sorry for the man and how can such a thing happen? Not fear, just feeling -- just being very sad seeing some person being treated like that.

Coach: Okay. And that was probably your first -- if I may ask -- that was the first incident that you felt from the war?

Tony: Yes. Yes. That was really my first --

Coach: Do you remember what year or month this was?

Tony: I don't remember the month but it must have been in '44 just before the end of the war.

Coach: Okay.

Tony: Prior to that I witnessed nothing about the war itself. The only thing about the war that I knew or that I personally had any knowledge of was occasionally we would -- the fighter jets would fly high over our village. And toward the end of the war we heard some guns that we were told were shot across the Danube when one army or another was chasing the other across the Danube. But that was some 20 kilometers away.

Coach: Okay. So what happened next? This was obviously a German -- the SS bringing Jews up north, as you say it. What happened next in the town?

Tony: Apparently that's what it was. That's what I was told. I don't have any documentation of that.

Coach: I understand.
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Tony: Well, the next experience that I can remember was when we were all told to leave our houses and go to the center of town. And there in the center of town we were housed in just a few houses, the number three comes to mind.

Coach: The whole village was.

Tony: The whole village, all 3000 inhabitants -- or, however many were left at that point. And then we stayed in these houses for some days. We just -- in one room there would be straw along one side and the blankets over the straw and we all slept next to each other, 20-25 to a room.

And then after some days -- oh, yes. I had some experiences there that I vividly remember. Although we were not allowed to leave these houses, I remember sneaking out with a couple of other kids after we'd been there for a couple of days and just wandering around the village. And what we saw was the other houses had been looted, the animals had been released, pigs were running around, and I remember going in the one house and there was a sow lying in bed.

Coach: A pig?

Tony: A pig. A pig lying in bed in a house. So everything was just in chaos.

Coach: Tell me about how they rounded you up and made you come out of your homes into the center of the village.

Tony: Yes. This was then a procedure that was repeated a number of times later on. There was -- I don't know, town criers -- someone was marching along the main road with a drum. He was drumming. With a drum and announcing everybody had to assemble in the -- leave their houses and assemble in these villages. And that was the major means of communication. But later on we had to assemble on the soccer field.

So after a few days --
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Coach: Hold on a second.

Tony: Yeah.

Coach: Because I don't know who's doing this to you. Who is making you come out into the center of the town?

Tony: This was the authorities then, that I guess were Tito's Partisans.

Coach: So the Partisans. Not Russian soldiers?

Tony: Not Russian soldiers, no. So these are Partisans. Yes, I should mention that after this incident with marching these men -- the SS marching these men -- the Russian soldiers came through town on horseback. And I witnessed a -- there there's an incident that I remember as well.

There, too, I was not allowed to leave the house; I had to stay inside. And then -- our house was U-shaped with one part of the U shorter than the other. And we were on the short side and the long side included not just the rooms but there was a horse stall and a cow stall. And when the Russian soldiers came through on horseback they came and got our two horses. And, again, I was observing this from the window. We had two horses and when the Russian soldiers came to get our two horses the horses kind of rebelled. And so in our yard the soldiers had to somehow get the horses to cooperate with them, which eventually they did. And then when they left with our two horses, they left their two horses there.

And the other thing about the Russian soldiers I remember, I think overall the Russian soldiers did not commit atrocities as far as I know. But we had an outhouse for a toilet; we didn't have running water for toilets. And after the Russian soldiers had left we noticed handprints on our toilet walls. There was no toilet paper. We did not use toilet paper but there were some corncobs available that we used, but apparently the Russian soldiers did not take advantage of those.
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But shortly after the Russian soldiers came through they were followed by Tito and his Partisans who then took over.

Coach: And when they took over, this is the point where you say the town crier came through with his drum, gathered everybody in the center of town; the Partisans are basically rounding you up at this point.

Tony: Yes.

Coach: Do you remember what that was like, being rounded up in the middle of town?

Tony: Well, that's what I was talking about earlier. I remember we were all put together in just a couple of houses and we were just confined there.

Coach: Was it a frightful time?

Tony: Well, I don't remember it being frightful at the time. Of course, I was a child then. I don't think I realized the significance of the thing at the time. But when I then -- with a couple of friends, against the strong advice of my parents -- left and roamed around the village --

Coach: With the strong advice or the strong --

Tony: The strong -- against. Against the orders of my parents. And saw that the houses had all been looted, the animals had been released. I then realized that there was something drastic going on.

Coach: Okay.

Tony: So after a few days -- and I don't know how long -- after a few days then we got permission to go back to our house. And we were allowed to use -- I described the house earlier, U-shaped with one part of the U shorter than the other -- we were allowed to use the shorter part of the house. And then right about that time, again I saw people being marched along the main road coming to town. But this time it was all kinds of people, women and children and they were carrying things in their rug
sacks. And so these were then people from nearby villages who were marched into Gakowa, and many of them came to our house and used all the rooms on the long part of the U. This was the beginning of concentration camp Gakowa. This was some time in late '44, just before the official end of the war I think.

**Coach:** Okay. Tell me about life in Gakowa after it became a concentration camp.

**Tony:** Well, after it became a concentration camp there was no school. I did not have a chance to go to school. And, as I was saying, a lot of people were housed in our village. Our village before the war had a population of roughly 3000. During concentration camp -- I don't think there was an official census but I've heard anywhere from 20,000 to 25,000, maybe 30,000 people were there at various times.

In our house, for example, we were allowed to use the one room and the kitchen on the one side of the house. All the rooms on the other side were filled with people from other villages, the internees of the camp. And just as before, each room housed maybe 20-25 people who all slept next to each other. There was straw and a blanket and then people just slept next to each other all the way around the room.

We had to assemble for meals. Meals were provided by the soup kitchen, but the soup basically was just water with a little bit of corn in it. And the people who had to depend exclusively on the rations provided starved to death in fairly short order.

We were lucky. I think the reason that I'm here to tell this story is -- well, a number of reasons that I'm here to tell this story. One, the village I was born in happened to be chosen by Tito as the site of one of his concentration camps. So this early on in the camp, although the village was surrounded by Partisans, some friends from outside the village who were not interned helped us out with some
food. Of course, food was scarce in those days for everybody, not just the internees of the village; but still, just a few pieces of bread could make a big difference.

And my father, I think because he spoke Serbian and Hungarian as well as German, was put on a crew who worked for the Commandant of the village. The Commandant was the guy in charge of the camp. And my father and his crew took a train wagon to Sombor -- I think it's about 20 kilometers away -- and back for supplies every day. And this wagon did not have an engine. It was propelled by hand -- actually, by feet; they had some kind of foot pedals that they worked. And as a consequence of this my father managed to smuggle some food in for us so that we didn't have to depend on the soup kitchen. And I think that was the main reason that we survived.

So personally, I think the main reasons I'm here to tell this story is that my father managed to smuggle in some food for us in the camp, some friends from outside the camp helped us, and that my parents were there. As a 9 year old, 10 year old, I was very fortunate that my parents were with me. That was not --

**Coach:** Why were there children there without parents?

**Tony:** Well, of course many men didn't survive the war. And many of the women -- and those who did, also many of the women, were taken to Russian labor camps. Many of the people between the age or 16 and 35 ended up in Russian labor camps. There the town crier would march along the main road drumming his drum and that was a signal that we all had to assemble on the soccer field. And on the soccer field we had to line up.

Everyone had to assemble on the soccer field -- men, women, children -- and we all had to line up and the Commandant came and picked out the people that he wanted to send to Russia. And I think my father was spared this fate because he
worked for this crew for the Commandant getting supplies from Sombor, the nearest town. And my mother was picked to go to Russia at one point but -- she was asked to step forward from the line and these were the people that were picked by the Commandant to go to Russia. But when the Commandant and his soldiers were not looking, she stepped back in line. And she was fortunate not to get caught. If she had been caught, the punishment would have been severe, probably death. So she was extremely courageous.

After that incident, when the town crier came through town and marched along the main road drumming his drum for us to assemble on the soccer field, my mother refused to go. She would hide and she would keep me with her for company. We hid in the bushes behind the house at one point, but most of the time we hid in the attic. We hid in the attic so we could look out to see what was happening and decide when the coast was clear.

My sister is five years older than I am, so she was a teenager at this time. She also hid in an earthen oven. We had a large earthen oven and she hid in there. It was closed and everything was dark; although she was too young to be picked, but still she hid there for safety.

Coming back a little, right after the start of concentration camp Gakowa there's another incident that comes to mind, and that is I remember witnessing people actually digging up a dead pig that had been buried and cutting it up and bartering for pieces of it just to get some food. And of course, right after the start of camp the dogs and cats disappeared very quickly, within the first week or two. There were no dogs or cats left in Gakowa.

**Coach:** Meaning people were killing them and eating them?

**Tony:** To eat them. Although this was not officially acknowledged; they just disappeared.
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**Coach:** How do you know that your mother quite possibly would have been killed had she been caught sneaking back into the line?

**Tony:** I don't know that for sure.

**Coach:** What makes you feel that way?

**Tony:** Well, because this was a serious thing to pick people to go to Russia. Nobody wanted to go to Russia so picking people -- and the Commandant, I suppose, had orders to send so many people to Russia so this was a serious, serious thing. You don't disobey the commands of the Commandant.

**Coach:** Why not?

**Tony:** Well, he had absolute authority. There was no police, no courts, no laws or any of that. The Commandant had absolute authority to do whatever he wanted.

**Coach:** So you were just scared of this authority.

**Tony:** Yes.

**Coach:** Had he and his Partisans done anything to cause fear in you?

**Tony:** Well, they sent people to Russia. I'm repeating myself, but, yes, the -- one of my -- not my immediate neighbor, but two houses down it was just a couple of years older than I was. He was shot to death because I was told that he and some other kids went out of camp and somehow ended up close to the -- or maybe not even out of camp, it might even have been a building inside of camp. But they ended up at a house that housed the Partisans. And when the Partisans saw him, they shot him.

Another kid my age showed me a wound where he was shot through the neck but somehow he survived.

So it's -- and I want to be clear on this. I don't know that they -- anyhow, the rule of law was the Commandant. He was the -- whatever he said went. There was no appeals process, no police, no judges, no court of law. Now, overall he must
have been fairly benevolent or I would have witnessed a lot more of these atrocities. But then, of course, when his soldiers got out of hand he was the only one that they had to report to. So while I'm sure that most of the Partisans were reasonable people, but it only took a couple to commit atrocities and some did.

I witnessed a Partisan would go along and there were some old ladies -- well, I thought they were old ladies at the time. They might not have been more than 40 or 50 years old. And just took out his weapon and whipped them for no reason that I could discern. So I did see a few things. I mean, we were all very scared. Very scared.

And the other thing is, as a -- many of my friends snuck out of camp. The camp was surrounded by Partisans. There was no barbed wire but Partisans would patrol the outskirts of the village. Many of my friends would sneak out at night to go to a neighboring village to beg for bread. As far as I know, only kids did this, I think for several reasons. Probably for two reasons: one, that they were more likely to get bread than the adults; and two, the punishment if they were caught generally was not as severe as it was against adults.

But my parents strictly forbade me to go with my friends when they snuck out of camp at night. And, of course, reason for that was we didn't have to depend on the soup kitchen like the others, thanks to my father who was able to provide enough food to keep us alive.

But nevertheless I decided -- against the orders of my parents I did sneak out four times. I just went out in the fields and I remember the potatoes had been picked but still there were some potatoes in the field so we got all of those and we got some fruit off the trees and I brought those back. Twice I got caught and one time when we got caught we were taken by the
Partisan -- we were marched along the main road to the Commandant's building. And the Commandant came out and he admonished us, "Don't do it again," and let us go. We weren't punished.

But the second time was quite different. The second time I remember we snuck out and then when we got out into the field there was a road, a country road, and we saw a wagon come along this country road. And when we saw that wagon we went back in and we hid until the wagon was gone. And when the wagon was gone, we came back out toward the road and as we approached this tree suddenly a Partisan stepped from behind the tree. He was waiting for us there. And then he -- he was brutal. I mean, he hit us, knocked us to the ground. When we were on the ground he kicked us with his boots.

And then he took -- there were just two of us on this occasion. He then took us to where the Partisans stayed. The outermost house of the village along one of the side roads was a village that the Partisans used for their quarters. And they stayed in front and he took us to this house and he locked us in a room in the back -- this was in the morning -- and just left us there. And then we were there for I don't know how many hours but we would see the Partisans go past our room and go to the outhouse and back. And we could hear them; they were laughing and drinking and playing cards, I think.

But after I don't know how many hours, we got restless and thirsty and hungry. So we managed to open a window somehow. In this room it's just a dirt floor, but using some rocks we managed to get a window open and reach outside and open the door. And then we got out but -- we got out and we ran and just ran and ran and ran and got away from there as far as we could.

**Coach:** Where did you run to?
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Tony: Run back home.

Coach: To your house.

Tony: To the house, yes.

Coach: Did you ever see the Commandant that second time?

Tony: No. This was just the house where the Partisans that controlled that particular area of town stayed.

Coach: How old was that Partisan that caught you?

Tony: I have no idea. He was an adult. I have no idea.

Coach: So not a young teenager.

Tony: No. He was a Partisan so he was a soldier.

Coach: I heard about some Partisans being, like, 19 years old, though.

Tony: That could -- I'm sure there were, but as a 10 year old I didn't pay attention to how old he was. In fact, I know there were some Partisans who were 19 or so because one of them married my cousin. Two of my cousins were orphans, a boy and a girl. The boy, Tony Folk, was a few years older than I and his sister was I think a year or two older than my sister, so she was a teenager.

And one of the strange things that happened was that -- Gertraut was her name. Gertraut -- this was after a couple of years of camp -- somehow she and a Partisan befriended each other and the Partisan took her out of camp to his family and married her. And she left leaving her little brother -- little brother, he was a couple of years older than I was, so he must have been 12-13 years old -- alone in the camp as an orphan. So he was not happy with this.

In fact he never -- I visited them several times later on, many years after the camp. As luck would have it, both Tony Folk and his sister who married the Partisan ended up living in the same village in Germany and I was there a couple of
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times. And I think Tony never completely forgave his older sister for deserting him.

**Coach:** How did the Partisans in the camp treat the women?

**Tony:** Well, that's a good question. Again, as a 10 year old I really didn't -- I really wasn't interested in sex and didn't really pay much attention to what others did but I did see women go visit the Partisans in that house where they stayed. I don't know of anyone that actually got raped, but obviously my sister was afraid of that, among other things, because that's why she hid so much at the time. And when she wasn't in the -- oh, I don't think she went along the front on the main street. I think she sort of -- when she had to go somewhere she snuck around the back.

And this Partisan actually, as I said, actually ended up marrying my cousin. He didn't have to marry her, but he did.

So I guess I'm not the one to say much about that because I don't know much about it. As a 10 year old I didn't pay too much attention to those kinds of things.

And one more thing I can say, though, in that environment the women or girls who did get raped could not say or do anything about it. To survive they had to keep quiet about it because there was no law, no recourse. If a woman or girl got raped, what could she do? To survive she had to keep quiet. Just complaining about it might make the perpetrator mad and kill her.

**Coach:** How does shame or pride come into that equation?

**Tony:** Well, that comes into the equation, too. You didn't -- yeah, it would be -- yeah, you would be ashamed to have to admit that you were raped and that would not be acceptable even by your relatives.

**Coach:** So it wasn't part of the Schwabian culture to talk about such events had they happened.
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Tony: Exactly.

Coach: Do you remember any other significant atrocities that happened during the encampment?

Tony: Well, I think that's basically my memory.

Coach: Okay.

Tony: But other -- there's not -- that's basically my memory, yeah.

Coach: How long were you in the camp and how did you get free from the camp?

Tony: Yes. Well, we were in the camp from '44 to '47. I don't remember exactly what month the camp started; I think it was in the fall sometime. And also, I don't remember the exact month when we escaped. I need to check with my sister on those dates. But I remember how we got out of the camp quite well.

One thing that comes to mind is not an atrocity but just some of the consequences of having no -- not only no food -- if I may go back to experiences in the camp.

Coach: Please do.

Tony: Oh, yes. But these were not atrocities, these were other things. One of them, a personal one, early on in the camp my eyeglasses broke. I was very nearsighted even as a child. My eyeglasses broke and of course there was no way to get a replacement. So I just saw as well as I could. I just didn't see well all the time.

And the other thing, after some time people not getting enough food diseases broke out. And I don't know what -- is it tuberculosis or typhoid? Anyhow, diseases broke out, including a contagious disease. Is it typhoid or tuberculosis? Typhoid.

And there was no medical treatment, no medicine of any kind. But they did isolate patients. At one time our house was chosen, along with others near us, to
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house the typhoid patients. And we were still on one side of our house and the other
side the rooms were filled with typhoid patients. And when this happened, in front
-- on one side of the house where we had this row of rooms, in front there was a
porch. So every morning when I got up I could see dead bodies lying on the porch.

And when somebody died, the body was wrapped in a blanket and just put
outside on the porch. And then during the day at some point a wagon would come
and they would come and pick up the dead bodies and pile them up in the wagon.
And these bodies would be transported to the mass graves right next to the
cemetery. On the other side of the village from where we lived were the mass
graves. So that's a vivid memory.

And also another vivid memory is to see these people before they died. They
would sun themselves in our yard and the area between the two wings of the house.
And lice -- everybody had lice -- and pick off the lice from their bodies and just kill
them with their fingernails. And I could tell that the -- I observed that the people
who stopped doing that would die shortly thereafter. When they stopped doing that
it was sort of a sign that they had given up on life and were ready to die. So that's a
vivid memory.

Coach: When you think about seeing these dead bodies on the front porch what comes to
mind now? How does that make you feel?

Tony: Well, that memory, although it's very vivid in my mind, it's not at all like seeing
somebody get clubbed over the head or seeing ladies just walking along the street
just getting whipped. It doesn't have the same impression on me at all because
somehow --

Coach: Could I interpret that as -- by you saying it doesn't have the same impression on
you, should I interpret that as you don't have strong emotions about seeing the dead
people on the porch?

Tony: Yes, that's right. Because somehow -- I saw them before in the yard sunning themselves and they were sick. They were sick and died. So that's not the same as seeing somebody get beaten. It doesn't have the same -- didn't make the same impression on me at all. I get emotional now when I think back about people who were beaten for no reason.

Coach: Did you see a beating?

Tony: Well, just the ladies that I was telling you about.

Coach: The old women.

Tony: Right.

Coach: And that upset you.

Tony: That upset me, yes.

Coach: Still to this day.

Tony: Still to this day.

Coach: Well, let's expand on that a little bit then, if we can. Why did it upset you?

Tony: Well, it just seemed so brutal. Just out of the blue and unnecessary and unnatural for one human being -- two human beings walking along the street, just taking out a whip and hitting the other one for no apparent reason. And the same as with these men that were being marched through our village before the concentration camp, same thing.

Coach: So besides the pain of this unnecessary action do you have feelings for the Partisan who was doing that?

Tony: Well, not -- well, yes, of course. The Partisans that did that I can't stand, but --

Coach: What kind of feelings do you have against them?

Tony: Well, I mean, they were brutal.
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**Coach:** Is it hate? Is it anger?

**Tony:** Well, yeah. No, I wouldn't say it's anger. I wouldn't say it's hate. The only ones that I really had hate for are the ones that beat me in that incident that I was telling you about. But now I -- but at the time I remember feeling, "Boy, I wish I could get those guys," even as a 10 year old.

**Coach:** Get them how?

**Tony:** Well, just revenge or something, I suppose.

**Coach:** And even now you would --

**Tony:** No, no. Not now. Not now. I have no feelings of revenge. And even then, I want to put it in context that -- again, at the risk of repeating myself over and over -- there was no police, no law. So the Partisans as a whole -- I don't know how many there were; there were a lot of them -- they were basically civilized people. They were just soldiers like soldiers most anywhere. It's just that the few that got out of hand, there was no control over the few who got out of hand.

**Coach:** Okay. So when you say you wanted to get them, do you mean to stop them, do you mean hurt them? What do you mean?

**Tony:** Well, at the time I had feelings of wanting to hurt them. Not now.

**Coach:** At the time, though.

**Tony:** At the time, even as a child.

**Coach:** As a 10 year old boy.

**Tony:** As a child I remember after they beat me brutally I remember -- that's the only time in my life I can remember of really wanting to hurt somebody badly if I had a chance. It's the only time in my life I remember having those kind of feelings.

**Coach:** When you think of the Partisans as you saw them in Germany in the encampment, what images come to mind? How do you see them? How do you remember them?
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Tony: Just fear. I was deathly afraid of them and wanted to stay away from them as far as possible. Stay out of their sight.

Coach: If I was a sketch artist how you would describe them to me to draw?

Tony: An interesting question. Well, of course now it's 60 years later and so I've been -- I've traveled a lot in the world and so on. I realize that they were soldiers. They were soldiers but they're much like soldiers everywhere. AS I said earlier, a few got out of hand and there was no control over them.

Coach: I'm asking for details. You're giving me a categorical -- do you remember were they neatly in appearance? Were they tall? Were they dark? Where they light? Were they raggedy? What were they?

Tony: That's a good question. Again, as a 10 year old I just didn't pay attention to those kind of things. I really can't even describe them.

Coach: You just remember being scared of them.

Tony: Scared of them when I saw them and tried to stay away from them as far as possible.

Coach: Fair enough. I'm just searching your memory to see what you do remember. This is not a test so you're not going to get a failing grade if you don't remember something. Unlike where your classes where you fail students, I won't fail you, okay?

You've described a few events for me. Was there a time that you felt scared for your life or scared for the life of one of your family members?

Tony: Yes. Oh, definitely. My sister contracted -- I talked about typhoid earlier. My sister contracted typhoid and came very close to death. I don't know what saved her. So she came very close to dying.

As to myself, I started hallucinating at one point and looking back on it now
I must have been malnutritioned. But of course during the time I was hallucinating I wasn't scared, but afterwards it was quite scary. I remember all kinds of -- wanting to do crazy things like swimming when I couldn't swim and so forth. I don't know how long that lasted, but somehow it ended and I haven't had a repeat of that experience. But when it ended and I realized what went on, that was a scary thing because I could have just --

**Coach:** How long was your sister sick for?

**Tony:** I don't really know.

**Coach:** Was it a long time or relatively short but she was really bad, or no memory?

**Tony:** No memory except that she was really bad and got very close to dying. And that's all I can remember.

**Coach:** Who cared for her while she was sick?

**Tony:** She was with us. That's why I don't know how she got out of it.

**Coach:** Did your mother --?

**Tony:** Well, my mother and father and grandmother and I, we were all together. She was with us this whole time. In fact, they wanted to segregate her, take her away from us to segregate her with the other patients, and we resisted. My parents resisted that on the advice of a friend and somehow managed to get away with it. If she had been segregated she probably would have died with the others.

**Coach:** Why is that?

**Tony:** Well, she would have been taken away from her family. I don't know what my parents could really do for her, but at least she was with her family.

**Coach:** Was it important to stay with the family?

**Tony:** I think so. I think so.

**Coach:** Not only your sister but I mean just as a whole.
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Tony: As a whole, yes, of course.

Coach: Why was it important to stay with the family?

Tony: Because you have the support of your family and you can support each other, make sure everybody -- if one of us -- well, my father brought food for us, but also supported each other emotionally.

Coach: So both physically and emotionally.

Tony: Physically and emotionally.

Coach: You had more support with the family intact.

Tony: Yes, definitely. And as I said, there were five of us -- my parents, my sister and I and my grandmother. I only had one grandparent. The other three died as a result of World War I.

Coach: Why don't you take me up to the time of where you escaped and how that went?

Tony: Oh, yes. That I remember very vividly. At some point my parents decided that they only there was was to escape. This was in '47; I don't remember the exact month. So we -- Gakowa, I should say, is just six kilometers or so away from the south of the Hungarian border, and it's about 20 miles east of the Danube -- six miles south of the Hungarian border. And my parents decided we had to escape.

So we packed our belongings, what we could, in rug sacks. The only thing we could take with us was whatever we could get in our rug sacks. By then I was 12 and I remember my rug sack was so heavy I could barely stand up straight.

At this time my father and a couple of friends -- I think a whole group of us, about 50 of us, escaped together. And my father and a couple of friends observed the route of the Partisans that were guarding the camp and I think timed them to see when they went on their route how long it would take them to get back. And so we assembled and snuck past them when they were the furthest away.
But then we had to walk through the fields. We couldn't get out on the road because we would be observed. So we walked through the fields, plowed fields -- at night of course -- with these heavy rug sacks. I remember after a very short time I couldn't stand up straight to support the weight of my rug sack. I had to bend over and I just held my mother by the hand.

But we couldn't -- because we were so heavily loaded with rug sacks -- we couldn't walk very far. We got tired and so after walking for a relatively short period of time we had to sit down to rest and we sat down in a circle. And we left shortly after dark and it took us all night to walk these six kilometers to the Hungarian border, stopping I don't know how many times to rest in between in a circle.

Then after one of these rest periods, rest stops, my father and two of the other leaders of the group, guides -- they were the ones that guided us through the fields -- disagreed on what direction the border was. So they were tired themselves by then and weren't careful enough to take note when we rested, and it was a dark night. So they decided to -- the leaders, the guides -- decided to make bigger and bigger circles around our circle until one of them could spot a landmark which would tell him where we are and which direction the border is. So my father -- another advantage growing up in the village that Tito chose for his concentration camp -- my father spotted one of these landmarks, told them where we are, and then knew which direction we had to go to get to the border.

So then we continued and made our way close to the border but by the time we got there it started getting light. And so the leaders again had a -- got together had a meeting, to decide what to do. Should we risk crossing when it's getting light already and we might be seen by the border guards, or should we hide in the corn
fields? So this was in the fall at some point, or late summer; the corn was still in the fields. But then it was decided that there were too many of us, we could not survive undetected in the corn field all day long waiting for night to come. So they decided just to risk the crossing, which we did.

There was a -- I guess it's called a No Man's Land between the border that was patrolled by the Yugoslavs and the Hungarians on the other side. There was a no-man's land in between. So we made it through this no-man's land and just as we got there the border patrol actually saw us from their towers and came toward us; but by the time they reached us, we were in Hungarian territory. And they did not pursue us into Hungary nor did the Hungarians send us back.

Hungary at the time was also under communist rule but somehow the Hungarian government allowed refugees to go through, did not send us back to Tito. In fact, I learned this later, in fact the Hungarian government offered to take us by train to Austria to one of the Austrian refugee camps. But my father refused to get on the train -- to allow us to get on the train -- for fear that we would end up in Russia rather than Austria. So we made our own way through Hungary.

I was talking to my sister, who is five years older than I am, recently about how in the world we did that. We did it on foot and we often managed to get somebody to help us -- take us on their wagon from one village to another one. So somehow we managed to get from one village to another one and made our own way through Hungary. Not quite. In those days Austria was divided into four zones, the American, British, French, and Russian. And the Russian zone consisted of Burgenland which was the eastern part of Austria. And so to get into a western part of Austria we had to cross the Russian zone, which of course was illegal.

So we somehow -- someone helped us get -- so we somehow made our way
to the Russian zone, to the start of the Russian zone, and by then it was fall and the border was a river. I don't remember the name of the river. So we had to wade across this river, which we did. We waded across this river and again just as we were across we could hear Russian soldiers coming to see what's going on. But by the time they came -- there was a forest on the other side -- we were far enough into the forest so again they didn't pursue us.

By then there was just the seven of us, my parents, sister and I, grandmother, and my aunt and uncle. There were seven of us. And we went into the forest as deep as we could and sat the rest in our wet clothes from the river. We could not change clothes and it was cold. So we sat there all night until daybreak. But then when daybreak came we were all sitting there and had no idea where we were. So again my father started circling the area where we were until he came to a farmhouse and persuaded the farmer to take us to the nearest refugee camp, which was Wilfersdorf -- Wilfersdorf in Austria. It was in a western zone of Austria.

And then in Wilfersdorf my father got sick and so we had to stay there for a while, a few days, maybe a week or two. I don't remember exactly. And then we were transported from Wilfersdorf to another refugee camp called Pfeffernitz, just north of Villach in the province of Corinthia [unintelligible 1:07:56], and then we were in Pfeffernitz for a few weeks. And at that point, although we were in a refugee camp and it was rather spartan, but at that point dying of starvation was no longer an issue, although we did -- I remember my mother sending me out to the farmers to beg for bread even though the food supplies were adequate, but barely adequate.

But then after a couple of weeks my father got a job in Villach, a nearby town, working for a construction firm I think called Nassimberi. Villach was
heavily bombed in the war and there was a lot of construction going on. Now, my father had no skills in that area at all; he spent his whole life walking behind a plow -- walking behind horses and a plow, working in the fields and harvesting and sewing on a primitive farm. But he got a job as a brick layer's helper with this firm.

And this firm managed to get us into a barrack -- left over barrack from the war. And there were -- I think it was five families living in this barrack. And at that point -- and my mother -- oh, this was in the British zone. Villach was in the British zone. And my mother got a job doing the laundry for the British soldiers nearby. My grandmother ran the household and we started raising pigs, so at that point starvation was no longer an issue for us. We had survived.

And I was able to go to school again. So at the age of 12 I resumed my schooling in 4th grade in Hauptschule in Villach. As a refugee in Austria I was not allowed to go to Gymnasium. If my parents had gone to Germany, there I would have been allowed to go to Gymnasium and my parents could have become -- would have been accepted as German citizens. But not in Austria. We were refugees.

And I remember my teachers there in 4th grade in the Hauptschule, I had a course in English. And one semester my course in English was taught by Dr. Mörtl and another time Dr. Fluck. And I found out later that the reason these Ph.D.s were teaching 4th grade is because they had been Nazis and after the war they were not allowed to teach in Gymnasium so they had to teach in the lower classes. So that's when I first became -- that's where I learned a few words of English which came in really handy later on.

In those days were a lot of refuges in Central Europe. And most of the refugees wanted to immigrate and the U.S. was a number one destination by far. In
those days, in the eyes of almost all the immigrants -- or, all the refugees -- going to
the U.S. was second only to going to Heaven. We looked upon the U.S. as being a
place we could go; if we worked hard, we could have a good life. But it was very
difficult. My parents applied and it took a long time and a lot of paperwork to get --
my parents had to undergo strict tests, political tests and physical tests. We had to
all be healthy. We had to get a sponsor who would sponsor us from the U.S. and the
sponsor had to be an American citizen who was wealthy enough to guarantee they'd
take care of us in case we would get a job.

And friends of ours in Chicago, Mike Brandt and -- Mike Brandt and his
wife Justina raised Katie Flotz, who I believe has also interviewed. Of course, Katie
was an orphan so she was raised by the Brandts and her sister was raised by another
family. Anyhow, the Brandts arranged sponsor for us and after three, almost four
years, we got permission to immigrate to the U.S. under the Refugee Act.

Oh, that's another thing I failed to mention earlier, but when we were put in
a concentration camp by Tito, Tito simply removed our citizenship. Our ancestors
had lived in Gakowa since 1763 on my mother's side. We've traced it back seven
generations, so my sister and I are actually the eighth generation of -- who lived in
Gakowa. Now, on my father's side we only go back five generations. So Tito
removed our citizenship. So as refugees in Austria we were displaced persons; we
had no country. But that turned out to be a big advantage because we didn't have to
go through the quota system and we came under the Refugee Act.

Although by then we had been in Austria for four years and both my father
worked and my mother worked, we had no money. We were extremely poor. We
had enough to eat and that was about it living in this barrack. So the Catholic
Charities also paid for our trip across the Atlantic, but that was an interesting
experience as well.

I'm getting away a little. Once we got permission to immigrate, then my father and mother had to quit their jobs and we had to go to Salzburg to become American. There we went through Americanization camp to become Americanized. I remember that. Because I had had courses in English they made me an instructor and we learned to sing "On Top of Old Smokey," "Red River Valley." And another thing I remember there was our American instructor taught us how to eat in a restaurant because Americans use their knife and fork differently than Europeans. And the interesting thing about that was that it never occurred to our instructor that we had never been to a restaurant in Europe.

So after, I believe it was two weeks in Salzburg, we then were put on a train to Bremerhafen, Germany. And in Bremerhafen we -- I think we stayed a week or so there. We got ready to board a ship, General Blatchford, a left over troop carrier from World War II.

So we got on General Blatchford and I was 16 by then. And at some point I remember 16 was the borderline between being a child and an adult and at some point -- I don't know if I was filling out something or whether they asked me whether I was a child or an adult and I said I was an adult and my father teased me about this for years later because as an adult when we were on the ship I had to work. As a child I wouldn't have had to work.

**Coach:** Oops.

**Tony:** So that turned out to be a terrible voyage. We got hit by storms and everybody got seasick and people wished they could go back. I remember that. But after 11 days we arrived in New York Harbor and then there was a final check before -- as we were leaving the ship, immigration authorities checked our papers for the final time.
and when they came to my mother's papers they noticed the doctors had noted that she has a spot on her lungs. Now, although this spot was noted by the doctors who checked her in Europe in Salzburg, and again in Bremerhafen -- they approved her but the immigration authorities in New York did not. So they put a red line through her papers and when she saw that she fainted on the spot. And as a consequence of that we were denied permission to enter the United States, but we were put on Ellis Island.

Now, that was a frightening experience because here we were. But Ellis Island was set up legally somehow not to be part of the United States even though it's in New York Harbor. So here we were on Ellis Island, refugees. The U.S. denied us permission to enter the U.S. No country was obligated to take us because we had citizenship in no country. And we met people on Ellis Island that had been there for months, a couple had been there for years and they were willing to go anywhere on earth.

Ellis Island in those days was a jail. I remember -- so our introduction to the United States was to look at the Statue of Liberty through a barbed wire fence. I was separated from the rest of the family. Actually, my sister was given permission to enter the U.S. because she was 21 by then. However, she refused in order to stay with us.

But somehow, again, I was declared an adult. I was separated from family. My parents, my sister, my grandmother -- and my aunt and uncle, too, then, they were gone. They had gotten permission to enter the U.S. and they had gone to Chicago. So my parents, my sister and grandmother were given a room together but I was separated from them and I was put in a cell with five other men.

There were three bunk beds on each side and at 10:00 in the evening we
were marched into the cell, we all undressed together, took a shower together, and then we were marched back into the cell. The cell was locked. At 6:00 in the morning the guard came, unlocked the cell. I remember had to pull my leg to get me out of bed. And we got out of bed and we were locked out of the cell for the rest of the day, from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

And the exciting moment every day came when the mailman came because everybody was waiting for a letter giving them permission to enter the U.S. And at that point -- of course, the food was more than adequate. The food was luxurious for us; and the accommodations, in spite of me being in a cell, were okay. The only other thing of note that I remember about that, there were some Asians in Ellis Island and when the call for food came -- I think they rang a bell or something for food -- these Asians would start running and they would jump over tables to get first in line for the food, even though there was enough food available for everybody. This was strange.

Anyhow, after 11 days a letter came giving us permission to enter the U.S. on the condition that my mother would get checked for the spot on her lung every six months. But by then we had to make our own way to Chicago. We didn't have enough money but we got -- friends from Chicago sent us money so then we took the train to Chicago. I was the only one who knew a few words of English, so I was in charge of all communications. And I remember arriving by train in Chicago and being amazed when I saw all those straight streets. That's a vivid memory because in Europe you don't see -- there aren't many places where you see long, straight streets in the cities.

So this is how we ended up in Chicago.

**Coach:** Fascinating story. Let's go back to when you left Gakowa and you entered Hungary,
that night. You crossed no-man's land and you got into Hungary. Do you remember what that felt like leaving --

Tony:  Oh, freedom. We escaped concentration camp. I mean, first of all, it was a huge relief that we didn't get caught because we could have gotten caught by the Partisans escaping Gakowa, or we could have gotten caught by the border guards crossing. So it was a huge relief and a sense of freedom. On the other hand, we were in Hungary which was under Communist control so we knew we still had a long way to go.

But coming back to the relief and the freedom, I should say also that -- looking back on it -- that as time went on the escaping became easier and easier and the punishment for getting caught when escaping became less and less. I don't think the punishment would have been severe if we had gotten caught at that point. I don't know what it would have been. So we really weren't afraid for our life at that point in time.

Somehow looking back on it I get the impression that for some reason Tito decided to put us all in concentration camp but he didn't really know what to do with us. I guess the feeling against the Germans of course was very strong. And I should mention also the Germans who were -- well, what were the criteria used to put you in concentration camp? Your last name. If your last name -- sole criteria was your last name. If your last name was judged to be German, by whoever did the judging, you were in. If not, you were out. One of our relatives was married to a man named Geszi, whose name was judged to be Hungarian, and they were free.

So Tito somehow decided to put us in concentration camp. He didn't just line us up and shoot us all. But as time went on and looking back on it, I get the feeling he really didn't know what to do with us so after a while things just got
looser and looser. And of course eventually in ’48 all the concentration camps were dissolved.

**Coach:** But you remember feeling free when you crossed the Hungarian border.

**Tony:** Yes. Yes. A huge sense of relief just getting out of concentration camp, Gakowa. And we knew Hungary did not have concentration camps for the Germans. So there are two things -- I was going to say something else about the internment situation. That's what comes to mind right now, the --

Oh, yes, I know what I wanted to say is of course the Germans in Gakowa before the war -- there were of course Germans who were sympathetic to Hitler. There were sort of two groups of Germans before the war, those sympathetic to Hitler and those not sympathetic to Hitler. And those sympathetic to Hitler knew they had something to fear so they left with the German troops when the German troops retreated. They retreated with the German troops and ended up in Germany. And only those stayed behind who thought that they had nothing to fear, but revenge was taken out on them; not because they were guilty, but because they were handy, which unfortunately is, as you well know a lot better than I, is not an uncommon phenomenon in the history of the human race.

**Coach:** I think, with your permission, we'll take a break right here.

**Tony:** Okay.

**Coach:** Okay, Tony. During lunch time you were reflecting and telling me another story about your time in Gakowa, and this time it concerned your uncle's parents. Can you tell me that story, please?

**Tony:** Yes. My uncle's parents were tortured to death in camp. The Partisans somehow got the impression that my uncle's parents had gold hidden somewhere around their house. So they went and pressured them by, among other things, holding a rifle into
their mouth and various other tactics. And it turned out they did not have any gold hidden but couldn't persuade the Partisans that that is the case and so they ended up being tortured to death.

**Coach:** And you know this because your uncle told you?

**Tony:** Yes. I was not a witness to this, but yes my uncle told me and then other people have -- I know this not from witnessing it, but just from hearing it.

**Coach:** Do you know what kind of torture they endured?

**Tony:** The only thing about the actual torture -- well, the two things. The one I mentioned, that they were threatened by holding a gun in their mouth. And the other one is that it was a cold winter day and somehow they were forced to take off their clothes -- not all of their clothes; I guess they had their underwear or something on -- and they were forced to march outside in extreme conditions. And that's all the details I know about the form of the torture.

**Coach:** When did you learn about the torture?

**Tony:** Oh, this was told -- I don't remember exactly when, but in concentration camp and afterwards.

**Coach:** So you knew about it during the concentration camp, too?

**Tony:** I don't remember exactly when I first heard about this. I may not have heard about it until afterwards, actually. I can't remember the exact time when I heard about it -- when I first heard about it. It was reinforced by several people, not just one person.

**Coach:** Any other traumatic events of the sort that we have not talked about yet that you want to tell me about?

**Tony:** No. I can't think of any offhand.

**Coach:** Okay. Let's move on with the other questions, then. In the beginning of the story you told me that the first time you escaped from the three house area that was the
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camp at the time when the Partisans first took over, you escaped and went back to your homes and found that they had been looted and all the animals were set free and everything was gone. Was there anything that you can remember that was in your physical possession that was important for you to keep throughout the encampment?

Tony: Personally, no. By the way, this excursion was just a few of us kids. Just pretty much myself and a couple of friends, kids. As far as physical possessions go, I was a kid so I didn't have anything that was valuable that I wanted to protect as far as I can remember. But my parents did and they buried some things. I don't know what all they were. I don't think we had any gold or valuable jewelry. I'm not sure what -- they had a few things hidden when it became clear that we would be put in concentration camp. They did hide a few things.

And, in fact, I recently had a discussion with my sister just about -- just how did we make our way through Hungary from village to village? How did we persuade people to take us to the next village on their horse and wagon?

And she said in some cases we knew people. Others helped us just on their own. Still others we actually gave them something.

I said, "What did we have?" Because we could only -- the only thing we could take with us is what we could carry in our rug sack, as I mentioned earlier.

And she said, "Well, we had some tablecloths and things of that sort that somehow were worth something." Of course, there was no money.

Coach: Is there anything that made it from Yugoslavia that you owned -- you and your family -- that you have here in the States with you?

Tony: That's a good question. I don't -- I can't think of -- well, my grade reports. I mentioned earlier that I went to grades 1, 2, and 3 in Gakowa and I have my grades
from those three years in a safety deposit box. So that made it all the way to Chicago.

**Coach:** Is that something you kept or your mother kept, or who?

**Tony:** Well, it must have been my parents who kept it initially and then gave it to me.

**Coach:** I wonder why they kept that.

**Tony:** I don't know. Just as a record of my school years, I guess.

**Coach:** Okay. During the internment what do you think the worst thing about it was?

**Tony:** The worst thing about the internment?

**Coach:** Either the worst thing that happened to you or just the conditions, whatever you consider to be the worst part about the internment. What was that?

**Tony:** Well, I would say just the overall disruption of life, first of all. I mean, my parents were farmers, had a small farm. Our farm was not a big one and not the smallest one, just -- and just the interruption of life. We had -- although life was very difficult for my parents. They had to do everything by hand, but they were happy doing it. They had a nice, happy life and then everything was disrupted very suddenly, very brutally, and then we lived in fear and near starvation for three years.

And personally I couldn't go to school. I didn't mind it at the time, of course. Afterwards I noticed I had missed three years of school. And during camp we had a lot of free time but nothing to do. If you don't go to school, you're 10 years old, what do you do? Well, you just run around. We couldn't even have basic things like playing soccer, for example. We played soccer but we didn't have any soccer balls. There were no soccer balls available. So initially in the first part of the camp, and even before camp, we played soccer with pig's bladders. We blew up pig's bladders and played. And then during camp, of course, those didn't last very long. We used
rages. We tied rags together and made a rag ball and kicked that around.

**Coach:** So basically just the destruction of normal life.

**Tony:** Just the destruction of normal life. Well, first of all, the destruction of normal life. And secondly being in camp with other people, that I mentioned earlier, when disease broke out, people were dying every day. And very unnatural conditions that's extremely stressful conditions that we lived in for three years.

**Coach:** What do you think about your childhood overall?

**Tony:** Well, until age 9, before camp, looking back I view my childhood as an extremely pleasant one. As a child, growing up there was wonderful because we had the freedom to run around the whole village. And my parents were so busy they didn't really keep an eye on us children. I was talking to a friend recently about our experiences as children down there. I didn't have to ask my parents' permission to go play with my friends, or even if I wanted to go to the end of town to the soccer field to play with somebody. I just went. So it was a wonderful place to grow up as a child until camp, of course. In camp everything was different.

**Coach:** So do you feel you lost some of your childhood?

**Tony:** Yes. Yes. I lost some of my childhood and I think I grew up fast. After camp at the age of 12 I was pretty close to a grown-up, maturity-wise.

**Coach:** Do you resent losing that childhood?

**Tony:** Well, no, I wouldn't say I resent it. I recovered from it, I think. I wouldn't say I resent it, it's just that it would have been nice to have a normal childhood at that age -- 12 at least, whatever.

**Coach:** Perhaps there's another word besides "resent"?

**Tony:** Yeah. Another word besides "resent."

**Coach:** Are you bitter?
Tony: Bitter. I'm not really bitter either. A lot of strange things happened. The one thing I think that is more stressing is that these experiences in concentration camp that I was talking about earlier occurred not during the war, after the war. During the war we all know that a lot of strange things happened. Atrocities are committed by both sides, the winners and the losers. And in many cases there's no accountability; the usual system of justice is not operative or operates poorly. But these things that I talked about occurred after the war when there was reason to expect justice to prevail. It did not prevail. And as far as I know, not one person has ever been tried, let alone prosecuted and convicted, for a crime they committed against ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia. I shouldn't say Yugoslavia; in Gakowa. I don't know of a single instance where anybody has ever been held accountable for committing an atrocity at concentration camp Gakowa. And that -- I wouldn't say it makes me bitter, but it's disappointing.

We hear about other concentration camps where people were tried for atrocities they committed, but nobody has ever even tried to try somebody who committed an atrocity in concentration camp Gakowa.

Coach: Would you like to see them?

Tony: Well, right now it's sort of late. It's 60 years after these events. But I would -- I'm not even sure I would like to see them tried now. I'm not sure what that would accomplish, but I would like -- I would like their record to be there, that what happened be honestly told. That's one reason I'm agreeing to this interview, to tell it as it is -- or as it was in those days. So it would be nice to have the people who -- to have it known -- to have the people who committed these atrocities known by name, even though I'm not even sure I would be in favor of trying them or putting them in jail now. Very little would be served by that. But just have it known that these
people committed these atrocities.

**Coach:** Why is it important to have their names known?

**Tony:** Justice. In the interest of justice.

**Coach:** What would you -- if you could meet the Partisans that were in Gakowa with you for the encampment, perhaps the one that even beat you, what would you tell them today?

**Tony:** Well, the one that beat me I would be angry with. I wouldn't want to do anything to him or anything, but I would tell him that I'm mad at what he did. He shouldn't have done that against a 10 year old boy who did nothing more than just sneak out of camp and walk around the fields and maybe pick up a potato that wasn't harvested or maybe pick an apple from a tree.

The others -- in general the Partisans, as I mentioned earlier, I think most of them were nice people just doing their job in the military. It's just that those few who committed atrocities were not held accountable for them. And just the overall situation is such, when you think about it there were these -- you asked me earlier how old these Partisans were. I really don't know. As a 10 year old I didn't really notice whether they were 19 or 29 or 39; that really didn't make any difference to me at the time.

I'm sure most of them, they were nice people, but also they were in an environment where they were guarding 20,000 people. And they knew that they had -- and we the people who were interned were absolutely helpless, vulnerable and helpless. Whatever was done to us, we had no recourse. There was no police, no judge, no jury, no nothing. So if a Partisan committed an atrocity, or raped a girl or a woman, or hit somebody, nothing happened to him. Unless his superior happened to see it and told him, "Don't do that again. We don't like it." And again I stress that
these things all occurred not during war time, during "peace" time.

**Coach:** So two things come across to me that seem to be important to you. One is that while you don't choose to want to see them on trial and be punished for their crimes, you think having their names associated with crimes would bring justice for you.

**Tony:** In some sense, yes. At least it would help to bring out the truth, "These things happened and these people did these things."

**Coach:** To make it public.

**Tony:** To make it public, yes.

**Coach:** And that would make it seem as if they didn't get away with it.

**Tony:** Yeah. Right. Didn't get away with absolutely no accountability whatsoever at least. At least on the record it's there. The truth -- I'm a research mathematician. I have strong feelings about truth.

**Coach:** Sure. Proofs.

**Tony:** The truth should be -- yes, proofs. Sometimes in civilian life proofs are not -- they're difficult in mathematics, too, but -- yes. I have a lot of respect for truth and honesty.

**Coach:** The other thing I'm picking up here, Tony -- and maybe you can expound so I understand it a little bit better. And it's not right, wrong, or indifferent, it's just I want your feelings on it. You come across to me as though during war it seems to be that you accept atrocities that happen during war, that you understand they're going to happen and that -- not that it's okay, but that at least it's acceptable to you. You seem to focus on the fact that this happened after the war; these atrocities are not acceptable. What's the difference there for you?

**Tony:** Well, I think the rules are different during war. I mean, during war -- and even people who commit crimes during war sometimes are tried by a military tribunal
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which is different than a civilian tribunal. And in a war people fight against each other, shoot each other, and you're afraid, "If I don't shoot him, he's going to shoot me."

But there was no such thing in concentration camp. The atrocities that were committed on us, we were absolutely vulnerable; completely vulnerable and helpless. As far as I know, Brian, I don't know -- there's no one that ever retaliated against a Partisan from inside the camp. I don't know of a single instance where someone did something against a Partisan, even in retaliation for being raped or these ladies that were hit with a whip. I don't know of a single instant where somebody retaliated or tried to retaliate. In fact, in some ways I find this remarkable, Brian, that her are all these people who were beaten, some were shot, some were raped, and nobody resisted.

Just recently I've heard -- actually, this wasn't for Gakowa. This was in Besdan [ph 1:47:39] prior to the war that men were selected out for one of these assemblies on the soccer field. Men were selected out and they were marched through a woods and they were shot 10 at a time. They were given shovels to dig their own graves and then were shot. And not one of them took a shovel and hit one of the people that was standing there ready to shoot him, or even tried to run away in the forest just to see if he could outrun the bullets. I don't know of a single report where somebody even resisted getting shot to death when it was clear that that was going to happen.

**Coach:** Why do you think that is?

**Tony:** Well, I don't fully understand that. I would think -- if I were in a position -- if I'm standing there, I'm number seven in line for getting shot, and the first six have been shot -- it's hard to say exactly what you're going to do under those circumstances
because the stressors are so enormous that we don't know what they are; it's difficult. But somehow I have a feeling I would try to do something. If I had a shovel in my hand, I would hit the guy that's trying to shoot me or try to run away or do something. I just can't see myself just standing there waiting to be shot.

**Coach:** So I want to continue to probe this just a little bit further, with your permission. In your mind do you think it's not okay, but during war is it acceptable for a soldier to rape an innocent civilian?

**Tony:** No. No, I don't. I don't. I mean, there are rules in war, too, as we all know. I haven't been in a war so I'm speaking about a subject that I don't know much about. No, certainly not. There are rules in war, too, but they're different than in civilian life.

**Coach:** This conversation started with me asking you, "What was the worst thing that happened in the camp?" I realize life during that time was very difficult overall, but comparably what was the best thing that happened to you in the camp? Not that it was necessarily good, but what was the best thing that happened?

**Tony:** I understand. That's another very good question. Well, if I may get a bit philosophical in trying to answer that question, my theory is I can't believe that -- life is rich if you have a lot of different experiences. If your life goes along very smoothly, you have no big ups and downs, there's nothing wrong with that but that life in my view is not as rich as it would be if it had a lot of ups and downs -- good experiences as well as bad ones. So in that sense I think the experience of being in concentration camp has enriched my life, given that I've survived it. Of course, the people that didn't survive it can't say that; they're not here to talk about it. I'm here to talk about it. So overall I think my life was enriched by the experience.

**Coach:** Have you ever given thought to how it enriched your life?

**Tony:** Well, just by having had these deep valleys and having recovered from them. To
lead what I view as a satisfying life after all, after a certain period of time has elapsed.

Coach: Okay. So you feel the best thing that happened to you is that the terrible experiences you went through enriched your life.

Tony: Just the overall experience, yeah, enriched my life. I mean, I saw a lot of human activities that most people don't see and many people can't even imagine.

Coach: Believe it or not, I fully understand what you're saying. So overall how do you account for your survival when so many in Gakowa died?

Tony: Well, this gets back, Brian, to what we were earlier discussing. My parents, first of all; and the fact that Gakowa was the site of the concentration camp so we had help from outside; and just the family sticking together.

Coach: Okay. Besides those three things we mentioned earlier as being the advantage -- your parents, your father's job, and the fact that the camp was your home town -- is there anything else that facilitated your survival? Someone else's help or spiritual help or anything at all that comes to mind?

Tony: Well, I think the spiritual help probably played a role as well. Gakowa was 100 percent Catholic. There was one church; it was a Catholic church. Although most people, if you asked them what their beliefs really are, they couldn't tell you, but they had beliefs. And I did, too, as a child. I outgrew them later on in life, but as a child --

And I think, coming back to what I was saying earlier, why did nobody resist all these atrocities that were committed against them? I think perhaps faith had something to do with that. They thought, "We've done nothing wrong -- I've done nothing wrong. If he's there, if he kills me or he rapes me and I do nothing, God will forgive me but he is responsible." So in that sense I think faith may have
played a role and it may explain partially this -- what I said earlier -- the strange fact that nobody resisted, as far as I know.

**Coach:** That upset you.

**Tony:** Well, just talking about it.

**Coach:** What's upsetting you?

**Tony:** Well, you know -- yeah, there are tears coming to my eyes and I don't really know why.

**Coach:** Do you feel sorry for these people for having their faith let them down?

**Tony:** Well, no, I don't think the faith let them down. I think the faith strengthened them to accept the things that were happening to them. But that's what I was trying to say.

**Coach:** Sure. And I followed that. I'm just probing to get your emotions out from you.

**Tony:** Yeah, I understand.

**Coach:** I don't know. When you're thinking of this are you feeling sorry for them?

**Tony:** Well, you know, Brian, you asked very penetrating questions. And as I said, I really don't understand why I'm crying now and why this affects me so much because at the moment I'm not thinking of anything personal that happened to me. I'm trying to kind of see the overall picture of --

**Coach:** I don't know if you picked up on this. This is a trait for you. When you speak of others suffering you get real upset. When you speak of that Partisan beating you, or any time you speak about anything bad happening to you, you get a smile on your face and you laugh about it.

**Tony:** Is that right? I hadn't noticed that.

**Coach:** And I picked up on that several times. That's interesting about you. I thought I'd share that with you because it's interesting that you accepted your own pain and you can even smile about it now, but when it comes to thinking about your fellow --
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what do you say, Gakowanians?

Tony: Gakowar or whatever. My fellow inmates.

Coach: When you think of the other Donauschwabians you're really upset about it and I'm trying to -- we'll have to analyze this and figure out what that means, but --

Tony: That's an interesting observation on your part, Brian. I hadn't notice that myself. But now that you're saying it, yeah, I can see that.

Coach: So tell me about your -- you said you had beliefs as a child that you outgrew. Tell me about your religious beliefs up until 9 years old, or even during the camp. What were your beliefs?

Tony: Catholic. Everybody was a Catholic, at least nominally. In fact, that was the only religion in town. As far as I know, Gakowa was 100 percent Catholic. You had no other choice.

Coach: So did you attend church regularly as a child?

Tony: Well, yes. Yes and no. I mean, my parents wanted me to go but they weren't really all that strict about it and it was just -- you were expected to go, but you didn't have to. I remember -- in fact, thinking back on this now it's rather strange. I didn't --

I was really raised by my grandmother who lived with us, as I mentioned, because my mother and father were very busy and the grandmother ran the house. And I can remember her saying then, and even later in Fidacha [ph 1:57:45] and Chicago, when she got mad at me for not going to church she would call me a Lutheran, which I have to apologize for the Lutherans that hear this. But for her, instead of calling me a heathen or whatever, called me a Lutheran. I don't know where that came from.

Coach: So in the house -- a lot of Catholics say grace before a meal. Did you have those kind of practices?
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Tony: No. We did not do that.

Coach: Did you -- as a child before the camp, did you pray at night?

Tony: Yes. I did do that sometimes and that was -- the priest sort of indoctrinated you to do that. And even in Austria when I went to Hauptschule -- Austria in those days was I would say at least 90 percent Catholic. And in my class we had religious instruction where the priest came in. And I believe you didn't have to stay, but as far as I can recall only one student in class left class when the priest came in. And the priest then made us promise to pray.

Coach: So was that prayer at night -- was that something you got on your knees for, or you just kind of did it in bed? Do you remember? It's okay if you don't remember.

Tony: I didn't have a specific ritual, I don't think. And I don't think I did it regularly either.

Coach: That's fine.

Tony: Just at times.

Coach: So I think I have an overall picture of faithful but not very strict and regimented about it. Is that fair?

Tony: Yes.

Coach: What about your sister? Same thing?

Tony: Well, yes, same thing except that she is still that way today whereas I am not. So that's the difference. And also my mother and father were very -- all their life.

Coach: We'll come back to your present religious beliefs in a minute. So when the encampment started and you're going through this suffering, did your religious practices change?

Tony: Well, we had no opportunity to go to church anymore so there was no official church. But other than that, no. I mean, beliefs didn't --

Coach: Did you continue to pray?
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Tony: You know, that's another good question. I can't specifically remember but there was really no reason not to because prayer just takes a few minutes and you can do that whether Partisans are guarding you or not. So -- yeah, go ahead.

Coach: I'll ask you two questions combined. Answer them in any way you want. How have your practices changed to today? With the second question being: if you were faithful, what were your thoughts about God and why would he let something like this happen?

Tony: Well, the first question, today I'm not a member of any organized religion. And I'm a black sheep in the family in that regard; there are still my family that are strong Catholics. My mother just died last January at the age of 93 and she was a very strong Catholic. In fact, before she died in the nursing home she prayed every day. When I would visit her during lunch time she would stop and she prayed. She prayed out loud, to the annoyance of all the people around there. Even when her mind wasn't working well anymore she would pray -- say the same prayer over and over again. So I was a black sheep in the family in that regard.

Now the second part of your question was reflecting on why would God let such a thing happen. I don't think I reflected on that as a -- when it happened I was between the ages of 9 and 12. I can't remember such a philosophical reflection at the time. I mean, we were just more concerned with trying to survive the circumstances that we found ourselves in.

Coach: What about now? Let's go back to what -- why did you leave the Church?

Tony: Well, because some time around age 15 or 16 -- some time around there -- I just started to think more about the beliefs and I found myself in disagreement with what the Church was saying on a number of things.

Coach: Do you have one that sticks out? An example of a major belief that --
Tony: Actually, I do. And it's kind of a strange one and I'm not sure -- I don't know that I can claim that that was sort of the trigger that got me out of the Church, but I do -- yes. But there was one that I remember where I said finally, "I can't pretend to believe these things anymore. I have to go on." And that was when the priest gave a strong argument that the Cuban revolution -- that's when Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba a long time ago -- that that came about because we Catholics -- it was our fault that we didn't do enough -- I don't remember the details at all.

But anyhow, he pretty strongly preached the [unintelligible 2:03:43] said Fidel's rise to power was our fault somehow. And I thought that was just too much. But that's just one -- that's the thing that just comes to mind, but after all these years that still stays with me so it must have made an impression on me at the time.

Coach: So while you're not a member of organized religion is there a faith present?

Tony: No, not really, except in an abstract sort of sense. When Albert Einstein said that "God doesn't throw dice," he was not speaking of any God of any organized religion but speaking more of God as nature and as a -- probably -- or possibly because I'm -- I don't want to compare myself to Einstein, of course, but as a theoretical research mathematician that's how I tend to think of God, as just nature and the laws of nature.

Coach: Okay. Fair enough. I think we've answered this already, but just in case you have any other thoughts that come to mind, how would you respond to the idea that -- during your captivity did you have any feelings or thoughts towards your captors, the Partisans?

Tony: During captivity? Well, I mean, they were our -- they guarded us. It was like -- worse than being in jail because in jail you get enough food to continue to live. So they were our captors. I don't specifically recall that I really hated them, but I just
hated being there and hated having them there, if that makes sense.

Now, as I said, my parents were never able to get over this feeling and I couldn't persuade them to ever go back to Yugoslavia.

Coach: What did they feel about the Partisans?

Tony: That they were just terrible, you know, terrible people.

Coach: What about your sister?

Tony: I think she basically feels more like my parents. Somehow those five years -- she's five years older, as I said earlier, and those five years make a difference. Her mentality somehow I think is more in line with the generation of my parents than mine is. I kind of grew away, I think, from that generation.

Coach: If we somehow knew that in the next couple of days I would be thrown into a concentration camp, and I shared that with you, what would be your advice to me to survive?

Tony: Thing you can do to survive. Well, a lot of it is mental, stay strong mentally. Never give up hope. No matter how dire the circumstances, don't give up hope. And if it's possible to contact and cultivate friends and others outside who might be in a position to help you, do so. And being thrown -- I'm taking your question to mean being thrown in a concentration camp under the circumstances that we were in, namely where you're completely vulnerable and totally helpless so you can't fight, you can't resist. So just -- you have to go along with the rules that are laid out and just try -- don't give up hope, and if possible keep contacts and friendships with people outside.

Coach: Was there a weakness you felt during captivity?

Tony: Of myself?

Coach: Yes, sir.
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Tony: I'm sure I had some weaknesses. I can't think of one right -- my eyes. I was seriously nearsighted. I don't know what you mean by "weakness."

Coach: Either physically or mentally.

Tony: Yeah. I mean, I don't view that as a weakness. I have no control over that.

Coach: That's fair. Did you ever feel powerless over something or was it --

Tony: We all felt powerless. I mean, we were completely helpless. When my glasses broke there was no chance to get glasses. I was heavily nearsighted and I just did the best I could with that. And the same thing when my sister was near death. There was no chance for getting a doctor or any kind of medicines, so we just did the best we could under the circumstances.

Coach: Was there a strength that you felt?

Tony: Strength? You're talking about personal?

Coach: Yes, sir.

Tony: Well, I guess perseverance. Somehow I had perseverance and that served me -- that may have served me partly during concentration camp and I felt it served me well afterwards. Of course, even though I missed three years of school, when I had an opportunity to go back to school I went even though I was older than the other kids. I persevered. And later on I persevered even at the point somebody asked me how is it that I became a research mathematician in spite of these steps in my education and various other things? Well, I persevered. I just -- no matter how far I got behind, when the opportunity came to get back on track or get ahead, I persevered. I just kept doing it.

Coach: What do you think provided that drive for you?

Tony: That's a very good question. I have thought about that and I have to say this not just for me. One remarkable thing. When I think about the survivors of concentration
camp Gakowa of my generation, many of them became successful in all kinds of ways of life. Not many academics, but in other ways of life -- what they went into they became successful. I have a feeling -- I don't know that this is documented anywhere -- the percentage of concentration camp survivors from Gakowa from my generation that became successful, however success is measured, is much higher than average. And I don't know why that is.

**Coach:** I was going to wait until after the tape to share this with you, but I think -- my assumption -- my assessment would point and answer towards the culture of the Schwab: hard work, settling in areas that require hard work, and the whole ethnic that was derived from all that. Persevering through the hard times. I think that is reflected in the survivors.

**Tony:** It's certainly true that the Schwabians had a very strong work ethic. They didn't have a lot of respect for education, but they had a strong work ethic. My parents didn't want me to go to school; they wanted me to work.

**Coach:** So that's my take.

**Tony:** Yeah. Right. Right.

**Coach:** So if we look at your home, especially one in Illinois -- yes, in Illinois -- I would imagine if I walked into your office I would see a multitude of certificates that give Professor Zettl titles -- Ph.D., Master degrees, undergraduate degrees. You're published -- I think 120-plus papers. You're in Katherine Flotz's book. As you look at yourself overall, how do you feel?

**Tony:** Overall with regard to my career and my life in general, family life and so on, I feel not only satisfied but very lucky. I had a satisfying career. I have a satisfying family life. And overall things have gone well for me. But I think -- I don't know how much credit I can take for that. I'll take some credit for it, but luck had a lot to do
with it, too. And I have to say, Brian, that a good deal of that luck is due to the fact that I immigrated to the United States of America, because I can't think of another country where I would have had the opportunities that I had here.

For example, coming here at age 16 with a 7th grade education -- in fact, I hadn't really completed the 7th grade -- and then I had an opportunity to continue my education. I don't think I would have had that in -- I can't think of another country where I would have had that. And I will say that was accepted. I mean, the fact that I graduated at age 20 from Chicago Vocational High School, one of the worst high schools in Chicago -- maybe the worst -- that wasn't a big deal. And when I was in college I was older than the other college kids, but that was not somehow that didn't work against me. In fact, it may have -- in some sense it helped me because I probably was more mature than most of my classmates.

**Coach:** What has allowed you to be successful? Because I think of you as very successful. You have a good family life. You had a successful career, a fruitful career -- Ph.D., professor, teaching many children math -- students math. What allowed that success to happen?

**Tony:** Well, a lot of it was luck. But also some of it was due to perseverance, as I said earlier. I forgot what I was going to say now regarding my career. I had teachers that really turned me on in college at IT [unintelligible 2:17:01], teachers that really turned me on to mathematics. And I already liked it before, but they really turned me on.

My goal was to be a high school teacher because -- reflecting on it now I think that goal was due to the fact that I worked my way through college. Illinois Technology in those days was a very expensive place to go to college, but I worked my through there by being a janitor in the summer time and sometimes taking two
jobs at the same time.

But then in my senior year these two teachers called me into their office and told me that they're resigning their position at Illinois State Technology and they're going to University of Tennessee. Would I consider going with them to be a graduate student at UT Knoxville? And up until that moment the idea -- even the idea of going to graduate school never even occurred to me. I wanted to be a high school teacher.

Now, when I reflect on it, why did I want to be a high school teacher? Well, the only things I knew at the time were being a janitor and being a teacher. And even though janitors made very good money in Chicago in those days -- it was a very strong union -- I didn't want to be a janitor for the rest of my life, doing the same thing over and over again. And looking back on it, I must have felt that I could teach as well as many, if not most, of my teachers. That is the only other thing I knew so I preferred that to being a janitor.

But then when they suggested graduate school, I thought about it. And I was 24, still living at home; I lived at home while going to college. And I thought, "It's time I break the family bond and get out into the world on my own." And that was one of my life-changing events as I look back on it.

Coach: So luck coupled with good old-fashioned hard work and perseverance.
Tony: Yes. Luck, hard work, and perseverance, yes. And I would even put perseverance before hard work, even. Yeah right. And my family life, of course. Meeting my wife at just the right time and the kids -- it was very, very supportive of my professional activities.

My being a research mathematician, especially early in my career, I had to travel a lot to meetings and went to sabbaticals in various different places. We spent
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a year in Scotland, half a year in England, half a year in Germany. I was at the Math
Research Center in Wisconsin. I was at Oakridge National Laboratory. I was a
consultant at the -- I mention these things -- my wife is very supportive of all these
things, so that worked out well.

Coach: What do you think has brought the most joy in your life?

Tony: Well, family and career.

Coach: Okay. On the other hand, are there any regrets about life?

Tony: No, not regrets. I mean, if I think back there are certain things I wonder what would
have happened if I did that rather than this, and so on. But, no, I can honestly say
that no major regrets.

Coach: All right.

Tony: With one exception. Okay, I'm going to make myself an exception now, yes. I just
mentioned the influence of these two particular teachers I had -- and I should
mention them by name. Bill Mahavier who was a professor that I had -- Professor
Bill Mahavier and Professor John Neuberger changed my life. They're now good
friends and I just saw them recently in a meeting. These two teachers had known
that I view them as being instrumental in my career as a mathematician. And I've
had other teachers that influenced me strongly and I never thanked them properly. I
wished I had.

Coach: But these two are still alive.

Tony: They're still alive and I thank them. And they know -- I mention them in my article
by name, that they know that I --

Coach: So what's the regret? I'm not following what the regret is.

Tony: Well, I let these two know that they had a very strong influence on me, a very
strong positive influence on me establishing my career. Other teachers who have
had a positive influence on me don't know that that was the case because I didn't let them know. I wish I had.

**Coach:** I follow you. Okay. So when you think back on this traumatic experience that happened to you at age 9, 60 years have passed by. What do you think it all means?

**Tony:** I don't know how to answer that question, Brian. What does it all mean, the fact that I was put in concentration camp? I don't know. I don't know how to answer that. I don't think it was a preordained event. I think it was caused by Tito for whatever reasons.

**Coach:** But I hear you say that it's made you stronger in life.

**Tony:** I think so.

**Coach:** That was the best thing that happened to you -- the best thing at the camp is that it made you stronger.

**Tony:** And richer in a sense, life experiences.

**Coach:** It enriched your life.

**Tony:** Enriched my life, yeah.

**Coach:** Sir, that is the end of the interview. If there's anything you think I should hear that we haven't talked about, now is a good time to bring it up.

**Tony:** Well, I think you've covered the bases pretty well, Brian. Covered the bases pretty well. It's just that if there are any young people that are listening to this and may be influenced by it, I'd just like to say that perseverance can go a long way. If they have setbacks, to just get over them, continue on, and work hard to overcome these setbacks.

    And I also just want to reiterate what I said earlier. I can't think of any other country where I would have had the opportunities that I had in the United States of America. Coming here as a penniless 16 year old, not knowing the country, with
parents that had a 6th grade education, no job skills, and then patting myself on the back of becoming a professor of mathematics with a satisfying -- as you mentioned earlier -- research career with -- you mentioned my papers and my books, 40 co-authors from half a dozen different countries around the world. I just had this past summer -- I'm just going off in a different direction now.

For example, this past summer I had two Chinese mathematicians coming to visit me to work on a mathematics project, one of whom -- Aiping Wang, a 30 year old married lady -- had never been out of China before. So from Gakowa to working together with two Chinese colleagues in Illinois was kind of a long and winding road.

**Coach:** Okay. Anything else?

**Tony:** Well, nothing that comes to mind right away. But I just want to say something to encourage young people who might be listening to this and inspired to just -- if there are setbacks, don't give up. Just keep going and opportunities quite often arrive completely unexpectedly. And put yourself in the best situation you can be in to take advantage of opportunities when they arrive.

**Coach:** Well, thank you very much for your time, for your hospitality -- you and Sandra inviting me into your home. Not only was it educational and productive, but I'm honored to be in your company, having survived what you did and being the outstanding American that you are through your work and your way of life. I'm honored by that, so I appreciate it. And thank you very much.

**Tony:** Thank you, Brian.