

Peel Bldg

Soul searching trip . . .

Long journey out

... for Erindale prof

of a nightmare

NOT FOR CIRCULATION

By WILL KOTEFF
City Editor

Every long journey, an ancient proverb reads, begins with the first step. For Andre Stein that step was remembering the torture of an 8-year-old boy. The rest of the journey back through the years to the hell of his childhood was even more difficult.

Andre Stein, professor of sociology at the University of Toronto's Erindale Campus, is a survivor. He is also a spectator, a victim and a perpetrator . . . as are you.

"If," says Stein, "you see your neighbor's house burning down you will help, you will do something. But if you see a fire a block away, already you will hesitate. And if you see a fire 10 blocks away, it is unlikely you will do anything."

It is unlikely because, as Stein points out, we let the fact of the distance separate us from our social responsibility. But, asks this survivor of the most concentrated attempt of genocide in this century: "Does distance make any difference to the morality of right or wrong? . . . Where do you draw the line?"

PILGRIMAGE

These are just a couple of ideas Stein continually confronted himself with during his five-year pilgrimage which should culminate later this year — the whims of a certain word processor excepted — in a book which poses many more questions than it answers.

The imposing tentative title of this retrospective and prospective work is, *And Yet . . . Meditative Dialogues from the Edge*; but the book is not intended as a hypothetical exercise for sociologists and philosophers. And it is not another historical re-hashing of the Jewish "Holocaust" perpetrated by the Nazis. It is written for the general public and is free of all technical jargon, says Stein. It also does not contain the word "Holocaust."

Explains the survivor, "The holocaust is unique in the history of the Jewish people, but it is part of the global 20th-century phenomenon." And it is this phenomenon, our capability for mass murder and the potential almost every one of us has to commit atrocities that is one of the major facets of Stein's work.

It is also a book about coping.

"It is an attempt to sort out how I survived the assault on my body as an 8-year-old in the Budapest ghetto, and how I cope now and

have been coping since."

DIALOGUES

The book is written as a series of dialogues, including an imaginary one with his mother who was killed by the Nazis when she made the wrong choice in selecting between two lines of prisoners in a concentration camp.

"How does one cope," asks Stein, "with having to make that life-and-death decision? And now how do I cope, knowing she made that decision and lost?"

Another dialogue explores the ramifications of knowing he and only five others of a family totalling close to 60 members survived because one of his aunts took a Nazi lover.

A child from that liaison was born in an air raid shelter, then died six weeks after the liberation.

"To this day, my aunt denies she had that child," says Stein.

This repression of certain events is why Stein did not seek out other survivors on his journey. As a survivor himself, this tendency toward a selective memory is something he was painfully aware of from the beginning of this pilgrimage.

"It took me 34 years to actually allow myself to remember that assault on my body — I totally repressed it."

ATROCITIES

But remembering was only the first step on a long therapeutic road to exploring his experiences and fears. For the first couple of years of his journey Stein saw himself as a victim "and only as a victim." Now, from a clearer perspective, Stein believes he is fully aware of what he, and all of us, are capable of doing to prevent or cause similar atrocities.

Stein rejects the common rationale about how much one person can do.

"One man can make a difference because if every one man tries, that makes a lot of difference."

As voters we have power and Stein points to the ending of the Vietnam war as a clear-cut example of the difference every man can make. He firmly believes the rise of the anti-war grassroots movement in the United States forced the government to end that conflict.

On a personal level Stein no longer views himself as, or accepts the role of, the passive victim. This change is reflected in his experience when he visited Israel for the first

time this summer at the outbreak of the Lebanese conflict. He was visiting a kibbutz within sight of the Lebanon border when the shooting began. But rather than leave or bury himself in his research in the museum there, he practised his profession as a psychotherapist to help the elder villagers who not only had to fight their fears from the new conflict but as well the memories it brought back.

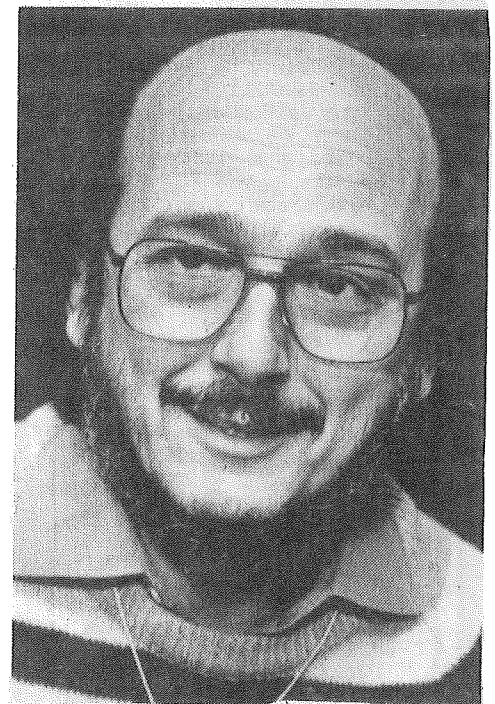
Says Stein, "It was not only a chance to do something, I had an obligation to do something. If I hadn't I would have felt like shit."

But would he have gone to help, his wife asked later, if he had been safe at home when the fighting broke out there?

Would he run to help out at a fire 10 blocks away?

His answer: "I don't know if I'd go 10 blocks; but I'm willing to do a lot more than I was before 1978."

His hope: that his pilgrimage helps others take that first step on their own journey out of the dark.



ANDRE STEIN