



KENSINGTON MARKET HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 1, no. 2. April 2015

Message from the President

THE Kensington Market Historical Society was launched two years ago with a wonderful event featuring Rosemary Donegan and Jean Cochrane. Since then we have continued to pursue our mission to learn more about the history of the Market and to spread word of that history to the broader community.

This issue of our newsletter has two functions: to bring you up to date on our activities, and to pay tribute to Zoltan Zimmerman and his family. Their store, a fixture in the Market for 60 years, closed this past January. As a special feature we offer a brief biography, wonderful photographs, and a heartfelt send-off from some of their friends.

We have launched an Oral History project to gather stories from Market residents and merchants and presently have 12 completed histories. We have

partnered with the Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario, who will store electronic files of our interviews on their server. We will make edited versions available on our website, starting this spring with an online exhibit presented by two students from the Museum Studies Program, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. Marianne Williams and Rachel Leaton will also lead our spring program to launch this exhibit, featuring a 'Human Library'. We invite you to join us at the Lillian H. Smith Branch of the Toronto Public Library, 239 College Street, on Sunday, April 19, from 2 to 4 p.m., and to borrow a living 'book' who will answer your questions about life in the Market.

We are grateful to the Toronto Public Library and the head of the Lillian H. Smith Branch, Sarah Bradley, for officially adopting us and co-sponsoring our events.

Past programming has been as varied as the Market itself!

- **Documenting Kensington Market**, on October 30, 2013, featured Edra Bayefsky, daughter of Aba Bayefsky, who drew and painted the Market throughout his life, giving an illustrated talk on her father's work; and Dara Solomon, Director of the Ontario Jewish Archives, who spoke of the OJA's work to preserve the memory of the Market.

- **A Kensington Market Childhood** on March 20, 2014, with Leslie McGrath, Head of the Osborne Collection, speaking on the pioneering work of Toronto librarians at Boys and Girls House, followed by a riveting talk by Owen Shime, who grew up on Oxford Street.

- **The downtown book launch of A Basket of Apples**, on June 2, 2014. Shirley Faessler's wonderful book about life in the Market, originally published in 1988, was reissued by Now and Then Books. The evening featured Karen Hines, granddaughter of the author, and publisher Bill Gladstone.

- **The Portuguese in Kensington Market**, on October 21, 2014, featured three members of the Portuguese Canadian History Project, who gave an illustrated talk on the history of Portuguese immigration to Canada, and the Market in particular.

Upcoming Events

We hope you'll join us on April 19 for our Oral History launch, and then on June 4 for a literary evening featuring Sean Dixon, Amy Lavender Harris and Michael Albert Ross.

You can now join or renew your membership on our website — please do! We rely on your support to continue our work.

ZOLI AND DANNY ZIMMERMAN: THEIR PROFOUND KENSINGTON MARKET LEGACY

Zoltan (Zoli) Zimmerman was born on a tobacco farm in Czechoslovakia, near the Hungarian border, in 1926, where he lived until WWII shattered his life. He lost both parents at Auschwitz, and he and his siblings were interred in German concentration camps until liberation in 1945. The survivors returned to the family farm, although his elder sister soon emigrated to Canada. A couple of years later, on January 1, 1951, he showed up at her door at 220 Augusta Avenue in Kensington Market. He began working at a fruit and vegetable shop on Baldwin Street the very next day.

In 1952 he and his cousin, Leslie Zimmerman, rented a shop at 200 Baldwin and opened a fruit and vegetable business. About two years later Zoli and his brother and two brothers-in-law purchased an old Victorian house at 208 Augusta Avenue and started a new fruit and vegetable stand. They soon acquired the adjacent houses at 210 and 212, demolishing them all and constructing a large building in which they sold not just fruit and vegetables but also meat and a broad range of household products. The business took off, and at its peak had twenty employees.

Zoli's son, Danny, began working weekends at the store following his bar mitzvah in 1973, a practice he continued throughout high school and university, increasing to full-time during the summers. After



graduation in 1984 it was full-time year-round. After his uncles left the business in 1995, Danny and his father became co-proprietors of the supermarket, although the real estate has remained in the hands of Zoli and his three nephews and nieces. This partnership also owns three other properties on Augusta which are rented out to other businesses.

Zimmerman's Discount Supermarket closed early in January 2015. It has left a huge gap in the lives of we who have regularly shopped there. Not only were the prices reasonable, but the service was always so generously friendly and helpful that we have, I am sure, developed a relationship with the place that is virtually familial. Their departure is a wrenching loss. They will still contribute to the vital energies of Kensington Market as landlords, however. We send best wishes to Zoli Zimmerman for his retirement. We will miss him! — *Dennis Reid, President*



ZIMMERMAN'S – THE MARKET REMEMBERS

Carlos Pereira, owner, House of Spice, Augusta Ave.

We go back a long time. I have been in the Market since I was 15 so 34 years now but I have only owned for two years. Zoli knew I wanted this business and he goes, "It's coming Carlos." He shares everything he knows about that business. I learned a lot from him, his ways. You know you work hard and at the end of the day it's the business but it's more than that — it is the trust, your trust, your respect. He told me, "You know Carlos, people come to you because they respect you. When you have their trust you have it made."

Tom Mihalik, owner, Tom's Place

Zimmerman seems like he was always here. Everybody that I know or any place that I go, first thing people will ask me, "Is Zimmerman still there?" Everybody has a story about Zoli. He opened up his store at a time when a lot of immigrants were still shopping in the Market, when we carried the greatest foods, the best possible foods and Zoli was the place to go for fruits, vegetables, meat, later on for groceries. He was a trend setter, everybody was shopping with Zoli. As you know I am also Hungarian and so was Zoli, so we had a lot in common. I came to check on my store at 5 o'clock in the morning and every morning when I drive by Zoli was also there. He definitely had a sense of humanity and a sense of understanding what the Market was all about. Zoli will miss the Market but the Market will miss him just as much.

Adam Vaughan, M.P., Trinity-Spadina

Since it opened over 60 years ago, Zimmerman's has been synonymous with Kensington Market. It is impossible to think of walking up Augusta Avenue without seeing Zoli Zimmerman busy at the cash while his son Danny greets folks out front.

What makes Kensington such a fantastic neighbourhood is the residents and business people that bring it to life. The Zimmermans have been an integral part of the special neighbourhood that Kensington has become, and theirs is a truly great Toronto story.

I will miss their presence on the street, but their contribution to one of Toronto's greatest neighbourhoods will never be forgotten.

Jose and Cecilia Espinoza, Latin American Emporium

Thank you Mr. Zoli and Danny for being such a wonderful neighbours, always so kind and helpful. Zoli, have a wonderful retirement, you deserve it. Danny, I'm sure that whatever enterprise you go into, you'll do great. It was a great pleasure to know you guys and we will miss you.

Photos

Top – Zoltan (Zoli) & son Danny, ca 1990

Middle – Zoli & Leslie Zimmerman, ca 1953

Bottom – Bruno, Luca & Zoli, 2014

Rochelle Rubinstein, visual artist, Lippincott St.

Every morning, I walk to my studio and window gallery on College St. and at some point in the day my dog Smokey and I go to Kensington Market. Zimmerman's has been an important part of the Market experience: a friendly place, full of well-priced everyday necessities, where I was always warmly greeted by Zoltan, Danny, and the two sweet women who worked there.

I remember my first visit to Zimmerman's, a dozen years ago. While checking out, I noticed the number tattooed on Zoli's arm and I said, "My mother's number is close to yours." He explained that our families knew one another from their early days as Holocaust survivor immigrants adjusting to new life in downtown Toronto. Since that day I have felt a kinship with Zoli and Danny, not only because of our mutual histories, but because of my deep admiration for their kindness, warmth, and incredible work ethic.

Dominique Russell, long-time resident of the Market, and mother of Luca, Bruno and Emma

We're starting to realize all the practical ways we miss

Zimmerman's: how our grocery bill has gone up; we need more plastic covering for our craft table, and where are we going to find it by the yard? How am I ever going to find those long socks again? Most importantly, we used to be able to send the kids without money to buy things on our tab. We could be sure they'd be well looked after, that they'd have fun while learning how to shop.

I've been going to Zimmerman's for 24 years. I always liked the feel

of the place, even back then slightly out of sync with the times. I used to buy what I thought of as extravagances: pickles, bubbly water, jam. Buying our groceries there became an exchange of greetings, questions about the family. That's what I'll miss most of all.

Why We Miss Zimmerman, by Emma, Luca & Bruno

They never seemed to mind having kids around, and they knew us really well and I guess we were one of their favorite customers. — *Emma, age 10*

I liked how Bruno finally got a kind of cereal. Thank you for having nut-free cereal. — *Luca, age 6*

I liked how I could squeeze through the clothes and see a mirror and it would look like I was walking into me. — *Bruno, age 6*

