

Interviewee: Gabor and Miriam Altman

Date: November 8, 2012

Z- To put context to the study I begin asking some questions about day one of your life. Where you were born, when you were born. I'll talk a little bit about the war years, but mostly focus on after the war years.

G- So I was born in Hungary, in a small town. [0:0:51-58] okay so when . . . I lost my home and family.

Z- What year were you born?

G- What year, 1924, 1925 I was born, and I was 18 years old when the German or Hungarian, they took me to the camp.

Z- Talk to me about your family before the war . . . How many kids there were, what your parents did?

G- Well my mother passed away in 1940, and after 1940 I was together with my father.

Z- Did you have brothers or sisters?

G- I had sister that married.

M- Was 11 years older.

G- That sister went to the concentration camp with a small baby on her arms, and naturally she didn't survive.

Z- And what did your father do before the war?

G- We had the lumber yard, and I was supposed to take over the lumber yard when I . . . my father is deciding, but didn't happen because in 1945 we didn't expect the Germans, that last year of the war.

Z- Did you have schooling? Did you go to school?

G- Yes, I went to gymnasium. I finish the gymnasium, actually not the gymnasium. I finish at the commercial school. What actually it was the war, so I was finishing high school and the same year they took me to Auschwitz.

Z- Was your family religious before the war?

G- [0:02:55-0:03:01] You were a Jew inside, in the four walls, and you are Hungarian when you stepped out of the house. I grew up that I'm Hungarian, but my religion, Israelite, but wasn't the case because I was a Jew just the same.

Z- So did your mother keep kosher?

G- Oh yes, we kept kosher. Everything was kept very . . . we turned the lights Saturday and there was a gentile person came in to make a fire and so forth, but right now I am more religious than I was brought up, because I have more knowledge and I know what I am doing. At that time we did it because we grew up that way. Grandparents kept it so we followed them, but actually we don't know much about what we are doing.

Z- So when you went to Auschwitz how old were you?

G- I was 18.

Z- And were you liberated from Auschwitz?

G- I was liberated in [0:04:30] it was concentration camp. First of all we went to [0:04:36], then we're staying there for a few days and then we went to [0:04:44], and we were at [0:04:47] and we were [0:04:49] when we were liberated by the Americans.

Z- So what happened after liberation?

G- After liberation right away I left the camp and walked home.

Z- To your town in Hungary.

G- In Hungary, yeah. Naturally I didn't find anything. Matter of fact the lumberyard totally disappeared because the Russians came in and used all the woods for heating and so on. And the building had no doors and windows, completely . . .

Z- Destroyed . . .

G- Empty and . . .

Z- Were your parents well-to-do? Middle class?

G- Well, was mainly well to do in a small town. It was 11,000 people lived there and there was 500 Jewish families, and my parents actually belonged to the five or six Jewish families who were well to do.

Z- And was the family cultured? Did you go to theatre or music or . . .?

G- No, no, no, the only thing that was cultured was go to the movies.

Z- So you went home, you found no one, you found your home destroyed, then what happened?

G- Actually they destroyed completely, so I located my uncle who came home in the next town. He had where to put my hat down, where to eat, where to sleep, but not staying very long there because I know there is no future in Hungary. So I left Hungary and went to Germany.

Z- To a DP camp?

G- What do you call it, DP camp. Actually what was a hotel, a German actually owned that hotel and they take it for Jewish families. They have this hotel.

Z- Where was it?

G- It was Weilheim, it was about 50 km from Munich.

Z- So how long were you there?

G- I was there for two years.

Z- Two years. And what was your plan when you were there?

G- Well, the plan was to go somewhere where they had . . . able to go. So they came, Canadian, the opportunity for some of us. The Canadian Jewish Congress . . . actually the people didn't know what's happening with the people before the war, they didn't know much after the war what is happening. Only thing they know, they have to feed the people. That was most important, otherwise they didn't have any information.

Z- Where did you want to go?

G- Well I wanted to go any place. I didn't want to go to Israel.

Z- What not?

G- Because the reason I don't want to go to Israel, because I thought any place I can go I can have a much better life than in Israel.

Z- It was too hard.

G- Too hard, so I don't want to face that situation that was in Israel.

Z- It was that easy to get into Canada, you had to be . . .

G- Well what happened, the Jewish Congress had a thousand visas for orphans below 18, so that was the Canadian Jewish Congress misinformation. There was not many 18 years old after the concentration camp. But then I was 23 years old so I changed my birth certificate.

Z- How did you do that?

G- [laughs] oh, that's something I can't explain to you right now, but we did it.

Z- I know that most of the orphans did it, because you are absolutely right, by the time '48 came the 18 year olds . . . there just weren't, right.

G- Was much harder for me to go back to my normal age. Much harder than . . .

Z- So when did you do that?

G- Well I did it as soon as I became about 65.

Z- For retirement?

G- For retirement, because you know 'til then we didn't think about retirement because we are busy to build our home, our future. We didn't think about retirement, but when it comes to 60 we find out actually the Canadian government gives a big pension, you know, at that time. First of all I went and registered being that there was a registration office here, which people came in before the war, the people came different ages, and I think they saved that. Actually [0:11:06] the same thing, they were much older, so I made an application, but in the meantime he got somebody else higher up to take the application. Six months later they called me, and I took my cousin as my witness. And I told them "look I came in this way. . . and I have to . . . reason I cam . . .and I'm much older than that".

Z- Did you have to get a birth certificate form Hungary?

G- Not now, not now. [0:11:50-52] got three people and they accepted my testimony and right away there was a lady who was representative of the government, and right away they [0:12:08] original age, and didn't take 2 weeks, right away I got the pension, \$6,000 check to pay me back, right away. So I became my normal age, but it was the federal government that was much harder than the provincial government, because actually the provincial government we get pension because you paid in. The Canadian government you get pension for anyone who is a citizen, but provincial government you had to pay in so much, pay in, so that was [0:12:59] of Canada.

Z- So let's go back, so when did you leave for Canada, when did you come?

G- When did I come? In 1948.

Z- Do you remember the date?

M- June.

G- That was June.

J- So you took a boat?

G- Yeah, we had a good boat ride, you know.

Z- And how many orphans were on the boat?

G- On the boat there was about 100.

Z- And you spoke only Hungarian?

G- And German a little bit.

Z- What did most of the other kids speak?

G- Most of them were Hungarians, boys and girls, they all speak Hungarian.

Z- Were there a lot more boys than girls.

G- I think so yeah, there were more boys.

Z- Yeah, everyone I speak to and everything I've been reading, it was about 75% boys, so I'm wondering where were the girls.

J- Now you weren't in the first group of orphans right?

G- No, came on the second . . .

J- You were called the second?

G- The second transport.

J- And where did you land?

G- In Halifax.

Z- So when you landed in Halifax what happened?

G- There was a Mr. Ram who was sent by the Jewish Congress and he brought us over. He was asking were you want to go. I said I want to go to a small town, because I grew up in a small town. So, the small town became Montreal.

Z- So you asked for a small town . . .

G- And he brought me in Montreal.

Z- The people you came over with, did they end up in Montreal too?

G- Yeah, my friend, yes, yes.

Z- So you ended up with your friend, did he want to go to Montreal?

G- Well, he didn't care.

Z- So he didn't care either. So you get to Montreal and what happens?

G- Well, I don't know what kind of people . . . interviews, but I haven't got a good experience.

Z- You didn't have a good experience?

G- No, absolutely not.

Z- What happened?

G- First of all the Jewish Congress they thought they bring refugees who came from a country, you know, that you have . . . that make a living, they have very low way of just existing. That wasn't the case because we came and lost our families, and the most important thing that the Jewish Congress were to look after people who were psy-- . . .

M- Basically Gabor always felt frustrated because psychologically, back then, just in . . . you know I mean were going back in hindsight, and they weren't prepared. So as Gabor mentions Mr. Ram, Mr. Ram was a professor at Concordia and when Gabor was here 30 years . . . I don't want to sidetrack . . .

G- Because you are on the camera honey . . .

M- No I'm not on camera you are sweetheart. So I don't want to kind of . . .

Z- Okay so we'll come back to that. So you came and it was hard. What was hard? Can you be more specific?

G- Yes, more specific. First of all the gentleman came to the centre were actually we were staying for . . .

Z- The Herzl Centre?

G- The Herzl centre, that's right. And he came, his name was Mr. Weisz and he said "You are here in Montreal, and you have to know that you can't depend on the Jewish Congress, they cannot do something for you". He said, "You have to learn to fly yourself, only thing we can do if you are too weak to fly . . .". We you put our hand out. "You shouldn't have flown". That was his message.

Z- And how did you interpret that message.

G- That I . . . first of all that I had to work, because, you know, people at that time . . . the people at that time, the people that we have contact with, elder ladies, widows, and people who needed to the money, and we paid, I don't remember, 20 dollars.

M- He's talking about lodging, in other word they rented space in somebody's house and therefore he had different experiences with more than one house, you know, in times before he can actually manage to be out on his own. So that in itself was an experience. Just relating to Canadian families and some of the questions that they would ask made him feel that, you know . . . because basically as the little bit that he explained, he did come from a very, at that time, affluent background. And they would ask him questions like "did you ever have an ice cream?", you know, so these were things that kind of threw him completely, you see. And then from there, okay, and I don't want to take over here at all, but from there they began to tell about their plight during the war years, where sugar was rationed and so forth. So in other words they did know, but it wasn't like maybe today were you get that kind of coverage. And I guess it was the type of families that opened up their home to him. So the people in a sense, we don't want to put anyone down, but they were limited in understanding what this young man has now passed through, I mean . . .

J- So you were in a room together with some other folks for a few weeks maybe? You were together with your friends?

G- No, not really.

J- You were moved to a room, or you were invited to . . . ?

G- No, we had addresses to go for and . . .

Z- Okay, hold on let's go back a little bit. You come, you go to the Herzl centre, how long were you there?

G- I was there about a few days. And I went to a sanitarium because I had something here.

Z- On your lung?

G- On my lung.

Z- Was it TB?

G- It wasn't TB because I was there four weeks and after four weeks they said "you can go".

Z- Okay, so as soon as you left you had a room in somebody's house? Do you remember?

G- After the Herzl centre I went to the hospital.

Z- Yeah, you went to the Herzl centre, you went to the hospital and then . . .

G- I went to the sanitarium and then from the sanitarium I came back.

Z- To the Herzl centre?

G- I think so. You see, I don't . . . I just remember. No, I went to my friend Teddy Bolgar. And the ladies of the house they find out that I came out from a sanitarium, and I was somebody to . . .

Z- To stay away from?

G- To stay away from, yeah. I mean they told Teddy that he has to move out from here, because he is danger, you know, he is . . . I don't know, but I remember to find a place to sleep wasn't a problem at that time.

Z- So you found a room?

G- Find a room that's right.

Z- Do you remember where it was?

G- Yeah, Hutchinson or somewhere around there. With an old lady.

Z- Jewish?

G- Jewish, only Jewish lady, yeah.

Z- And you paid 20 dollars?

G- I paid 20 dollars a month.

Z- And was that just for the room, no food?

G- The food, yes, yes. The food I think so . . . or \$25 or something like that. You know, how much you paid you made \$16, I mean you worked and you made \$16, so the Jewish Congress gave me the other \$4 to fill that . . . \$4 or \$9 I don't remember, something like that. That was the Jewish Congress doing . . . you know, for . . .

J- So you went to this room and did you get work?

G- Yeah, I went work and I slept downstairs there, and this lady was feeding me. You know, we were making a joke because she said, "what you want to eat?", and I said "what you have to eat?", I said 'we have cold chicken", so every night I had cold chicken . . . but you know, the boys and me making fun of that. [response starts at 23:40, not sure if the transcription is accurate]

J- Did you find your own job or did the Congress help?

G- No, actually I got the job through a friend who became a friend family, he was a manufacturer and he had a job there, and I was there for a day and a half, and I just left because I had to . . . for baskets, you know, for [] baskets, and I had to hammer in . . . in the wood you know, and I was . . . I don't know about hammers so I . . .

Z- So what did you do?

G- Well I went to the . . . there was an office here, which is actually the Jewish Vocation Office, it gave jobs for people who are looking for jobs. I said "I finished commercial high school". And they said "are you able to do offices?", I said, "offices, fine". So I was working for Canadian Buttons, the company.

Z- And doing what? Bookkeeping?

G- At that time there is no computer, which was actually today . . . it was an adding machine or multiplying machine that they had to crank, you know, and they had . . . it takes almost a week to learn that machine.

Z- And how much did they pay you?

G- They paid me \$22 I think. That was a big pay at that time.

Z- And what about your English?

G- It was very bad [laughs]. My English was very bad, still very bad too.

Z- Did you go to classes?

G- I think so. I went to one or two classes and I said I have no patience to go to classes. And especially I hear some boys that wanted to go to University and I couldn't go because the Jewish Congress, don't want to pay them.

Z- You wanted to go to University?

G- No, I didn't go to . . .

Z- And was the Canadian Jewish Button, were they Jews who owned it?

G- Jews owned it, yeah.

Z- And how did they treat you?

G- They treat me like . . . you know . . . I was the office boy and you know, they were nice to me and nothing special, I mean . . .

Z- Did they ask about the war?

G- No, nobody asked anything about our . . . they didn't know anything about the Holocaust until '67.

Z- Why do you think they didn't asked?

G- I never asked, never talk about, not private people, not in a synagogue, not in a sermon from a Rabbi, not until after '67 they open up everything about the Holocaust and communicate.

Z- So you joined a synagogue early on?

G- No, the only thing I kept Yom Kippur.

Z- And during those, there was no sermon, no talk, it's as if the holocaust didn't happen?

G- No, no, no, I remember I went to [0:28:21] synagogue, they asked me for the ticket, I said "I haven't got no ticket", they said "you have to leave", so I left. So that was . . .

M- That was the holidays.

Z- The high holidays.

G- That was the situation.

M- But you have to be careful when you actually say Gabor, just let me say that, because we married in 1959 so life changed a lot then of course, but if you never walked into a synagogue prior, just on the holiday, you don't know what took place. You're making more or less a blank statement that no rabbi or no priest or nobody . . .

G- Sorry I have to interrupt here, because we know that there wasn't [0:29:22] at the synagogue at that time, we talked to the rabbi, there was certain people that were taking care of this, and right away they had to know that this is a refugee of this is a newcomer. And they have to do something about him, you see, so I open my mouth and right away they find out that I am not a member of the synagogue, so they have to . . .

Z- They could have connected the dots right. But you know it's interesting Miriam because half way through the research, because of the interviews I've been doing a lot of archival work looking at JIAS case files and Congress case files, and one day I say to John "You know what's missing here? The role of synagogues". There is zero mention of synagogues anywhere.

M- In terms of the synagogues, sometimes they would have let's say dances and as a way of welcoming the newcomers.

Z- I'm talking about outreach programs, programs that would, you know . . .

M- Outreach wasn't even a word then.

Z- Not a word then . . . but you know sort of the sisterhood would get together and clothing or food, but it wasn't, it just wasn't, or I can't find anything. You know, so I think what Gabor is saying is capturing what I'm trying to capture.

G- Nobody asked about what you have . . . we have Yom Kippur and we have supper or something, nobody ask you anything, any religious thing, nobody ask you anything what you did you know.

Z- So how long did you stay at the Canadian Button company?

G- I stayed there for a few months.

Z- How come?

G- Because I found out that . . . I want to make money. I know that if you don't make money in this country you are staying always in the workers, the blue-collar workers, so they have to find . . . you making money, with money you can go somewhere, you could do certain things, you see. I came from a well to do family, so the first time I found out actually, you have to think money, that's very essential to you being well off financially, then you are able to do certain things and you're able to better yourself, so . . . I actually I find somebody who was in the customer peddling. You hear about this?

Z- Peddling?

G- Yeah, we sold to French people on credit.

M- Tell how you began.

G- We begin and then you know we have stores, we send the customer there, and later on, in the beginning you have small items you are dealing with, and later on, you know.

M- Tell how you actually started with that suitcase and with different small items and you took a streetcar. You want to tell that?

Z- So you started this on your own?

G- Yes.

Z- So you got a suitcase. You filled it up with what?

M- Nylons.

G- Nylon shirts, at the time they came out with nylon shirts. Then, you know, In Europe I had a nice white one and beige on, nice, nice colors I had.

Z- Where did you get them?

G- It was a wholesale place.

Z- Okay, so you bought everything wholesale.

G- Wholesale, and one day I found out that they haven't got these nice white shirts, they haven't go them anymore, but they have different colors, like red and very striking colors, you know. So I said well I have no other choice. Then I find out the people are going for that kind of shirt. [0:34:25] so I made money. That's the way I made money.

Z- So you just marked it up a little?

G- yeah, I mark it up a little, yeah.

J- And you would travel?

G- Yeah, I went to tavern and all these places.

Z- To where?

G- Tavern. Tavern. Friday night tavern, you know what's a tavern.

M- To a tavern where they . . .

Z- Oh tavern.

J- You'd go into a tavern with a suitcase.

G- A suitcase yeah. And people, you know, the working people you know. First they didn't go home, they go out Friday night, they go to the tavern, beer.

Z- So after pay day and before they go home . . .

J- They meet you.

Z- So how much was your mark up?

G- Oh mark up was about 150%, 200%, I mean . . .

Z- So you'd buy a for let's say 50 cents and sell it . . .

G- No, no, I paid the shirt for \$5, \$3, \$4, and sell it for 15.

Z- That's a lot of money then.

G- I have somebody buy three shirts and get a special [laughs].

M- But the whole thing in this kind of business is how you get paid. In other words, you're not selling the shirt and you're getting \$15 in your pocket. That means that you open up a so-called credit to that person. There's a card and then you would go collect, so every week you would collect 50 cents, and you would go up the winding steps, you know, and get you 50 cents or your dollar, 'cause our son did that for awhile with his father one summer, and knew of course how important it was to be well educated. I mean not to belittle his father, but for his own future. So basically it took a good while until that \$15 shirt would be fully paid, but in the meantime, in the interim, the wife would need things in her home, so this is how it begins to develop. She would need linens, or she might need a pot. You know, so small things. And then from these very small things, alright, how he really made, you know, the comfortable living to support his children, whether in university here or university in the United States, is because the small things became bigger things, and the woman needed a fridge or a stove. So once you go to items of that nature then of course there is going to be some mark up and you're not going to be collecting just the 1\$. It begins to be, you know, maybe \$5 as you walk up all those steps. So basically this was a very hard way of earning a living, but that's the way he made his living.

J- Okay we need to go back.

Z- One second. What gave you the idea?

G- Because somebody else doing this.

M- Somebody had been doing it.

Z- That you know? A survivor?

G- Yeah, yeah.

J- In France, no in Germany, in Europe?

M- No, a Canadian here. It was very popular here.

G- I was working for a week for him, and I said goodbye to him.

Z- And you bought your own suitcase.

G- yeah.

Z- What were you going to say?

J- Okay, I'm in the bar, it's Friday night and Gabor comes in and he's got a suitcase and he---

Z- Has nylons for you . . .

J- He has nylons. Hey, maybe he has nylons for me. I don't know, right.

M- Pantyhose.

J- And you come up to me, or we approach each other, and what do you say? How does it work?

G- I show you. I open up the shirt. "What size you wearing? Large? Medium?" So here's a large". "How much it cost?". "\$15". He say "I give you \$12". I say, "Fine you give me \$12.". You know what I mean?

Z- And then you start a card, a credit card?

G- No, that was . . .

J- That was a cash deal.

G- That was a beginning.

J- Oh, okay.

G- I suppose you call it cotton jaune in French. That was cotton by the yard, and at that time the French people they had the bed sheets.

Z- Yellow cotton?

G- Yeah, yellow cotton, 'cause actually if you washed it it became white, so they . . . the people they used to buy pillowcase and bedding, mostly bedding, and we sold by the parcel. I sold a parcel for \$35 dollars. And we get a dollar or \$2 cash down, and the resit of it they paid a dollar or two each week.

Z- How long did you do this for?

G- I don't remember, quite a while. But as my wife explained to you we went into bigger items.

J- The card system, the credit card or whatever we call it . . .

G- Yeah the credit card system we had all the time.

J- So that, like that would work when you came to someone's house, that wouldn't really work in the bar, because who wouldn't know who you were selling to.

G- No, no, no. The bar was just the beginning, a few months, few months.

J- Just for cash, to get a cash flow or something.

G- That's right.

Z- Did you then have a store front?

G- We have a store, as a matter of fact at that time we had four stores.

M- When he says "we", okay, you had to pay in, there was a store. If you grew up in Montreal you might even remember it. I was called Canadian Outfitting, is one of them, on St. Lawrence near Mont Royal. And then there was another store called Brown's. Brown's was near to Ontario, or . . .all right. So you paid in x number of dollars to be able to use this place, so you would be able to get the merchandise or send your customer. Your customer would go. In other words is she wanted a big item you couldn't bring it to her. She would go to the store and chose it, all right, so the store would make some money of course, and of course the person who is selling it would make some money along the way. But at that time there was no such thing as credit card, right. We didn't have any Eatons credit card that we could buy something and pay later on, so that's why it became a lucrative business, because you can manage to furnish your home or get whatever, the necessities, and yet for just pennies, just a few dollars. And a bigger item, of course, you had to give a larger amount as a down payment as they say. So if you are buying a thousand dollars worth of furniture in your home, I don't know what you would ask as a down-payment. Certainly you would right away have to pay the tax.

G- In the beginning the people they didn't get no credit in the Eatons stores.

M- That's what I just explained sweetheart.

Z- So let's leave this for a second, although it's totally fascinating. How long were you in the boarding house.

G- [laughs] I don't remember, but I pulled out and I have my own apartment.

Z- You had your own apartment?

G- Yes.

Z- How long?

G- My own apartment?

Z- Yeah.

G- I had it for 2 years.

Z- Where was it?

M- Gabor, our apartment? What are you saying dear. You came in '48, we got married in '59. When I married you, you had this furnished apartment on Mountain side behind Harold Cummings, the car dealer. You want to tell me that from '48 to '59 . . . So how many years were you in that apartment? That apartment wasn't even built, Gabor, by '55.

G- No, no, no. I was there two years.

M- Yeah, so where were you until there?

G- I was in . . . what's the name, I forget the name . . . the people who . . .

M- With NDG? That's the house.

G- Yeah.

M- Where they ate their meal.

G- On Kensington St.

M- Yeah, that was an NDG area, and that was the house where you once said before Yom Kippur you wanted to eat and they had eaten already . . .

G- Pessah.

M- Oh it was Pessah, yes. Oh, so you were in that home for many years.

Z- And was that good?

G- The people are very nice, but in the meantime the same thing, that the Holocaust wasn't discussed there.

Z- It wasn't discussed.

G- And I used to work here, yes, I used to work up at the [0:44:48 Federal?] stores, that was a five cent store I used to work for a year and a half. I used to work there and then one day I said "it's not for me". I wouldn't get anything here.

M- You wouldn't progress.

Z- So what year did you start with the traveling suitcase?

G- Actually it started [laughs], oh boy . . .

M- Gabor, I don't know I wasn't in your life [laughter].

G- Don't ask me the dates, because really I don't know the dates.

Z- Okay so let's forget the dates, let's talk about---

M- I'm sure that it was probably between '51 and '52.

Z- Okay.

M- 'Cause I can't see from the short time that he worked in these different jobs, where he just brought up Federal, which is a five and dime store at the time, all right, so it was basically Federal, the button place, and one or two other places, but he never stayed anywhere very long. So I think probably by '51, '52. Pardon me, just to say when he married me, in '59, all right, he was well established. It was 10 years after he had come. He said he didn't want to actually marry until he felt himself established. Of course, he had difficulty finding the partner, but that's another story.

Z- We'll get to that shortly. Let's go back to '48, '49, '50 and social life. Who were your friends? What did you do? Where did you hang out?

G- There was a Hungarian place where I had supper. It was very cheap and you get Hungarian food. It was very cheap. So we get together there, you know, the boys.

Z- How many of them were you?

G- There were three or four of us.

Z- And you saw them all the time?

G- Well occasionally I saw them---

J- And where was this place?

G- St. Lawrence Blv.

Z- St. Lawrence and?

G- St. Lawrence and . . .

Z- Do you remember?

M- Was it St. Peter?

G- St. Peter, yes something like that. Not St. Peter, no, no, no. It's . . .

M- It wasn't the Pam Pam.

G- No Pam Pam is Barry Street [?]. . . it was at that time Pam Pam was actually restaurant downtown. That was actually a restaurant, where you could have a coffee, an espresso, and so forth. You know, they got various kinds of foods.

Z- Pam Pam, oh I remember they made wonderful tortes. They were terrific. That inspired me big time. So the Hungarian club, do you remember what it was called?

M- I don't know the name.

Z- So after you would eat, would you go out? What would you talk about? Would you talk about the war? Would you talk about . . .

G- No, no. We are busy making a living. We are busy to talk about the working place, we are talking about the everyday problems.

M- Your social life . . .

Z- And did you feel a sadness or a hardship or . . .?

G- Well we weren't so happy. I mean there's happy occasions, you know. We laughed a lot, but actually there was . . . however, we are not settled. And you are not . . . you feel that you haven't got what you actually would like to do, what you want to do. Actually there's a certain sadness always behind us.

Z- So you settled for, let's say, work that you would do because you needed money, but you had no interest in doing, living in a place where you didn't want to.

G- That's right, that's right.

Z- What was your impression of Montreal?

G- I was very disappointed with Montreal.

Z- How come?

G- Because Montreal is a big city, like a European city. If you walk up, you see the stair case going up, you know, you feel you are in an oriental city. You know, I mean, you get this impression, you know. And we are disappointed that the Jewish community at that time '48, the Jewish community was very poor. I mean they had big synagogue, and you know, they had a rabbi and so on and forth but . . .

M- Culturally.

G- They were culturally, they had . . .

Z- Culturally they were very poor.

G- Very poor. Actually Montreal became in 1956, when the refugees from Hungary, they came in at that time, they start to pick up.

Z- So what was relationship like with the established Jewish community? Did you have anything to do---

G- No, absolutely not.

Z- How come?

G- Because if you wanted to be in the Jewish community, I didn't see that anybody picks up . . .

M- Welcomes . .

G- Welcomes, yeah, and lifts you up, and does something, you know. It's very strange to us. I mean I'm talking about myself.

M- I think actually when you say that Gabor, you should emphasis when you're talking about lifting up and so forth, you know, one shouldn't have the impression that you wanted someone to reach out in a monetary way. You wanted somebody, you wanted people to approach you, all right, and kind of get the feeling of what this man has passed through, and related to you in a certain. And that was basically a very strong component of what was missing here. People seem to have centered on their own problem, what they had passed through in that period. Whether it was their own son that had also gone to war and you know. And there were many Canadian that were also lost during that period, so people were grieving with their problems.

Z- So you felt there was a disinterest in you, or you as a collective, the survivors? How did they show that disinterest?

M- If I can just interject here Gabor, because – and I don't want to go into too much here but – my father was a widower, I was already two, and he went back to Europe and came back in September just before war broker out, September '39, with my stepmother. He had remained in Europe for several months. That was three years after the passing of our mother. And I could remember as a youngster at the time, telling my older siblings, "You should go, you should go, there is a dance with all these people that just came".

Z- When was this?

M- So this would have been in the 40s.

Z- After the war?

M- No, in the 40s. No, after the war. No, no, pardon me you're right, after the, exactly. So this would have been . . . I don't know when Gabor came in '48 if there were refugees who came before '48.

Z- Not too many. It really began '47.

M- Right. So at that time I could remember, all right, we were already . . . you know, my siblings were teenagers and---

J- And you lived where? And you lived—

M- ---and she said, "go, you should go because there is activity". So there was something, it was not very much of course, but I have that memory.

Z- Did you go?

M- Yes . . . that's a very good question. I'd have to ask my older siblings.

J- Where did you live at that time Miriam?

M- At that time I was living on St. Urbain, right above Mordecai Richler's house. We were 5259 and he was 5257.

Z- So you were living where a lot of the immigrants were coming in.

M- Right. Right.

Z- Did you speak English at home?

M- No, my first language was Yiddish. I only learned English on the street.

Z- Okay. So could you provide an example from your experience—how you felt there was this disinterest in you?

M- He always talks about that.

Z- Talk to me about what you talk to Miriam about. The disinterest, the lack of interest the mainstream Jewish community had in terms of . . .

G- Actually in '59 when I married the Jewish community doesn't mean too much to me because I was married and I have a wife and I have a home, so the Jewish community became all right, and then moved here in St. Laurent and became a member of the synagogue.

Z- Okay, but what about in '48, '49? What did they do that gave you the impression that they had no interest?

G- Well actually myself I didn't look for any kind of involvement in any kind of synagogue social like or something like that.

Z- But what about just non-synagogue, just Jews who were born in Canada?

G- No, no, no, at that time, you seen, I explained that at that time in '48, the Jewish community gave you addresses, they found places, you know, to room and board. Today you can't find anybody that's going to give you room and board because the people are that much higher, living standards. At that time they needed the money and we didn't hear nothing else than about "how much we suffered when we came here", and "my father and husband is working". And we had contact with only working people in the factory, we didn't have no other contact with the people with higher educations. Somebody was an accountant, or a lawyer, or a bookkeeper or something like that, we had no contact. Only with neighbor we had contact.

Z- Did you hang out with other survivors who were no Hungarian? Like Polish or German?

G- Not really.

Z- How come? You had that common experience.

G- Because . . . I don't know. All the people I know they disappeared, eventually disappeared, they left Montreal. I had only two friends here, Mr. Bolgar, Teddy Bolgar, and [0:58:26] who we were together in Germany and we still have a bond together.

Z- Okay, so you were young, you were 25. What about girls? Did you think about dating?

G- No, not myself. I am not interested in anybody [until] I am able to make a living myself. And that happened here when I met my wife. At that time I'm able to make a living and support my wife.

Z- So you didn't date any girls for that 10 years?

G- Yes, yes, yes, yes. I had many girls, but I . . .

Z- And they were immigrants?

G- Yeah there was immigrant and there was local.

Z- Could you talk about the locals?

G- Well I can't talk to them because actually that local girls . . . I haven't too much social life with them. Maybe I took out once or twice and that's it.

Z- How come?

G- Because I find out that it's not for me, so I didn't want to fool myself or fool the other person.

Z- So you say they weren't for you. Was it because of the cultural gap?

G- No it's not, I just . . . I had in my mind that's not for me, and that's it, you know, that me and that's it.

Z- I heard stories of people telling me that a lot of the Jewish Canadian parents didn't like their kids dating the immigrants.

G- Well I haven't got the chance, the experience, because I knew myself, already I knew that girls who are . . . doesn't want to go out with you, there's no use to try to go out.

Z- So was there that feeling that the Canadian Jewish girls were not that interesting in survivors.

G- Yeah, I had some Canadian girls interested, but I had no interest.

Z- You had no interest. Because?

G- Because, because I felt that the chemistry is not there.

Z- Okay, so it was more personal.

G- That's right

Z- Miriam can I ask you something.

M- Sure.

Z- You said that Gabor used to talk a lot about feelings of disinterest from the mainstream community. Can you give some examples?

M- Well he had disinterest, it's very hard to have interest if you kind of get the feeling that there is no interest. And unless you are more of an outward person, all right, and by nature most males, right, aren't as outward as females. I don't know if in your different interviews you find that difference when you interview women versus men, if you find that the woman are much more expressive in terms of really the feelings. Gabor expressed some feelings here, but I think that he could have centered in a lot more on that, but be it who he is, all right, he didn't. So, there was that feeling of isolation. Now when you talk about so

occupied in being, you know, to earn a living and to establish his life, behind that is always “what was left?” and that “I am really alone”, you know, to the right or to left, I have nobody to turn to. The bit of family, there were 44 grandchildren to his grandfather, from '44 only six came home, all right, and in that six there was four from one family. So to give you the scope, and you know, we all know in life if we only hear part of a little story, it's like a puzzle with one or two pieces missing, you won't get the full picture. So the few cousins, they came to Israel because one of them was very involved. He worked for the [1:04:16] in Israel for all the years. He managed at the times when you couldn't get refugees into the country, all right, he was behind the scene. So in '59 when we married, that's when I got to meet some family.

Z- How did you meet?

M- So how did we meet, well I don't . . .

Z- Okay Gabor it's your turn, and then you can tell your story.

M- I might just interject here and there.

G- Actually I met my wife, I get to know her. I saw her before, but a Hungarian girl used to live with them, because they [1:05:06] and because they have problems, you know, [1:05:13] and so forth, which I don't want to go into it. And the Hungarian girl used to live there and I had a friend who now lives in Winnipeg, and he says “Gabor I want to meet that girl, I am marrying her”. So I went to the house and met Miriam. The Hungarian girl she actually left Montreal because her father lives in Italy somewhere.

Z- Lived where?

G- Her father lived in Italy. She went and lived with her father. Then about 10 years later actually what happened, that somebody . . . the name is . . . Miriam what's her name? Mrs. [1:06:19] parent's name?

M- I remember only [1:06:23], I don't remember.

G- What was [same as 1:06:23] parent's name?

M- Oh, Salad [spelling?].

G- Salad. So they were looking for a boy, an eligible boy who isn't married. So they introduced Miriam to me.

Z- How old were you Miriam?

M- I was pretty old, I mean at that time it was considered old. I was 26.

G- So went up to the house and right away I said, "I know you, way back ten years". So that's . . .

Z- That's how it began.

G- There it began.

Z- So Miriam what was the impression, you were part of the established Jewish community so to speak, what were the impressions or the view points of the community in terms of survivors?

M- You see, I can't, it's very interesting because . . . so you have to go back basically to '48 when they came and how old I was then.

Z- So you were what 16?

M- I was born in '32, do the math.

Z- 16.

M- So I was 16, all right, so . . . right, so I was 16 and so I would have been . . . so when my step-mother would say "there's a dance okay, you should go" . . . but at that age if you think about yourself, you're involved with everything around you, all right. So, in all honesty I can't give an honest answer.

J- Did you go to Baron Byng?

M- No. I went to a commercial high school, but my closest friends were [at] Baron Byng. But is there a reason for which school?

J- No, just asking, just context.

M- Yeah, right, right, right. I was part of that group even not being in the same school.

Z- Do you have a sense of what the impressions were of the immigrants? Was there any talk or discussion?

M- You see, be it my own background and the internal problems of that background, then I cannot say. I know that, for example, my stepmother would go to other people who were European.

Z- She was European.

M- Yes, yes, she was Lublin. She was from a big city in Poland. I can't in all honesty, you know, if I try to really think back to the time . . . I remember going to Herzl centre, so I must

have participated in something with these young people, yes. That I do remember. Now, what participation, how, I can't . . .

Z- I'm more trying to get an impression of this group of people. Because it was a massive number of immigrants sort of parachuted into Montreal.

M- Right, you know, maybe if I sleep on it and really try to work with memory I could come back. You know, it's like very often, you know, a name, you meet someone and you forget the name and then it comes back.

Z- But basically all your friends were Canadian Jewish people or . . . ?

M- Well I had one particular close friend, who the parents, he was stationed overseas and he married like a war bride you can say. And so that was the closest in terms of . . . The other friends' parents, the other friends, you know, they came in the early 20s, they were immigrants themselves, but they had already established themselves. So I didn't really meet with other European arrivals you could say, no, no, I didn't.

Z- So there were these silos.

M- I didn't that's right. Exactly.

Z- So when you married, did you . . . how were friendships negotiated? Was it mostly survivors or . . . ?

M- A little bit of both, I would say. A little bit of both. But amongst survivors, and especially Hungarians, they tend to speak their language. So, you know, this is an interview around Gabor so . . .

Z- Oh, no, this is connected. This is a part that I find interesting.

M- Oh, I see, because I didn't want to . . .

Z- No, no, no, this is very much part of the interview.

M- Oh I see. No, I actually was beginning to feel like the outsider, you know, not Gabor. Because amongst all the Hungarians, you know, the Hungarian language would take over and now and again they would say something in English, and they would say "oh excuse me", you know. And especially, you know, your parents were also survivors, but especially amongst Hungarians, there is a certain . . . I don't know how to say it without making . . .

G- No, no, you just say it the way you feel it.

M- There was a certain superiority that Hungarians would kind of have, and I would actually feel a little bit inferior sometimes within their group. Why that is, body language, however it is, all right . . .

Z- That you were a non-survivor or that you were not Hungarian? Or both?

M- That I was not Hungarian or that I didn't come from a background where . . . because he left out the social part of his parents, as he just explained very briefly, "they were Jews indoors", but his father would, you know, be with club and be with the judge or the doctor, or whatever, you know, other religions. And they would socialize that way, right. And many of the Hungarians have come from backgrounds where their social life was on a much higher level than the social life that I came from, and even culturally, many of them, you see. So I felt, and then of course there was a cousin who came after the Hungarian Revolution in '56, and they as a matter of fact walked Gabor down as we got married, and there too, I was feeling that they were looking at their cousin saying like, "Who are you marrying?", you know I mean, "Who is Miriam?". So, I had those issues. I mean there's no question about it. And their daughter, these particular cousins, sadly they're not alive, but they lived here in Montreal, and their daughter was old enough to pick up, to pick up. And then of course I, without wanting to saying very much, but to say this, that whether in Israel or here, they would always say that the success story of family has been Gabor. So I don't want to make that as a bonus, because that means many of them, you know, had quite a number of downfalls in their life, whether it was marriage or children or so forth.

Z- So you felt like an outsider?

M- Definitely.

Z- And did you feel that it was coming from you or from them?

M- Oh, from them. Because it's not in my nature to . . . definitely from them, and even Gabor I think, even he might have . . . no but you might have seen it right. . .

G- Don't put me . . .

M- No, but I complained about it. I complained about it.

G- Yes, I know you complained about it.

M- And my children would pick it up, you see, when they got older, already they began to pick it up.

Z- So were your friends and family inclusive of Gabor?

M- Oh very much so. Very much so. Very much so, in every which way, because of the person that he is. Just my . . . some nieces that loved him so much, that I had a seventeen year old niece at that time, who with her friend after high school went backpacking to Europe and went to his town and wanted to visit his mother's grave cite. So, so close she was to her uncle.

Z- So there was no resistance from your family?

M- No, not at all.

Z- By that time it was ten years later. . . and your stepmother was an immigrant herself.

M- No, my stepmother wasn't alive then. She died when my . . . I had two brothers, stepmothers who I am very very close to, and she died when my younger brother was ten.

G- Actually later on in '59, I'm going back to the 60s, that gap between the newcomers and the Canadian, it doesn't really exist anymore, you know. Because all the girls and boys that came, they all financially and education wise they get at that level, that Canadian girl look up to them, and eventually [1:18:02] the whole situation.

Z- Because of financial success?

G- That's right.

Z- And if it wasn't financial success do you think it would be different?

G- Yeah, I think so.

M- Right, well I'll just go back to professor Ram. So Esther, my oldest daughter, at that time was studying in Israel and it was 30 years that her father had come. And I was thinking that it would be very nice to have a gathering of all the people that Gabor came with, and she encouraged me to do it. And we were about 90 people here. It was a beautiful day, so we were outside. From all the couples that came, of course many of them I didn't know, from all the couples that came, there were only one other that didn't marry a survivor, and that's what I kind of took note of. Everyone else married a survivor. Not necessarily Hungarian-Hungarian, but Hungarian-Polish, or Romanian, and so forth. And professor Ram, we invited him as the guest. And back then he was overwhelmed of course. People had young's families. Everyone brought their albums to show their families. He sent me a letter after thanking me, but it was really him that I thanked because he brought them. He couldn't get over how well adjusted, as he saw of course, you know, as he saw the people. It was too bad it wasn't videotaped. Because people spoke and if you think about---

J - What year was that? 1978?

M- That's right.

Z- So did you feel that Miriam was excluded from your friends or you friends weren't pleased that she was a Canadian and non-Hungarian?

M- More I think from the few relatives.

G- No I don't think so, not my friends. I mean she's talking about my cousin. I had a a cousin that you see, you know, they grew up with a certain snobbery in a provincial town, you know. The Jews who had a certain snobbery and if somebody had more money in their pockets or are in a higher situation, the social life that they had, you know, it wasn't a healthy situation. You know, so doesn't mean anything. I mean you are in Canada for a while, all this disappears, all this European way of life, or you know the European way of customs are disappearing and doesn't count. You see, so when I married Miriam I am not marrying her because she is a Canadian. So I just married a girl because I said to myself that's the girls I want to marry, because that's the girl for me. So I didn't look at you like being a Canadian [laughs], absolutely not.

Z- Did you speak only English to one and other?

M- Well in the beginning I was the teacher [laughs], yes, yes. But by that time, I mean he was here 10 years, so his English was acceptable.

Z- How's your Hungarian?

M- Poor. I mean there was no one to whom to speak really. It wasn't as if you had grandparent or someone. I mean I have the odd word, or when they're speaking I will pick up the odd word that I do understand, but . . .

Z- Not too much.

M- Not too much.

Z- And when you socialize with her friends how did you feel?

M- I feel like that's a friend from way back. I like to be in their company. I liked them. I didn't think that any friend that she brought in in socialized, I have no problem at all.

Z- So it was easy? The integration with your friends?

M- No problem.

Z- Can I ask you a question? Did you every go eat at Beauty's? Beauty's on Mont-Royal and St. Urbain.

G- No, a long time ago I used to go to have a sandwich there.

M- That's what you were asked dear, if you ever go there to eat.

G- I ate, yeah, occasionally. Occasionally I ate there. I don't know what's so special there, but it still has a name.

Z- It does have a name. We were there yesterday and I spoke to the old man and I said, "Did you ever speak to the survivors?". And he said, "No. They kept to themselves".

M- Well, you know, and he probable told you very much what was the fact, that they kept to themselves you see. So it wasn't only – in this way you also kind of get a picture – it wasn't only that people didn't reach out, but you know, if you kind of give the message that you don't want to expose yourself, right, so people withdraw. People withdraw.

Z- That's right. I think people do withdraw when they feel that initial rejection and then they do keep to themselves.

M- And then of course there's a barrier.

Z- But if the initial reception was different I think . . .

G- What kind of sandwich did you have?

Z- I had a club . . . I don't know something with . . .

G- The salmon sandwich was very good.

Z- I was thinking of the chopped liver, I almost got that.

G- Salmon sandwich was very good, I remember that. My friend Teddy knows him quite well, because he used to go to the fruit market down there. Teddy knows. I wasn't around there for the last 20 years, so since I have retired . . .

---Talking about Beauty's----

M- In the questionnaires that you are going to pose here, do family come up? Does like children, and how the children felt about having parents that were survivors, or is that not part of the study?

Z- Well I'm open to anything . . .

M- Like on an average in terms of . . .

Z- Well I do ask, like you clearly had children.

M- Right, and how the children . . . if in anyway you can detect that the child was brought up by a survivor? Like I'm just interested in your own research if 'til now and what you've done in your research or even prior, that the parent would say that there's definite evidence that my child is a child of survivors.

Z- Well, I mean there is clearly a literature.

M- Yes. Right.

Z- A lot of literature, and I think that it's different when one person is a survivor and one is not. That has different complications like everything else. But did you talk to your children about the war?

G- Not much.

Z- Did you talk to Miriam about the war?

G- Not much.

Z- Did you ask?

M- This is why I bring it up, you see. Gabor's feeling was, and this is what he did express early on, is that he wants to bring up the children just like every other normal father, and if he allows that to come into the picture that could interfere in his parenting, which kind of in many ways to me made sense. However, he didn't realize that so much of what we don't say is not necessary, and your body language, and your mannerism to certain things, okay, just show it all. Whether it's leftover food, not that he would be angry with me you know, but just to say that the crumbs of the bread wouldn't even be left. You see, so you know children pick up all these silent messages. So I would say that from our four, the one that you see the least symptoms of in any way, or behaviors, basically I should say more behavior, would be our youngest child.

Z- But you know it's very interesting, I had a mother, for example, who talked all the time about war and I had a father who never said anything, totally nothing. So it was like everyday I heard, you know, stories of death and starvation, and how she would never throw out a piece of bread, and even it was five days old and stale and moldy she would still be eating. So, you know, it's what I knew, right. But I'm just wondering, some of the silence, the silence is what fascinates me more. Because I'm wondering if after the war, and I know it happened in Israel especially, I think the survivors were totally silences, no one wanted to hear that as a community. But even coming here, if the situation was where the survivors were encouraged to talk about their stories, to talk about the struggles, to express it, to say this is your normal. You know, it's not normal, but it's still your normal. And if that became normalized then a whole dialogue, a whole different way of being would have meant that you didn't have to spend your life with your children in secrecy, because there was a quality of shame to it, right. Because you weren't able to talk about it when you came.

G- Well actually Canadian Jewish people they don't want to know. Really they did not want to know what's happened to you. Because there's something . . .

M- They might have had a certain emotional . . .

G- For one instance, I went back after the war in 1945, I went back, and my town used to have the gentile people who found out the family, who very nice and everything, they had [1:31:25] against the Jews, but still as friend. And I remember I called the name of the person and he didn't want to even see me. He didn't want to talk to me. Because they themselves, they were ashamed of the whole situation. Finally I catch up with that man, he was strange to me, completely, and I . . . you know, why? But I found out why, because they were uncomfortable to talk to me about what's happened, you know. And they are very strange, and they weren't anti-Semite but still they talk to me just like a stranger, because they felt that . . . very hard to welcome me, do something for me.

Z- But those were clues that you got that, you know, be careful what you say, to whom you say, and how you say, right.

G- Right. Right.

Z- But you didn't feel that you could talk to Gabor about the war?

M- I don't know if I felt that I couldn't speak to him about it, but I was able to understand his feelings about leaving that part of his life out while the children were growing up.

G- But, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but there's so much literature about the Holocaust, so why the children should asking, it's no purpose to their asking, because almost everybody went through, some people went through one year some people went through for two years, but all went through the same thing. So there's nothing to ask right now, but the time when everything was hidden, everything was in the back fire, then they didn't ask because it was hard for them to ask.

Z- Your children?

G- My children.

Z- Did they ask you?

M- It's a good question. There were times when they would ask. Yes, there were times that they would ask. Especially like now in the last years, 'cause Gabor mentioned his mother died before the war. And as he gets older he always . . . well it's the only gravesite he can visit, so he wants to go every year. And every year one of the children and grandchildren have gone with him, all right. So at this point between themselves, they can't kind of understand why their father is so connected to a gravesite. And they haven't actually made peace with it. It's like beyond understanding, right, there's only sadness there. If you look over there you'll see, one of the trips my son who actually left the finance world to become a writer, he wrote a poem about that visit to his father's town.

Z- He's a poet?

M- He's a poet and writer.

Z- And what's his name?

M- Howard Altmann.

Z- And he lives?

M- He lives in NY, the other two live in NY also. So, right, and he was the last one who went last year with his father.

Z- Do you have that poem?

M- I have the poem. Do you want a copy?

Z- I would love a copy. Is he the oldest?

M- No, Howard is the third. So there's my oldest daughter Esther . . .

Z- When was she born?

M- She was born in 1960.

Z- So shortly after you got married. What does she do?

M- Actually I was pregnant with Esther when I met the family in Israel. She's a clinical psychologist.

---Talking about Esther's friend Eva----

M- But she does have several friends that are children of survivors, Esther. When I think about it, and even here Jeffrey, he's the one son that's here.

Z- He's the youngest.

M- He's the second. And he also has a good number of friends that are children of survivors.

Z- And what does he do?

M- He's in insurance.

Z- He's a salesman?

M- He's on his own. He works independently.

Z- And then there's . . .

M- And then there's Howard, he became the writer, and Valerie is an OB in NY. She is the youngest. But she is the one, the youngest, who I feel she doesn't have . . . her whole disposition, everything, is so different from the other three. And that's why I say she is the least, effected by her father as a survivor. My feeling is that she went into OB because of that in some ways, not even consciously realizing it. And in some way you could say that Esther went into psychology for that reason, you know, there's some reasons we do things and we don't even break them down as to why we make the choices, right.

Z- But again it's sort of very text book. Very successful children, right. Successful family. Successful children.

M- Right. Right. Right. From a rather young age managing to get themselves, you know, working and university.

Z- So have you talked to your children about the war.

G- Not much.

Z- You should. I think you should and I'm saying this more personal as opposed to professional. I think you should, it will be a gift to them, because they will know you.

M- It's so interesting because when I picked up the phone John, to guide you were the extensions are, so I mentioned to Jeffrey. He said, "Why wouldn't you tell me? I would have wanted to be here?". I said "Jeffrey I didn't know it was just last minute". Maybe he would have learned something that he doesn't know.

G- They know actually.

Z- But it's different being told, you know, sharing that. So understanding why you go to visit your grave, I get it, you know, your mother's grave, right. Oh I totally get.

M- Yes. You totally get it.

Z- I totally get it.

M- But you totally get it – can ask you if that's not too personal – because you yourself are a child of survivors?

Z- Yeah, but also I'm a mother right, you know, whose lost her mother.

M- Right, okay.

Z- But it's also symbolic of a life, like when I asked you questions about before the war you couldn't talk about it, right. You would immediately go to the war, but it was very hard to, you know, bring that part of your life back to life.

M- That's right. That's very true. You picked that up very quickly, very well. Yes, I have to say that you are right on.

G- That's right. True. True. Yes. [at the same time as Miriam]

Z- And that's sort of a nice time, right. When you are growing up, a child, safe, freedom.

M- Right on. Right on.

G- You're right.

