

So generally with survivors I have three parts, but since you were so young, what I'll ask you to talk, first some life before the war for your parents. Who they were, where they were from, a little about their families, I'm particularly interested in social class, culture, religion. Then the second part is, briefly, the war years. Where they were, what happened. And then the gist of the interview begins after the war. Where they went, how they decided to come to Canada, how they came to Canada, and then, of course, life, those first few years. Life in Montreal.

So my parents are Polish Jews.

What were their names?

His name, my father's name is Getzel Silverstien, and he grew up in a town about 11km outside of Warsaw called (0.01.03.5). His father was a tailor. They were religious Jews, but seemed to be tolerant of their children when they moved towards the enlightenment. My father had over, I think 8? Well my father had an older brother, who was married and had a child who died in the Holocaust, his eldest. The other three sisters, sequentially, were went to France before the war, the fourth one went there as well and then came back, and then there was my dad, and a younger brother, who died in the Holocaust. Martha, my grandmother, you know they were very small town, (0.01.52.4). And the pictures that we have of them, really they look like they were Shtetl Jews. My mothers name was Fega Isenburg, and she grew up in (0.02.05.5), which was a bigger city. And from the picture, I don't actually have, I have no idea what my grandfather did, but in the pictures we have of him he was, he had a mustache, and he had a normal haircut, and he wasn't wearing a kippah.

So more cosmopolitan looking?

Yeah. My grandmother looked more like an ordinary Jewish lady living in a city at the time. They were 7 girls. My grandfather had been married before and his wife had daughters, so the two eldest daughters were from the first marriage. And the other five... I said there was two, so there were three in the picture, so the other 6 were from the same mother. The three eldest, three of the older sisters survived the war, and the three youngest perished, somewhere, I'm not sure in which concentration camp. I don't know.

What did they speak? Did they speak Polish? or Yiddish? At home?

At home with me?

No, when your mother was growing up.

They spoke Yiddish at home. My sense is they also knew Polish, because they dealt with, you know, the lived in the community. But basically they spoke Yiddish at home.

When was your mother born? Your father born?

My father was born in (0.03.32.0).

But when?

Oh, what year? Uh, I think he was born in 19... I'd say he was born in 1918, sounds like. I mean you know they were not sure, they didn't have the documents, so it's where they made a decision that he was born. My mother is exactly 21 years younger than me, so

Older than you.

Older than me (laughing), you're right, not younger than me, I was thinking of an earlier date. So I was born in '43, so she was born in '22.

Is she alive?

No, neither of my parents are alive.

Ok. And what was her family in terms of culture?

I don't have a, to tell you the truth I don't really, I can't even put into words. They seemed like they were more emancipated Jews, in the sense that they lived in the city, that they dressed like everybody else did. My mother was, I mean the war started when she was 16, so she was a member of the Zionist Movement, you know. Her eldest sister, the eldest of the group, had immigrated to France when she was very young to try to escape, I think, the family, the environment. There was an arranged marriage in Paris, so she went to Paris and married this guy, thinking she could escape him, but she couldn't, so she was getting married to this man, who made her miserable, apparently, all the time. Because she couldn't escape. But I don't know beyond that. You know, my parents, when, I think that the war took up so much time and energy, and finding a place to live, that... we spoke Yiddish at home and they were very Jewish in that sense, but they weren't involved in any, like they weren't members of the Workmen's Circle, or the Bund or anything like that. They just sort of lived in a community, but just within the community, they didn't really have any affiliations in that sense.

So, your mother was in school up until the war started?

Yes. And I think my father went to (0.05.41.0) and I think when he was old enough to work, he went to work. And he was an apprentice. He went to Warsaw with his older sister. I think he was apprentice to be a tailor. And my mother also, actually, I was just thinking, there was a picture of her where she is in a house where she's learning to sew on a machine. So she could have been 13 or 14, so maybe she didn't go to school until she left, but she had started already to be trained.

Do you know if she had any aspirations, to do something?

I don't know. I think she wanted to go to Israel. That was what she had said at one point. She was a member of the Zionist Organization, before the war broke out. I mean, whether that was serious, if she was going to go or not, is moot at this point.

And in terms of social class, were they middle class, were they...?

I would, from the way she talked about it, my sense was that they were probably middle class. They were. I don't think my father's family was, I think they, well, if you consider that they lived in the Shtetl, it was probably the one person with money.

Peasant class.

Well, he worked. I mean, he wasn't... Actually, he worked, but he also tended the (0.06.53.3), who I never quite figured out what it actually means in Polish. I guess the local landowner who

had an orchard. So they took care of his orchard in the summer, and brought the fruit to the market. So the kids, my father, my aunts, whatever, would spend their summers in the orchard.

Was your father trained as a tailor? Cause he was a little bit older than your mother, right? So he would have been what, 20, 21 when the war broke out?

You know what, I know he worked as a tailor. Whether he actually learned it when he got to France or whether he learned it in Poland before the war, I don't know. I'm not sure.

But there were other of his sisters, who were actually in the sewing profession?

They weren't, I mean they just, you know...

I thought she was a professional?

Yeah, she was a seamstress, that's true. But I don't think... I don't know. I'm not sure whether his training was in Poland or whether he was training in France.

So your fathers name is Silver...

Silverstien. Yes.

Ok, so the war broke out, and...

The war broke out, and my father and his eldest, one of his sisters, the one he was closest to, ended up leaving (0.08.12.0) and they went to the Russian border. She went with her first husband. My mother left (0.08.20.5), which is closer to the Russian border, and, with one of her older sisters and her husband, and they were there, so she was 16, so she would have been, that would have been '30... '38. Something like that. And I think the intent, the story is that she has told is that the thought was that they would stay there for a little bit of time and then the war would end and they would go home. I think when Russia closed the border they were on the border and they were shipped inland. And so they were shipped to Komy, which is one of the provinces in the North of, the European side of Russia. Around Finland, in that area. And that's where they spend the war years.

One of the Soviet Republics. There were 16 Soviet Republics, and Komy is one of them.

How do you spell that?

Komy. Hey, I did it right!

So they were in a work camp there...

That's your mother's family?

Both of them! Both of them. That's where they met. They met in Komy. So they didn't know each other when they were shipped inland, and as it turned out, they were all sent to Komy. Some were outside of Syktyvkar, which is the capital of the republic. And they spent the war years there, in a camp. Part of the war years. When the Russian-Hitler pact split, the Poles, including Polish Jews, were free. They were no longer interned as war enemies. And they then were free to leave the camp, so they went to Syktyvkar

Which was the big city in that part of the war, Syktyvkar.

They were in the city, they were there until the war ended.

And what did they do?

In the city? I don't... My aunt, I think that basically they did whatever came along. But mostly my aunt, who was a really good, well trained childrens seamstress, dressmaker, she basically I think supported most of them. And the rest of them, I think just, I don't even know for how long they were there, and what they did, they did whatever came along. To survive. And when the war ended, they decided to leave Russia.

But it wasn't that easy, getting out?

It wasn't... there was a 6 month period, apparently it was very easy to get out. There was no question. Except my father was very sick. He had pnemonia at the time, so there was a fear that they weren't going to let him out. And the last boat, I think, that was able to leave, he was able to get on.

If you look on the map, you'll see that it was very far, from where they are, which was approximately at the latitude of the Northwest Territories, on the Euro Mountains. They had to cross all of European Russia to get to... They were going back towards Poland. So that was like, really thousands and thousands of kilometres. And they had no money, so that was, it was a bit of a problem in itself.

Well I think it's probably no different from many of the other Jews who...

It was an odyssey to get back.

So they left Russia, by boat, no the left the city by boat.

By boat?

It was a river.

So they took the boat, actually I was just looking at the map the other day, just cause I had never actually, as my parents went, even though they talked about the war a lot, I never asked them where they had actually gone. And my aunt, who was in Russia with them, was the last survivor, I actually sat down with her and asked her what the trip was, and you know she would say these names of these towns in Yiddish, and so some of them I was able to track down, and some of them I couldn't, because she called them in Yiddish, and what they actually were had no relationship at all. So she said they took a train, after they got off the boat they took a train, that was a two week train ride, why it would take two weeks I don't know, but whatever.

Because connections, very chaotic. I mean someone explained it to us yesterday, that tracks were, in Poland especially, tracks were bombed,

Oh yeah, but they were never, they weren't in...

No but trains coming from Poland, there was all this, you know trains brok down, schedules were chaotic.

So they went by boat to (0.13.02.0), which I think was in the Ukraine, I don't know. I'm not sure. And then they took a train to Poland. So they wanted to go back home, because they had no knowledge of what had actually happened.

They got married in Russia?

In Russia. In the camp. They met in the camp.

Do you know who married them?

No idea. No idea.

That's a good question.

I know that they, my mother, who was 16, befriended my aunt, this aunt who's been with us our whole life. And she was 10 years older than my mother, so she sort of became like a mother to her, and they worked together, and they shared a coat and boots, so that when one of them worked, the other one was home. And so she met my father, who was her younger brother, who had come to Russia with her. So in the end,

But then you were born there, right?

And then I was born there.

So they had to travel back with you, and...

Me. At that point, in the camp, in that particular camp, there were only Jews, there was another family that had also been through the loss of a child.

So when were you born?

I was born in October, '43. So when the left Russia, I must have been...

But you're right. They had a child to take with them. Which was not such a simple matter.

I imagine it was quite, because you must have been at least a year old by that time.

Yeah I was, I was a year and a half, by the time the war ended in '44, because it took them quite a while, actually, cause they didn't get to France, my brother was born in '47, so I was almost 4, so somehow from whenever they left Russia until they got to Paris, my mother was pregnant with my brother, and we must have gotten there, so she would, and in the pictures you can see that she was noticeably pregnant.

So they went to Paris, they went back to Poland, and of course there was no one living, so they went towards their closest relatives, which were (0.15.07.5)'s sister, sisters plural, who had actually survived the war in Paris. So that's how they ended up in Paris.

Were they in a DP camp at all?

They were in a camp, to come to Canada. Once JIAS accepted them they had to go to Germany, my parents, and from Germany they came.

But they weren't in a camp after the war, this was a couple of years later.

No, they sort of basically... and as I said, for some reason I never actually sat down with my parents when they were alive to say "ok, so how did we go from here to there?" Hanche said to me that they basically went to Poland, then they ended up going from Poland to Czechoslovakia...

How come?

That was just the trajectory that they ended up taking.

But it was also, they were travelling without papers, they were crossing borders illegally, so they had to go where there were guides to take them, with the idea of sort of heading towards Paris, but it wasn't a direct route, by any means. They couldn't just get on a train and go to Paris.

Well part of the problem was because of the bombing of train tracks, train routes were, you know...

But I don't even know, as I said I know the bits and pieces of the story, but never the exact, why they ended up going from Poland to Czechoslovakia. I think you may be right, it may just be they knew somebody who could show them the way to go there. The intention was to go to Paris, cause my mother had a sister who had been in Paris before the war, and my father had his three sisters, they had gotten something from them at one point during the war, so it was good that they were there. And so they were heading in that direction, assuming that they had survived the war and they were still in Paris. So they went from Czechoslovakia to Austria, I don't know how, to Germany, and then they crossed the borders, that part is the only part I actually remember, because they actually told, they kept telling that piece of the story.

What year was that?

It would have been in '47, cause my mother was pregnant with my brother. My brother was born in August.

So between '44

'45

Yeah, but when they left Russia,

'45, it was after the war.

So they were in Russia till May '45?

Yeah. They were in Russia till the war ended, and probably for several months after, because my father was sick, and he couldn't leave. So whenever the iron curtain came down, you would know that, because with your background...

No, I think it's at the end of '45, beginning of '46, is when they probably began this whole thing. Something like that, right? And somehow it's a couple of years, this meandering is not like, you know, in this age of instant travel, one forgets that right? And they told stories of crossing the border, it was frightening! To cross the border with a baby, because the baby screamed, it was bad news. And there were... it wasn't just the authorities, but there were gangs of hooligans, and people who would hold you up, and steal from you, or kill you, or whatever. It was scary.

So it took them about a year and a half, from the time they left Russia?

I never actually sat there and thought it through, but what did they do for a year and a half, and how did they actually survive these meanderings? To get to...

So there's always, that's why I asked about DP camps, people, I think a lot of Jews ended up going from DP camp to DP camp, where they got fed, taken care of...

It's possible, but you know they never talked about that part. They just talked about trying to get to Poland, they talked about how dangerous it was, being on the trains, and I don't know where this was, in Russia or Poland or both, where there would be, that's what Billy was telling you, hooligans who would come, and you know threaten the people in the train.

There was also a lot of Jews got killed when they went back to Poland.

Women got raped and people got killed.

So it was dangerous to go back to Poland in the first place, of course, you know there was some men in the party, but nevertheless!

Well we don't, I don't, as I said they didn't go into detail about... the only part that they actually talked about was how hard it was to go from one place to another. And the only part that they actually, or that I've even bothered to pay attention to was just when they, the last bit of the trip. Cause they were always travelling with...

Tell them the story of when they arrived in Paris and how they found their way.

I'll try to get there.

Ok, sorry.

We should make some tea. They were always travelling with my aunt and uncle, so there were always...

This was your mothers?

My fathers sister. She was the one who was with us all the time. So they took the, so the last part of the trip, there was the five of us, and maybe another family, so there was one, there were two people. One of the guides knew how to get to the border in France, and the other guide knew how to get from France to Paris. But it was miserable and rainy out, so they lost each other in the rain.

Do you know what month that was?

What month? It must have, well let's see. Because my brother was born in August, so I would imagine it must have been in the late spring. So they split up, so my parents ended up with a guide who knew how to cross the German border, where they could cross safely, and the other guide was with my aunt and uncle, he knew what to do once they got to the other side, how to get to Paris. So we crossed, and then once they were on the other side they were on their own. They ended up at the train station somehow, how they got on the train to get to Paris is beyond me. I know they didn't have any papers or any money.

Nor did they speak French.

So when they got to Paris...

What did they speak? English? No not English... Yiddish Polish and probably Russian?

Yiddish Polish and probably Russian, I would imagine. My father for sure. I don't know about my mother. My father, wherever he worked, he learned the language. So I don't know whether she spoke Russian. She was young enough to have learned. So when they got to Paris and they were in the subway in the city, they got off the train, you know, wet and dirty and like all the other refugees who had appeared in the cities, and they had no idea where to go. They had an address, so they were speaking Yiddish to each other, and some man overheard them and came over and asked them where they wanted to go

In Yiddish?

In Yiddish, they were speaking Yiddish to one another. So they showed the address and he took them to my mother's sister.

Do you know where she lived? In Paris?

At that time? I don't remember. I mean, I remember the house, but I don't remember where it was. Because she ended up moving eventually to a bigger apartment.

You were almost 4 years old. So do you have any memory? Or...

Of that whole trajectory?

Yeah of that trip, or being in Paris?

I do remember being in Paris. I don't remember getting to Paris. I remember the stories that they tell.

Yeah. But you also remember being there, that first year though?

The first year that I was there? Oh I remember, I was in Paris till I was almost 8. We didn't leave right away. So we were there, I don't remember this man at the subway, and I don't remember getting to my aunt's house, and I don't remember the first, I don't remember my other aunts, because my aunts immediately sent somebody to get my father's sisters, cause she knew who they were. And so the whole family sort of reunited, but I have no memory of that at all. I have some memory of my brother being born, but I don't remember...

But you've talked about the house. The house that you lived in, with your parents in Paris.



Yeah but that wasn't the house where Leia lived.

Was your brother born in a hospital? or to a midwife?

Yeah. No no, he was born in a hospital. In the Lariboisiere Hospital. He was quite sick when he was born, so he spent some time in the hospital. But he's fine. He's 66, so he's not, you know, he did ok. And my aunts, you know, survived the war years in France, in hiding.

Passing as a non-Jew, or?

My mother's sister could, she was this tiny little blonde, blue eyed woman. She spent the whole war years in Paris. Her sons were hidden in the countryside with a woman who basically used to work for her. So they spent the war years there. Her second husband, the man who she married when we were there, his wife was deported with his daughter, and he was in a concentration camp as a French, I think he was a French citizen. Possibly.

Didn't help.

No, it didn't help at all.

But it's amazing that a lot... most of this family actually survived the war, but the kids were separated from the parents and were sent into the countryside, we'd been in this... we were in this town where they...

My father's sisters went into hiding with their kids, so it was different for them. They were, in the (0.24.48.5), when there were a lot of resistance fights.

Are they alive? or with kids?

My aunts are all gone, bu cousins, I have one who died, but everybody else is...

In France?

The ones in France, yeah. He uh... And the men, the two husbands, one of the husbands was killed after the war, on his way home, the two others survived the war.

So they get to Paris, what happens then? When do they... They stay with your aunt, until?

They stay with my aunt until they find an apartment, and then they move into this tiny place.

Do you know where that was?

It was near... I do actually, I can visualize it. It was in a laneway, which is, there's all these weird places in Paris where there's homes. And then they were there just recently... It's escaped me, but it was near the metro station called Jaurès, so it's around the 13th, is that... around Belle Vie, but a little bit further up. So in the area where a lot of the Jewish immigrants ended up, or the Jews had lived. So we lived there, in a house.

So in the 13th (0.26.05.0).

Yeah. And we lived there until we came to Canada, basically. It was a two room, on the second floor. With a sink outside the house, you know, a flat kind of, and a little area which was kitchen with plates...

And it was only immigrants there?

In the building? No, I don't remember that, at all. That it was just immigrants. I don't even remember that they were necessarily just immigrants on the street. I think it was just an apartment. I mean they knew other people who lived in the area who also had...

And you went to school?

I went to school. I went to school close by.

And it was a secularized school?

Yeah. It was a regular school.

And were there a lot of immigrant kids in it?

I don't think so. I don't have a sense. I don't remember that. I was probably, went to school just, let's see I was... I don't know. Anyways, I went to school, and my parents worked. My father worked at home.

What did he do?

He was a tailor.

So he sewed?

He did. He had a sewing machine in the... in those rooms, it was a sewing machine. It was a huge table where he would iron the coats.

So he got work from a factory, or?

Well you know that they did a lot of piecework. And that's what he did. He would go get a bundle of things to sew together, and he would do that, and iron them, and then he would take them back and get paid again.

And what did your mother do?

I don't remember her working, now that I think of it. I think basically, unless she did things with him in the house, when we were at school. But she didn't work outside the home. But if I think back to all of the family, none of them worked. There were no factories there. Everybody did piecework, so you went and you got stuff, and you brought it home, and that's what Leia, my mother's sister, did in her place, with her husband. And they had been there longer, so they had somebody working with them, so they had a bigger (0.28.29.5), and my father's sisters, I don't remember what the men did, but the women had, you know they lived in this tenement house, where they owned, one of my aunts owned two flats, the top two. So she lived in one, the top one, and they would sew together these cheap sweaters, and they spent all their time together. You know, going, getting the material, cutting it, also they had to cut them, and they had to...

really really cheap sweaters, and you know I think back, and I don't know what the men did. I don't know what my uncle... One of my uncles, actually, I have no idea what he did. The other one, was sort of an intellectual, and he was very involved in the resistance movement, and worked for one of the Jewish Veterans Organizations, and he was very well, you know you talked about Izzy Blume and everybody knew who Izzy Blume was. So I think that's what he did.

So were demands made of you to help out, to help out with your brother?

No. Well, not really. I mean the only thing I remember is when he started daycare. He cried all the time and I would have to go spend time with him in the classroom until he settled down. But I have no memory of them asking me. Even here.

So why did they want to leave Paris if all the family was there?

Well my father, when France went to war in Indochina, he had had enough, he wanted off the continent. He didn't want to stay. And my mother found one of her sisters, one of my mother's sisters was hidden in an attic in Poland, and after the war she married the man who basically saved her. She had been married, her husband had died. His wife and kid had been deported. And so they married, and he was a furrier, so they went from Poland to Italy, and in Italy they wanted to know where he wanted to go, because he was a furrier, he came to Montreal. So when they tracked him down...

He wasn't Jewish?

He was Jewish.

And he hid them?

No no, they were hidden together. What happened was, my aunt had jumped off a train, close to home, to (0.30.52.5), and somehow found her way back into (0.30.55.0), and he met her somewhere on the street, and he said "what are you doing here?" and she said "I just jumped off the train." And she didn't know where to go, because her family had been deported, and he said "Well wait for me," and he went to the attic where he was being hidden, to see if they would agree to have another person join them. So they agreed, and so she went and she spent the war years. And then after the war they got married, and came here. Because he was a furrier by profession, he came to Montreal. And so when they found each other...

So they came in '47, '48?

They must have come... how old was Ester? Ester is a year younger than my brother, so she was, she must have been 49. Cause she was already a year old I think when I came here.

Ester is your cousin?

Ester, yeah. So they came, they sent them papers. To come to Canada.

I guess they were sponsored.

They were sponsored. By them. And I think my father held the papers for about a year, because his sisters wouldn't want him to go. But he just really wanted to get out of Europe. And so he came here. In May '51.

So when they decided to leave, you said they were placed in a DP camp? or...

I think ultimately they came through JIAS. Even though my aunt and uncle sponsored them. So I think because they came through JIAS they had to go to Germany, into a camp, to get the boat from Bremen, to come here.

Did they land in Halifax?

Yes. We did.

Do you remember that?

What, landing in Halifax? I don't know whether I actually remember it, or whether they told me about it. I don't know. I'm not sure.

What do you remember, that you remember or that they told you about?

I remember a little bit, as being on the boat. I remember one night there was some singing, sing-a-long, and I remember the song that were singing. The weirdest part about is I have a friend here, who's Spanish, who was on the same boat, or it sounded like. And she was talking about this song, and I said "but I was there" and it was just the most bizarre thing, that we could have possibly... You know it could just be a fantasy that we've created.

Her parents were refugees from the Spanish Civil War, and they had been in France.

Anyways, it was just weird. It was a nice...

Well there were so many immigrants coming in, right? So Jews were a fraction of them. Because there were, you know, Poles, and French, and Spanish, at the same time, and Portugese.

But they landed in Halifax, as most of the people did, took the train to Montreal.

Do you remember the train ride?

No.

Now you knew French, but you didn't know English.

No.

Do you know how much baggage your parents took, to come?

Oh we had these...

I can visualize these suitcases...

No they weren't suitcases, they were, what are they called... No they were made, not out of straw, but of woven... these huge big bales, they weren't bales, because they were solid. But they weren't made out of material, they were made out of sort of bamboosh type things. And

there were dishes that came broken, so they brought everything, but they didn't have that much. It wasn't as if they were leaving... they had this tiny two bedroom apartment. They didn't bring any furniture. So what they brought was their clothes, and whatever they thought of buying to bring along. Cause when we got here, I'm sure that initially the help that they got was through JIAS.

So you were almost 8, and your brother was...

He would have been 4. Cause I turned 8 in October, and he turned 4 in August.

So you go in the train, you don't remember anything about the train...

No, I don't remember anything about the train.

Do you remember arriving here?

Arriving here? No. I remember going... Do I even remember going to my aunts house? No. But I do remember the house, because we lived there for a while.

Where was it?

It was on St Dominique. Around St. (0.35.18).

Do you remember the address? Or no?

No. I might have at some point. I'm 70 now, I don't remember a lot of things. (laughing) A lot of details escape me, even in my own life.

You know it's interesting, when I talk to the adult survivors, they have, you know, I'll ask them questions. What I once thought was a silly question, do you remember your first meal, and they do with great detail! Do you remember where you... '46, '47! You know, incredible! And do you remember how much money you earned. "\$23" I mean the detail, and I'm talking about, some of them are in their 90s, right.

But I can see that. I mean I have memories, if you're talking about that, about what I did when I was 20, which is much... especially when we got to California, was so intense that I remember such detail.

Which is interesting.

For sure.

But you know when you're a kid, you're sort of basically dragged along from here to there. I mean nobody asked me "do you want to go? do you not want to go?"

Were you sad about leaving?

I have no memory of it. At all. Of being upset. I mean, I don't think it was a great boat ride. You know, we were separated from my father, and it was...

That's right, the men and women were separated.

Yeah.

Were they?

Yeah. It was very bizarre. I'm not sure why but the women and men were separated.

Well it was probably easier to transport people in quantity that way. So you stuffed all the men in the bottom of the boat, and you didn't worry about it. Who was where and when. If you have families you have to cluster people. I would imagine it would be much more complicated. And yeah, they met people in the camp, on the way, and the people they met on the boat. And these were the people who basically...

Then again, they're lifelong friends, some of these people.

Yeah. So, you know, they created this community.

A network. I mean, when they got to Montreal, eventually they had a network. They had friends, even people, wasn't from your mom's city. Didn't they have a little group of people who came from...

(0.37.21.7)

So how long were you on St Dominique?

Not long. We arrived in May, we spend the summer in the country, and then by September we were in (0.37.35.0), at 4640, actually. Is that right at you? Is that why you remember the address?

No, we didn't.

That's where I lived, actually. 4640.

No, it's just yesterday someone was saying that the Hertzler center was 4646 (0.37.50.5), so...

Ah you're right. That was right around the corner, that's right. So my father found us a place to live.

Was that a room?

No, it was a flat. We lived on the third floor. My father must have found work, I would imagine. Cause he was... initially I think he worked as a tailor in a factory. And then he worked in a store where they sent parcels to Eastern Europe.

So why did he stop working as a tailor, do you know?

No. I don't know.

Did he have any difficulties finding work?

I don't have any memory of any sort of sense of deprivation, that we would have to be really careful, or that we didn't have food. We had an apartment. I mean we had the flat.

Was your mother working too? at that time?

Not right away, no.

So talk to me about, so you had to go to English school, because you weren't Catholic...

Right.

No no no, but there's a little interesting story there, because her dad took her to the local French school, because they were from...

Oh that's on St Dominique, when we got here, cause we got there in May, so my dad took me to the local school, down the street on St Dominique, and he wanted to register me for school, and they said "well you're not Catholic, you can't go to school here."

(0.39.06.8)

Well he said, you know, (0.39.11.0), I mean, I spoke French. But you know they couldn't afford to send me to private school, so, and it didn't make any sense to them, so he said, you know, "Take them to the Protestant school."

Is that Bancroft?

So I went to Bancroft school.

So, it's interesting because the number of immigrants, and there have been a few who came from France, all wanted to send their children to French school, and they were all,

It's a very embarrassing thing when you have Quebequois friends, and you bring this up, it wasn't that we rejected you, but you rejected us. And it's not part of their history. They have a lot of trouble processing that, because the whole story is that the Jews joined the Anglophones, they don't have any story that says that the Jews were pushed into the arms of the Anglophones, even if they were Francophones.

Yeah, I'm definitely going to write about that, because I think its interesting, because I have so much data, and for a lot of the survivors they interpreted it as anti-Semitism, as opposed to, you know...

Which it was!

Well, yes and no.

No no, excuse me. I grew up in Francophone Montreal.

No but I don't think they necessarily, the Catholics sent us away because we weren't Catholics, and they only wanted Catholics in their schools. I don't know whether they necessarily..

Yeah, I guess if they had been Irish Catholics, they could have gone.

It was religious right, it wasn't the division between religion and the state, so that was a problem. It was, you know, it was integrated.

Yeah. It was really hard for the Jews, because it was religious, plus linguistic.

So if there was a Francophone non-denominational, like a Francophone Protestant school, it wouldn't have been a problem, and they were private.

Well that's what he was saying, you know, so you can send her to Marie de France, and probably my father didn't know what the hell Marie de France was about, and private schools, I mean...

No, it's totally beyond his means. To send his kids to private school

So we ended up going to Protestant schools, and we all became Anglophones.

Did you lose your French?

Mostly, not all of it. I mean I was old enough to have a mastery of the language. I didn't have a very sophisticated language. I spoke like an 8 year old.

And when she went back to France after high school, and she spent a year at the (0.41.29.5).

Well you're jumping so many years.

No no, but you said you lose your French, and she has enough, she speaks French very well, actually.

Yeah but I spoke like an 8 year old.

You were literate. Your literacy level was...

Well that's what I meant. So you know I can converse, and I could do well when I... on the other hand, you know when we did our final high school exam, you did better than I did! We were comparing marks one day, and I said "you know I was the Francophone and you were the Anglophone and you got better marks than I did."

But I was a good student, I knew what to memorize. That's a skill in itself.

But you know the other interesting thing about the French English divide, the French language, which is, a number of the immigrants who came from Poland said, well they really didn't speak English, or French, but they had a teeny bit of French from high school, because French was the other language, so they came here, they wanted to learn French, they wanted to learn French, and they would have had to pay to go to private lessons or evening schools. Well JIAS offered English for free. So this was another thing that, you know the policy was such that they actually...

Of course, JIAS could have offered French for free, but they chose not to do that. There was a tendency in the Jewish community in Montreal to gravitate towards the Protestant Anglophones,



even though there was anti-Semitism on both sides, there was slightly, the barrier seemed to be slightly more permeable on the Anglophone side.

Yeah. I mean, but it's historical, right? So you know, if everyone in the Jewish community is in English, you come in, and you recreate that, right? But, I mean the Jewish community was declining in those years, the numbers were decreasing, the birth rate didn't keep up, and so here thousands, 60 thousand, 70 thousand Jews came in, it was a way to transform the cultural policies in terms of language, and you know there was anti-Semitism at the side that the didn't want to have anything to do with the (0.43.48.5), right? You know.

I mean there's lots of things on both sides that are suppressed and not really acknowledged. The whole policy of trying to keep the Jews out of Canada, and things like that. So there's a lot to that story, but Miriam and I, you know we grew up as, well Miriam let's say, because it's an interesting story, that she essentially identified as an Anglophone.

I mean, well when I came, I was French, as far as I was concerned. Not a French citizen, but I was French. I mean I had done my schooling in French. And as a matter of fact, when I started Bancroft school in Grade 3, I couldn't speak any English at the beginning of school.

Yeah, I'm interested in that. So your first day of school, what do you remember? There must have been trauma.

Well I think, you know I happened to have an American teacher, who I have a picture of, so I remember the story, and she let me speak French for the first three months of school, so I was in an English class, and I was learning English, but I could communicate with her in French, because she allowed me to.

She was French?

Yeah. And until around, after Christmas she said I have to start speaking English. So I was able to transition, because it was, she allowed me to transition easily. But you know, like everybody in the street either spoke Yiddish or spoke English. So eventually all of us learned English together, because it was the language on the street, and there were kids who weren't immigrants, who were English speaking who you played with, and those of us who were immigrants would speak Yiddish and English, and eventually everybody learned how to speak.

So you always spoke Yiddish to your parents?

Pretty much. I mean, as I got older, less, as they understood English more.

But in France it was Yiddish?

Yeah. We always spoke Yiddish.

So what was your impression, the first days of school?

You know nothing really stands out, except I think my memory is that I went to school, and that I don't remember it being traumatic, that I couldn't speak the language. I had also gone to school. It wasn't as if I had never been to school. I had gone to school in France, so being in a classroom, and learning things, wasn't an unusual situation.

Was it different?

I don't remember it being significantly different, except there was a different language. And I tend to be, my personality is very adaptive, and easy-going. I tend not to have temper tantrums, and I tend not to go over the top, so I would imagine that this would have been similar. And I had a friend, Sonya, who I met on the street, she lived a block from me, and she had also arrived around the same time that I did, and she spoke Yiddish at home, but she spoke Swedish and I spoke French, so you know. There were a lot of kids like me, so we all sort of went together, so it wasn't as if it was just me in a classroom with everybody who spoke English, there were a lot of us who were sort of muddling along, and trying to figure out how. And by the end of the year everybody spoke English.

Did your mother take you to school?

At the beginning, yeah, but then, you know, I lived around the corner. I mean Bancroft school is on Saint Urbaine and Mount Royale, and I lived on Esplanade and Ville Neuve. Unlike how we are with our children, or our children are with their children, how they have to be taken around the corner, once I knew how to cross the street, I went to school. I was 8. I mean, I was old, in a way. I mean you took your sister to school...

Yeah, when I was 9 I was taking, yeah absolutely. It's a different age. You wouldn't dream of sending kids on the streetcars, miles and miles. My daughter would never dream of allowing her kids to go anyplace where they aren't driven. So it was a different age, a more trusting age.

How did your parents do? Initially here?

Well they worked. My father, you know, began to work pretty quickly, and my mother stayed home. She eventually worked...

When did she start to work?

I must have been around 10. But she worked, um, we had a neighbour downstairs, who was Jewish, but Canadian born, to differentiate, and he did piecework at home. He was a furrier. And so he taught her how to put linings into coats, so she worked downstairs for a couple of years, which made it easier for her. Because, you know, we were upstairs.

Was this right away, or?

Probably about a year. So she didn't need a babysitter or anything, cause she would go upstairs and feed us, and some nights she would go back after supper and once we were in bed and continue work, if there was things, you know, the fur business, when December comes around you're busy until Christmas, so January. So she did that, and then when Mr. Moscovitch moved to the factory, she went to the factory with him, so I must have been about 11. So at that point, I was 11, Moshe was 7. He would go to my aunt, cause my mother's sister, Ollie, had moved to St. Urbaine and Villeneuve at that point, with her 4 daughters. And so he would go there for lunch. He'd go from school, we were all at Bancroft school.

So you would have to walk your brother in the morning?

M. Well yeah, and then he, I don't remember walking, but I probably did, and then he would go to Ollie's for lunch, I probably had lunch at school at that point, I would have my lunch.

Periodically I would go over there with him, and have lunch, and then come home at the end of the day, so he would have to come home. I'm sure he came home on his own, by that time, when he was 7.

Z. And you had a key?

M. I had a key. And, I don't know. I would come home, do my homework, I don't remember anything dramatic happening. The neighbourhood felt very safe. Because there were people around, like Mr. Moscovitch was in the factory, but Mrs. Moscovitch was downstairs with the kids. The people next door. I bumped into the pharmacist who works there part time now, Willie, who lived next door. My brother's friend. So it was like living in the Shtetl, it's not like living in this anonymous space. So I don't think that, I never felt any anxiety on the part of my parents, that we were going to work and they were...

B. It's not like living in Montreal west, where everyone's in their own house.

W. Or even if you're on the plateau now, I think it's probably still quite, it's more anonymous than it was then. Because you know, everybody was used to living within a community, and so you're very conscious of the kids. My mother had another friend, I remember now, she was in Russia with us, who lived across the street, and she never worked, so. It didn't feel unsafe.

Z. And your mother, so she would work, she would come home, cook?

M. Cook supper. We would all wait around for supper.

Z. And then she cleaned?

M. And then she cleaned. And then we would, I guess after school we would do our homework, and she baked every Friday night. She baked cookies. And on the weekends, they would socialize with these friends, who had come over on the boat with us. Immigrants.

Yeah. And they spent a tremendous amount of time together. They were tremendously supportive to one another. And we as kids were part of the cabal, the group, you know. You didn't, they didn't go off socializing on their own, and we would, whatever age we were, there were little ones and I think I was the oldest, at that point, of the group, but you know, until I got to be about 13, 14, or 12, 13, and I stopped going with them, as much, because I got involved with the Hashomer Hatzair when I was about 12. So I stopped going with them as much. But you know, these kids, all of us, sort of grew up, they grew up, our parents grew up together, and we grew up together as well. With all these people.

Z. So, they would just go to each other's houses, or for dinner they'd all come over? And what about religion.

M. Yeah. Nobody was religious. Except for my mother's sister. Except for Ollie. She, her husband was a cantor, and so when he came here, he got involved in one of the Shul's. I just remember where it was, but I don't remember, somewhere. A little Shul. But they were the only ones. My parent's weren't religious.

Z. So they never went to Synagogue, after the war?

M. No. No.

B. It was a very secular, I mean, this is not a result of the war, this was, her dad and his family, a lot of those sisters, they had rebelled against religion back in the Shtetl. It was part of that Jewish Enlightenment.

That's what I said, it was part of the Enlightenment movement. That (0.52.44.0).

So they were either Zionists, or Communists, and they had all...

Well no, there weren't any Zionists in my father's family, they were Communists or Anarchists.

B. Communists or Anarchists, right. Communists or Anarchists. The oldest sister was an Anarchist.

B. Yeah, she was an Anarchist. And to this, to her dying day, she was.

M/ People were serious Anarchists in those days! Right! And Communist, and Getzel was a Communist until he actually went to the Soviet Union, that disillusioned him a little bit.

When he came back, he said "You know what, Communism doesn't work."

So he was a member of the Communist party?

Probably when he went to Russia.

Here?

No no no. He really stopped being a Communist when he left Russia.

After the war.

After the war.

Oh during the war.

During the war, I mean. He was, you know, he said when he left home to go to the border, and obviously the intent was to go to Russia, his father wanted to give him some money, and he said "listen, I'm going to a worker's country, I'm young and strong, I don't need any money."

He doesn't need money, right. And they were. The thing about Miriam's experience is, we could show you a picture, but, they were both physically very robust people, which partially explains, cause when they went to, you know the Russians gave them an axe, in the first year, and said "survive." There was no, the Russians saved them, in a sense, but they didn't... It was not a luxury hotel kind of existence. Right?

Well I think, you know... To tell it like my parents did, because you know you hear some of the Jews who went to Russia who were maligning, or whatever, they've always said "you know what, we lived like the peasants there. They didn't have anything and we didn't have anything. There was no sense of, because you're Jewish, or because you're this or that, our life was worse." That's not the way they ever talked about their experience in the work camp.

There were two narratives, that I have heard. One is that there was nothing for anybody, but it was sort of poverty and survival, and, the other one was that some were sent to Siberia in labour camps, and were in labour camps. And that was horrendous.

In the first year, I believe they were cutting trees for the Russian war effort.

So it was a labour camp.

But there were Russians there too. I think it was at the time when they closed the border and they shipped them inland, they shipped them inland because there were Germans, I guess it must have been after the, it doesn't make sense after... anyways, I don't remember... the story doesn't make sense to me. But anyways they sent them to Komy, they were considered as enemy aliens. And so they were put in a camp as enemy aliens, to work. Right? When that Hitler-Stalin pact broke, they were no longer considered enemy aliens, so they were able to leave the camp. It's not as if they were kept, confined, all the way through the war as Jews. So that was never, my father's story was more about the corruption, and the inefficiency of the Soviet system.

He never talked about anti-Semitism, in the Soviet Union at that time.

He said there would be two trucks that left somewhere, one was for graft, and one would arrive. He was telling the story, and you would hear this 21 or 22 year old talking about what nightmare he saw happening in this you know, workers paradise, I suppose, that he had gone to.

So when he arrived in the West, he was not, he wasn't a Communist, and they certainly weren't religious. There was no...

No, my parents were never religious.

So was there any Judaism? Any cultural sense of Judaism?

We were secular Jews. Meaning we spoke Yiddish at home, we identified with being Jewish. You know, my parents would sing Yiddish songs, they would do that, but we had nothing religious in the house.

So my family, they were so Jewish, that they weren't part of those organizations where they had we have to produce... they were Jewish, they were the Jewish culture. But it wasn't a self-conscious goal of their lives, as others' were. You know, part of different groups. They weren't.

No. And none of, neither my fathers sisters, nor my, except for Allie, who was religious, and who's daughters were raised religious, and I guess Esther is the only one who really stayed religious, because the others have, you know, Mary's less so, more traditional, and the two youngest are as far removed as possible. I mean they're very aware of being Jewish, but they're not... Well I don't know, Sheila is in England and she goes to Shul, and

Does she?

Yeah. And there's a lot, there's so many different, not so much in Montreal, which is so rigid in some ways in its Jewishness, but if you leave Montreal, you go to Toronto, or the States, or even if you go to England, there's so many diversified expressions of Jewish Religiosity, but you don't find... Montreal's very tight in that.

But they weren't interested.

Who? My parents?

Your parents. It was a secular home, it was a very Jewish home, but it was...

So on the high holidays, the school was pretty much shut down, right?

Well school was closed. We didn't go to Shul. Passover we ate bread at home. I mean it was hidden, because my mother was embarrassed, but we ate bread. I mean she brought it in. It wasn't as if we brought it in, she brought it in, but she says it's a shande. So we didn't let anybody know that we ate bread. I have a friend as an adult, who I would eat bread and she would give me a hard time that I was eating bread, I'm an adult! I grew up this way, I'm not asking you to eat bread. Do what you want.

It's just culturally different, her parents were that generation that they were proud to be secular. To be emancipated was to be secular. To have seen through what all this, what they would consider superstition. So they were still in the throws of, it seems to me the war interfered with all that of course, but this palpable sense of liberation. And my side too.

But that was here.

But the same phenomena was everywhere.

But it was my father, it wasn't my mother so much. I think my mother just didn't think that... I mean my father took much more of an active... I was thinking, my brother had a bar mitzvah, cause all the boys had bar mitzvahs, but my father would have been just as happy for him not to have a bar mitzvah. So it was an issue between them.

It's true, your mother was more conventional.

So because of my uncles affiliation with the Shul, he had a bar mitzvah at the Shul, and he was taught whatever you were supposed to be taught, so he had that, and then he had a party, which everybody else had. But he did have a bar mitzvah. And that was an issue between my parents.

So who controlled the finances in the house?

Nobody. But you know who put (1.00.22.0)

Between your parents?

Yeah, the money was there, it was taken care of, they never talked about money.

When I think about that, I don't think of it as a traditional thing, where the man is... I think of that relationship as, when I think back, I mean the division of labour was clear that (Faigy did everything, but I think it was kind of egalitarian, in terms of power in the family. Or I think in a way Faigy was the strong one.

But I don't remember them...

Do you remember a little brown envelope on Fridays being exchanged?

But my mother would have it too.

Yeah your mother would have it, and what would your father, he would have it too?

It's funny, I remember hers, I don't remember his.

What is this little brown envelope?

You get your money in a little brown envelope!

Pay! Cash, every Friday at work, you'd get a little brown envelope, full of cash.

Oh this is your pay for the week!

Yeah, your pay for the week.

With a little thing inside, saying how many hours you worked.

And many stories I heard is the man would give it to the wife, and the wife would take care of the books of the house.

Well you see, my family was like that, but in her family, first of all, her mom worked, she was an independent woman right from the beginning, very quickly. And coming into that family, it wasn't...

But I don't think, I mean my father, if anything, was much more outside the house, in that sense, even though she worked. He spoke English well, and he spoke French well, and he would interface, I think, with the community there. So I would imagine dealing with the landlord, or things like that, he would do that. I don't think that would be her. But I don't have any memory of it being "my money" or "your money" or I don't even remember him getting a little brown envelope, though I know he worked. But it's funny because I have no memory. But as you said it I remember hers. But I remember hers, probably, from when I was older, rather than when I was younger. Because my mother worked her whole life. And my father, you know, well maybe because of where he worked, he worked in that store for a while, and then he decided to go into business for himself and that was a disaster. And then he ended up coming, but he learned something about working with leather, and making briefcases, and suitcases, and things like that, when he was there. Because he had these two partners, one of them was Canadian born, one of them was an immigrant like him, and they really did a number on him. So in the end he lost his shirt, and he lost his money, and he lost 2 years.

He wasn't the great Canadian success story, it's true.

He was a great man. Terribly unsuccessful.

He was not destined to be a successful business man.

So he ended up working in a factory where they made leather goods, and I think he worked there until he retired, basically.

And he did ok there?

He was fine, he ended up being floor manager. He was a nice man, so you know he was a nice manager to have around. And my mother worked as a, she went to work in a big factory with Mr. Moscovitch when he became floor manager there, and but then she went to work in a store where they sold fur coats in Sherbrook and there was a little (1.03.46.5) in the back, so she worked there. I think she worked there until she died. You know my father died, and within a year she died, and he sort of, when the factory closed he basically stopped working...

They were working class people.

When was that? When did they die?

My father died in '89, and my mother died in '90. She basically never retired, cause she got sick, she was working, and then she died.

And from our advanced age, it seems very young.

Yeah, very young.

Younger every day.

Yes it is, it is indeed.

So lets go back to the early '50s, were they involved with your schooling at all?

Yeah, my father worked with, my father was the one who helped me with my homework, would do my spelling with me, and my arithmetic with me. And he was going to school as well, he did go to school at night to learn English.

Did he go to JIAS, do you know?

Il don't know.

It must have been, because the Jewish Public Library was right there, Esplanade and Mount Royale. Did your mother go?

No.

Why not?

I guess she worked and then she had to be home. I mean, somebody had to be home. That's why I'm saying I think that he was the one that interfaced with the society at large, so he went and he learned to write, and I mean he knew, he had gone to school in France too, so it wasn't as if he had to learn the alphabet or anything, but he had to learn to master the language, and I would imagine that he must have known how to add and subtract and whatever, because he worked when he was in Russia as well, and he worked when he was in France, and he managed there, so he must have managed the money. But she never went, and she learned at work, basically. She worked with, when she was working in the first factory everybody was French, so she spoke French. She already spoke French, somewhat. And then when she went



to work at a place where everybody spoke English she learned to speak English. And we spoke English at home, eventually. Moshe and I went to school, and we spoke Yiddish at home, but eventually as time went on, our Yiddish was interspersed with more English, whereas it initially was interspersed with more French, and that's the language we spoke at home. I guess the older I got, the more I spoke English, we had a bastardization of the language, basically.

So what about, did they go to home and school meetings?

M. My dad would go. He would go whenever we got our... not home and school, whenever we would have report cards, and meet the teachers, he always went. I don't remember her going, but I do remember him going. And he was very involved with my schooling. I don't know whether he was as involved with my brother's schooling, maybe I was involved with his schooling cause I was 4 years older, in the sense that if he had homework to do or things to do I would help him. And I think it was also his way of learning the language as well. And he was very involved with me in that sense, in school, not that he was an educated man. I mean he went to *cheder* and then I don't think he did much schooling in Poland, in regular schools, so he wasn't an intellectual, he wasn't an educated man, but he learned as he went. And eventually when he worked in the store he had to learn a bunch of different other languages, so he had a smattering of a lot of languages that he could communicate in.

Z. So when you started school, I mean I guess in '51, my sense would be that you were amongst the eldest of the immigrant kids, so your class would be, there would be a lot of Jews but not predominantly immigrant.

M. No, everybody was Jewish except for one guy, who was German. No, that was in High School. But in elementary school there was one protestant girl in the class, and she lived right near my aunt, actually. But she was the only one who wasn't Jewish. And you're right. There was a mixture of kids who were immigrants and kids who were born here.

Z. I think if you fast forward three or four years, like to the mid '50s, then you'd get, I mean when I went to school it was like 90% children of Holocaust survivors in the classroom. And when you think about it, what support was available? You know, in terms of integrating immigrant children into the classroom.

Where did you go to school?

Alfred Joyce.

Isn't that where you went to school?

Fairmount and Durocher.

You must be my brothers age?

I was born in '51, I'm a bit younger than him.

M. Oh so you're younger than Moshe. Because, I mean the kids that he went to school with were also all Jewish kids who lived on the street. And I'm thinking of the people on the street that were immigrants, Jews, but there were also Jews who just lived there, because they lived there.

They were leftovers from moving (laughing)

That's right they hadn't moved to Outremont yet.

Well not everyone was successful, and could afford to.

So did your parents integrate with the Jewish Canadians at all?

M. Not really. I mean they had one or two friends, and there was always an agenda that they were Canadian. There was always an agenda that they were Canadians and they were... periodically it would surface and it would create a...

B. I remember my mother used to feel very superior to immigrants.

Why is that?

She was born here.

Because she was... I don't know. Why do people differentiate themselves?

Oh there was real differentiation then.

B. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you gotta say you're better, you gotta find some way that you're better.

How would she talk about them?

B. Mother? Well, you know, there was the question of accent, and things like that. I don't know, I mean I don't remember her saying terrible things, but there was a kind of disparaging tone about...

M. Well that's like Mrs. Caplan. She really loved my parents, but she always felt superior.

Who is she?

M. This was my mother's, I don't know where they met, one of my mother's very close friends. They were always around, until they died, basically.

And she was a Canadian?

M. She was a Canadian. And I have no memory of where they met, but the fact that she... and you know, they weren't successful financially, but that gave her an edge over my parents. And every once in a while she would make some comment to the effect that she was Canadian and they weren't, and it made her better.

B. I think there was that dividing line between immigrants and Canadian born.

I would imagine, it probably, more of a need for it on the plateau, where it was, as you said the people hadn't had enough money yet to move to lower or upper Outremont so there was a sense of not having really succeeded, so that you were more successful than the people who had just come over, just because of who you were. I mean they weren't mean or anything, it

was just, I do remember hearing, there was something, and then it would go! And my mother would say "well you know, Mrs. Caplan, blah blah blah." And I'd say "OK, whatever."

B. There must be social stratification, that's a kind of social stratification. Anyhow.

But there was clearly a difference between... because you know, the people who you came off the boat with had your experience and had shared the same experiences that you had. And so you had a common frame of reference. The people who were born here, who were Canadian, just had a different point of reference.

B. It wasn't just coming off the boat, I mean, their experiences of the war were extraordinary by anyone's definition. The Holocaust, they were not only refugees, but they were Holocaust survivors. I mean, you know, really they did have a story that Canadians, no matter how sympathetic they were, it's hard to appreciate from the outside. Just like you go to France, and that whole generation never, I mean they keep re-living the second world war, they just don't.. you know. And it has deep deep effects on their generation, their childrens generation, their grandchildrens generation. So, I mean, it wasn't just like a normal kind of immigrant situation, it was the Holocaust.

Was it the same thing for your parents though? Cause they came later?

They came in '52.

So you were born in Europe?

Yeah. I was born in Israel. Technically not Europe, I guess.

Your parents went to Israel?

Yes, they met in Cyprus.

So that's another narrative.

That's another narrative. That's the exodus narrative.

So lots of people with that narrative, you know.

What is interesting is how few people would even ask about the experiences of the Jews in Europe during the war. There was just no interest.

Here or there?

Here.

Which kind of people are you talking about?

Jewish Canadian.

B. That's very interesting. And I think it's true, and I've often speculated as to why that was true.

Why do you think it's true?

B. I think that the Holocaust was deeply traumatic to even, and there was a sense of keeping away. It threatens peoples sense of wanting to bury themselves in North America and lose their specificity. To go into that sort of mythological North American melting pot, and not be Jews, and anyhow, I recognize that attempt. My parents were communists! And one of the first things they did, my parents and their friends, was to shed being Jewish.

Z. So how did they deconstruct, in their mind, the Holocaust?

B. You see they didn't deal with that. I never heard them discuss the Holocaust.

M. They never talked about the war?

B. Not really, you know. It was like they were totally, my father totally lived in Karl Marx, and you know, the Soviet Union and etcetera etcetera etcetera. In their conscious re-creation of history, the big event was not the Holocaust, it was the Russian Revolution.

M. But you know what you're saying is sort of interesting, because it wasn't just in North America, it wasn't just in Canada. Because the same thing happened in France, after the war. Even though there were people who... Because the stories have been starting to come out in the last 15 or 20 years about what actually happened to French Jews, which nobody talked about. And I remember talking to my cousin..

But the Holocaust was real.

The Holocaust was real.

So that's the difference.

M. Right, the Holocaust was real, but their personal stories were not as horrific as the people who came out of the concentration camps, and so those stories were not talked about.

And also I think a lot of French were also sent to, or deported to...

Yes.

So there was the, I mean we were just in Paris, and Shoah ... which is fantastic, I'm sure you've been there, right? To the Shoah Museum in Paris? I mean there's the whole France as a nation.

B. But it was late. Because I can remember the books that came out, and when they came out. It was still late. The French took a long time to come to grips with what had gone on in France. It was, you know collaboration, the fact that the French were complicit in all these Jews, I mean that took a long time to actually come out. So as a society as a whole it was difficult.

M. It was difficult to tell the specific stories. That's what it was. I mean the stories that were told, cause I know exactly what happened to my cousins, and to my aunts, so it wasn't as if it wasn't talked about, but the intensity, the volume of it, the telling of it other than in a private space, in a public space, came out only about 20 years ago, or 25. It wasn't that long ago. Cause I remember one of the times I went back to Paris, my cousin saying "we just finally found out the story about..."

B. Well you remember the Schwartzberg book, "(1.17.00.5)", I mean that was...

But that came out a long time ago

B. Yeah, It was a long time ago, but it was a while till, just exactly what you said. In the public space it took a long time, to arrive into the public space. To be acknowledged.

Z. You know it was interesting because what people said here, survivors, they said people didn't want to hear, people didn't believe them, or the third one was they were suspicious. "Why did you survive?" "What type of person are you." And if you were a pretty, young woman, what did you have to do to survive?. And that silenced. Totally silenced people.

M. Perhaps that was the reason that people stayed within their own little space. Because they could tell each other their stories, and knew what their stories were, and could share it, and believe it, and it didn't have to stay within yourself. It didn't have this sense of shame, or the fact that people don't believe you. You created a safe space for yourself. Because I know all of their stories, so it's not as if, they would talk when they finished dinner, when they were playing cards, and everybody's story was told.

Over and over again.

M. Yeah, so we all knew the stories. Cause I remember the stories, and I can tell you well "this is what happened to this one, and this is what happened to this one." So amongst themselves, there was a, they created a safe space, where the reality of what they lived was.

The telling and retelling.

M. It was out. And there was no attempt to have the kids not hear it, because you know, we were all around.

B. My feeling was always, as someone that came into that community, that it wasn't repressed, and it was quite, you know, it wasn't the story that there were these awful secrets, it was quite, within that community, of them, her parents, and her family, their immediate family, and their friends.

M. But they had nobody who was Canadian who was part of their... Never. They were never integrated into the... Well I guess the only people were him, when I got involved with Bill, and your father was, I mean it was easier with your father, who came here as a 13 year old from Russia, than with your mother, who was born here. You know, Victor in some way, I mean he had no problem speaking Yiddish to them, whereas Betty, who grew up in a Jewish house, Yiddish speaking house, never could say a word of Yiddish, you know. So even though my parents spoke English, they spoke Yiddish English, it was a combination, you know Victor had no problem with communists or not, he had no problem with that space that we needed for us all to be, whereas I think Betty had a much harder time.

Z. So Bill, when did you hear about the Holocaust, or when do you remember it being sort of put into your headspace at all?

B. I really don't remember it as being a very prominent thing as I was growing up. I often laugh, and I say "well, I married into the Holocaust." I never really focused on being, even focused on being Jewish, we were like militantly secular, as communists were.

M. I mean everyone your family knew were Jewish.

B. Yes, but I hadn't been conscious of that, right? It's when Miriam and I married and we left for California...

How old were you?

B. We were 21 when we got married, and 22 when we left. Right?

M. No, we turned 23.

Yeah, so we were like, 21, 22, and in California it gave me sufficient space, that I could actually start to think about who I was, and what the story was, and actually, well the United States and California in particular...

Harvey Jones America's so...

Was a much more easy space to be Jewish

It's important! It explains a lot of things, you know.

I mean I was much more at home in Berkeley than I've ever been in Montreal, as I always say. Because I was like, everyone, it was like, I can't explain, but it was very much a feeling of being at home in American culture.

And did you find that, cause you must have grown up, I mean, the plateau was so Jewish?

Oh it was very easy living in the plateau, everybody was Jewish. That's why I say, it felt like being in a Shtetl.

Where did you grow up in Montreal?

I grew up on Cremazi and Saint Denis.

So the North end?

Yeah. Francophone Montreal, where I was a double minority, as Jewish and Anglophone...

Z. Double fucked (laughing)

But then you moved.

But then we moved. And I ended up in high school living in Outremont. )

He went to Outremont High I mean.

But by the time I was like, 13, 90% of the kids in Outremont High were Jewish, right. But it was, you know, it was a very like, the sort of high achieving Jewish kids, you found a lot of them in Berkeley, I'll tell you that, right.

I assume you didn't have a bar mitzvah,

B. No

Z. And I assume there were some survivor kids there, but not too many.

Survivor kids?

No.

What about when you went to that school in Park X?

B. I don't remember, if you ask me to think back to my childhood, I can't identify anyone as a survivor, and immigrant. All my friends were, as I was, born in Montreal.

Z. I have a friend too, who's a couple of years younger, he's a sociologist, statistician, Mike Ornstien, I don't know if you know him...

B. No

Z. He's at York, and he grew up in Montreal, Snowden, of Canadian, Jewish Canadian, and he, just like you, it's the same narrative. He did not know.

In Outremont High, in those days, I mean I'm sure there were some Holocaust people, but we were all...

There were a few

They didn't advertise it, you know. I could remember some guys who came out of like the Hungarian revolution,

That was '56!

Well, High School was in '56.

M. Would they be in Outremont?

B. Well, they had been in Outremont, you know, one or two. But I mean basically we were all from lower-middle to upper-middle class Jews, and they were Jewish in the way, you know you go to synagogue occasionally, and whatever like that, you know. We were like, militantly outside of that. So what made me different was our lack of religiosity of any sort. But it wasn't the immigrant experience that I was conscious of. We would talk about the role that being a communist played in the immigrant experience of my parents, which I believe it did, that's a different story, but for me, that had already happened the generation before.

So your first contact, really, with the Holocaust, was when you met Miriam, or?

B. Yeah, well...

M. Well it was probably the first time it was actually real to you.

B. Oh yeah, no I really do have a feeling, I mean not only the Holocaust, but Judaism in general.

M. We weren't very Jewish.

B. You were extremely Jewish, but you weren't religious Jewish.

M. We weren't religious at all, yeah.

Z. Lots of people say that about me, that I'm extremely Jewish, but I consider myself an Orthodox Atheist. So you say militant, right. But I am, you know, passionate in my beliefs, or non beliefs, but I am very Jewish.

M. As soon as you walk into the door (laughing). I was saying to John, as soon as you meet someone and you hear their voice you know exactly who they are, where they went, and what they did.

Z. It was like at the mountain today, I should put this off, we walk our dog on a mountain every day, my student's going to type this, but anyway, and there was this, two women, you know maybe a teeny bit younger than us, and they're walking their two dogs, and they're compelled to talk to me, which is fine. I could talk to anyone, and then as we leave I said "Ugh, dyke Jewish women. All over." (Laughing)

M. They probably were!

Z. They totally were!

B. Well you know, there's a culture where one acknowledges, and you have to get out of it a bit, so you can recognize it, cause when you're too identified with it, you don't actually see it cause you are it.

Michelle says it to Trevor all the time. She'll say "that person's Jewish" and he'll say "really? how can you tell?" and she says "I just can tell." And I can understand that! Because there's, it's just in how you move, and how you say something, and you can only recognize it because it's so much a part of you that you just see it. You can't even identify it to somebody else, because there's nothing tangible to say "well if you do this and this and this you're going to see it."

B. But remember that there's incredible trajectory that happened in my lifetime, I mean, because I talk about marrying Miriam and sort of, in a way, embracing Judaism in this bizzare sort of cultural way, and realizing that you are, to your core, Jewish, in the sense of how you approach the world. And there's a culture there, that's very old, and that you are that culture. But in terms of talking about it and assimilating it, there is a huge change in my lifetime from the way the larger culture and it's relationship to being Jewish. Ok? So. The larger culture has come to, so for my son-in-law, you see, he'll think about his father-in-law, and he'll think about Seinfeld, and he'll say "Oh yeah, the same kind of humor as Seinfeld," like it's a positive, see? And when I grew up it was a negative. Right? So it went from being...

That's American TV



B. It's an incredible influence. And so that's what we found, in the States, the words, there were Yiddish words like chutzpah, and they were words that, sort of esoteric words, right? And then when you went to California, everyone, didn't have to be Jewish to use those Yiddish words, they had gotten totally into the main culture.

Schtick, chutzpah.

Right? So I think it went from being, you know, shedding all vestiges of being Jewish, to having this certain pride in the fact that this was such a strong culture. And that wasn't something that happened just individually, but the whole culture moved.

M. But I think part of what happened when we got to California that was different is the Montreal Jewish community is such a traditional community, even though it had a whole left-wing trajectory of our parents generation, you got stuck in this place. So, you know, I was a labour Zionist, no, I was communist Zionist, (1.28.59.0), so I had a very left wing position in my head about how I lived, and how I thought, and I always felt out of step with the community of people that I grew up with. I mean, I wasn't ostracized, but I always felt I didn't belong anywhere, exactly. And you have your own, you have your commies, but when we got to California, we were just sort of in a culture that we could swim in, you know. I mean, everybody had shed all sorts of things, and everybody, especially Berkeley in those days, there was all this stuff going on. It was a pool, a pond, that you could just swim in, and know that you could swim anywhere. And you would find a place for yourself.

Well Miriam was in Social Work, and I was in Mathematics, both of which were disciplines that had a lot of Jewish representation in them, and then of course, there was all the politics and everything else which was going on in Berkeley in those days, which was also, many of the leaders were Jewish, and so it was, coming from Montreal, for both of us I think, going from being peripheral to being mainstream.

What a great time to leave at.

And even there we weren't mainstream. We weren't the extreme of anything, but it was easy to be there.

So go back to High School.

M. Back to High School. I went to school, I think I was still in the youth movement, I was 12-16. That was my life. I would go to school. I didn't completely belong. I mean I did, I mean I was a good student and whatever, but that whole social scene that happened in High School was never anything that I actually...

How come?

M. I got completely caught up in the youth movement.

But I'm also wondering if it had a little bit to do with the fact that you were an immigrant.

There were a lot of other, I don't remember...

It was beginning. But you were at the forefront.

M. Maybe. If anything, it had to do with me being very tall and feeling out of sync, out of step, out of physical step.

B. There was a lot of short, little, Jewish immigrants, and Miriam was at her full height when she was 12 years old.

M. So I think the movement was an easy place to be. I had good friends when I was in school, and I think, you see Carol was Canadian, Dalia had come from Israel, Juliana was from Hungary, I'm trying to think of the people I was close to.

Sonya?

B. I wasn't friends with Sonya by that time. She was too social. And I wasn't. So I think it was more that. I think the youth movement gave me a space that I felt comfortable in.

Z. It was intellectual.

B. It was intellectual, it was a community. You know, we read ELT, we learned things, we went on outings, we went to camp, we danced. So it gave me a community that I felt really comfortable in. I don't know what I was looking for, but I think it was more that. I don't think I went there because I was an immigrant, I think if anything, it was because I was tall and didn't quite fit into the social acceptable norm. Or maybe I didn't feel it. I'm not saying that I was rejected, but I didn't feel it. And I think it was an easy way out.

Well I think that a lot of the girls around Miriam, they were all immigrants, as I remember them. One or two weren't but they were all busy being what you could call "North American-ized." You know, dates on Saturday night, ectetera. And Miriam was not in that culture. You know, she was going her own way, all the time.

But I'm not sure whether it was out of complete strength, or if I didn't do it because...

But you didn't!

No, I didn't.

The fact is that you didn't. You never played that kind of social game.

So did your parents, do you think your parents integrated into Montreal life, or did they integrate into the Montreal Shtetl life?

I think it was Montreal Shtetl life. I mean I think that their world was their world of friends and work. Did they help my brother and I? I don't think so. I don't think it was something that they thought about. We basically were allowed to, we just grew up! And whatever we encountered, we encountered. I don't think they had a trajectory for us. Except, I mean, probably me more than my brother, so I did piano, and I went to ballet school until I stopped, and you know, my brother played sports, I guess. But they didn't, I don't think that they knew what it was, or what you needed to do, to become part of the North American.

No, but the kids did.

No no, but I'm saying that I don't think that it came from them. Anyways, they worked, they worked full time. They had two kids. They had some time that they wanted to see, when they had time they would see their friends. They were busy doing all sorts of things themselves.

Did they ever buy a house or anything?

No, they never did. My father never had the guts to do it. I mean all their friends did, eventually, my father was just too frightened to buy a house. And I'm not sure what he was frightened of, but he was frightened.

And where did they, did they continue in mile-end, or did they?

No. They were on Esplanade until I turned 16, and then they moved to Snowden, they rented this small apartment that they lived in, near the Jewish. So there were the 4 of us, my brother never had a bedroom until I left home. He lived in the living room.

I remember we moved to Dupuis, and

Oh, I lived on Legare and Dupuis!

Yeah, and I lived on Lavoie, just down the street. A two bedroom apartment I shared with my sister.

See, I was a girl, and he... anyways. Whatever. He has bought many houses along the way, bigger and bigger. I laugh, I say he's like a snail. His shell is getting bigger and bigger.

Do you think his experience was different from you?

Totally. Absolutely.

How so?

Well I don't think that he, I think that the war was a separate move for him, he came here when he was 4, and he heard the stories, but he heard the stories from a distance. So I think he's much more integrated, I shouldn't speak, maybe it's not fair. I think he just lived much more within the Canadian culture. And you know, he's married twice. Both of his wives weren't Jewish. His first wife converted, the second one didn't. I mean, not that it matters, but they didn't. They both are very similar in body shape to my mother. They're blonde, blue eyes, whatever. And he lives outside, completely, of the Jewish community. Totally. So I don't know whether it's a reaction, or whether he actually just integrated into the society in a way that neither my parents nor I actually did.

So I'm sure he doesn't call himself Moshe,

No, I call him Moshe. He calls himself Maurie. He has two names, he's called Schmiel Moshe, so his name is Simon Morris, so in school they called him Simon,

In French they called him Simon

Sucha good name, Simon.

And in camp they called him Maurie. And my parents each called him by the name of their father. And I can't remember which one was which, so both names were always in use. But at home we called him Moshe. And I still call him Moshe. My kids call him Uncle Moshe. And in camp they called him Maurie. And my parents each called him by the name of their father. And I can't remember which one was which, so both names were always in use. But at home we called him Moshe. And I still call him Moshe. My kids call him Uncle Moshe. He lives in Newmarket. And he has grandchildren, and they call him Zaide.

And as he's gotten older, he's certainly, I mean, I think he, and a lot of the grandchildren, I mean, her parents were special people, and everyone had a very warm viewing. I had a very warm, terrific. They were just very welcoming, very human people, and one felt... So I think that, down to the grandchildren's generation, they remember them very very fondly, and they did have that aura of bringing, no matter who the children married, bringing them into the larger family. Very welcoming. They were, you know, it's amazing, because they never lost a kind of humanity, given what they had gone through.

No. But the Jewishness is lost as the generations...

The Jewishness was lost because it had no institutional backing. It just was what they were. That part is interesting. It's part of the Jewish assimilation.

Well I think people went totally sort of, assimilated and then the majority seemed to have gone the way of religion, and Holocaust has been...

Well it's like my daughter, who lives in Halifax, can't find a way, there's no way to be Jewish in Halifax, unless you're, you know, Orthodox, but you can't be married to a non-Jew.

She should come to Wolfville.

I'm sure.

No! There's a little forum of Jews. Secular Jews. There's a real forum, like the whole political...

Around the university?

Yeah. There's a whole number. It's very interesting.

Well for Michelle she had her own struggles, and sometimes you don't ask yourself those questions of identity until you move away from your parents and you're forced...

Or you're moved to a very different environment where you feel it's a little, oh, it's a little threatening...

Well, you have children, and what are you going to pass on to your children? You have to actually make a statement. You can't just...

Well I think that what she says is that given that she grew up in our house, which was not Jewish in... I mean the kids knew that they were Jewish and they had, you know their grandparents were Holocaust survivors, they knew our story, they knew Billy was Jewish, but we didn't live in a Jewish way in our house. Our kids went to (1.40.05.2), and then they went here, and then they went there. So Joshua, who's our son, seems to feel Jewish. He doesn't

need to do anything. It's just in his bones. With Michelle it's always an issue. It's like, "I didn't do these things, and I meet people and they say, I tell them I'm Jewish and they say "You can't be Jewish, how could you be Jewish, you didn't do this, you didn't do that."" And then she feels badly.

It's all religious though, that's the problem. I mean, I don't know how that happened...

Well it happened in Montreal, I don't know if it happened everywhere, you see. But of course, Michelle took, Michelle had her own ways of coping, you know. She's an academic, so she started to write papers about being Jewish.

She writes about being Jewish.

I should read them.

She's writing about Jews in films in England, because she met, somehow, some professor in, I think he's in Whales.

She'd be interested in like, how Jews are represented in Canadian television, would say something about Canadian culture and being Jewish.

But this guy in Britain who she writes with, has sent her film, and she says "how can these people be so familiar," I mean it's about Jewish families in Britain, I've never seen them, but she says "they're so familiar, and yet they're British." It's like when somebody comes in and you just know that they are, because there's something about their story, or how they talk to each other, or how they relate, or what they eat, that is so familiar. So she was surprised at how familiar it was, and how she could sort of interface with it.

This is germane to this throughout this conversation, in a way, because her theory is that, and she's talking about the cultural history of Canada, which is different than the cultural history of the United States, in the sense that Canada is so consumed with this 2-nation idea. That there's very little space for minorities to find, because you see, and she wrote something that said "A minority in Canada is a white person who comes from Newfoundland." It's not an ethnic minority, it's not the same. So that, in a certain sense, there's more space. And often if there's a Jewish character, say in an American television program, well the CBC will reject it, because it's too American. To be Jewish is to be American.

And to replace it with a Newfoundland humour. Because Newfoundlanders have the Mercer, and the...

When I came back from the States, the queens, I remember this guy came up to me, he came from small town Ontario, and he says "you can't be Canadian, a guy like you can't be Canadian." I mean, what he meant was that I was Jewish. And Jews can't be Canadians. "You must come from New York." In other words, a person like me was a familiar archetype in America. That's why I said I felt at home in the United States, and feel at home in the United States in that way. Certain parts of the East Coast and the West Coast, usually, but in Canada there isn't that room. And that speaks to, and Montreal is even a more complex reality, because when I was thinking of Miriam's parents, they were in this sub-community of Holocaust survivors and immigrants who were within this larger Jewish community, who were placed within the Anglophone community, who were placed within the Francophone community, who were placed within Canada, right. So it's multiple, multiple, multiple minorities.

That's a good diagram. That's a great diagram, actually. Thank you. It's wonderful.

There wouldn't be a Toronto diagram.

No no. It would be different.

It would be different but not as many steps in Toronto. You see the thing that characterizes Montreal is the number of steps, the number of ways, that's why everyone feels that they're a persecuted minority. Everyone simultaneously feels that they are the persecuted. "You think you have problems? Well we really have problems." Right, so you can't tell, so you have this thing where Jews and French Canadians are claiming to be persecuted, and they're both right and they're both wrong. It's like that. So it really is, Montreal is a complex cultural situation.

Back to your thesis...

No, it's all part of it, actually. I mean my mind is... I just want to, would you say your parents, how hard were the first five years here?

Since they came to Canada?

Yeah. Would you say it was difficult for them?

I don't think it was any harder than their five years that they spent in France, or four years that they spent in France before coming here. If anything, I would say it would be less hard. We lived in a bigger space, finding work was much easier, and I think they were that much further away from Europe, which I think gave them breathing space. I think those first four years that they spent in France when they came from Russia, and I'm just guessing at this point, must have been really, really difficult. I mean they had to face the fact that everybody was dead, they had to face the fact that they had left Russia and gone through this trajectory all across Europe, they had to find a place to work, they lived in this very, very small space, and then the war in Indochina started, and my father talked about it, so it obviously obsessed him that France was at war, and what the hell was he doing there.

Well I think a lot of the French people who left, left right at that time. They wanted to get out of Europe.

They were afraid of another world war. They felt that there was going to be some sort of war, another war in Europe.

So when did the French, well they were always in that area, right? There was a bit of a colonial connection before the war, or maybe it was a long time, I don't know.

That's right, oh yeah. It was an incredible war. The whole French experience in Indochina was just like Vietnam.

But we never learned about it, really, from the US.

No there was no memory, the Americans just repeated the entire disaster.

Did they go in in 1950?

It was '53 I think, something like that.

So it was like, I see. Cause the US was already involved in Korea.

And that was part of her dad's anxiety. Because it actually did look, at that time, like a world war. Remember, China and Russia were on one side, the Americans were on the other side, it wasn't totally paranoid on Getz's part to be worried about what was going to happen. Obviously him and his family would be safer in North America, they didn't want to go through another war in Europe.

I have to tell you, I feel exactly like him. I'm so happy I'm on this side of the Atlantic. When I watch what goes on in Europe I can't believe it. Thank God I'm watching it from here, and not from there. And I thank my father every day. This is wonderful. You made such a great choice. You took us out of that insanity. I mean, we have our own insanity here, but by comparison, you know.

You know I can remember, you asked about how her parents felt, but I can remember them really being appreciative of being in Canada.

Oh they loved being in Canada. Do you find that other immigrants felt that way too?

It was complicated. I always answer that question, I think people were very excited, people found it hard, some people hated it at first. I think there's a difference between, I hate saying this, but I'm going to, because it sounds classist, between the Shtetl Jews and the more cosmopolitan, urban Jews, who compared Montreal to, let's say Warsaw, Krakow, Poland. The cultural life was just booming and creative, and a lot of those Jews didn't want anything to do with the Canadian Jews, because they found that they had no cultural capital, right. They felt they were nouveau riche, they were uninteresting, they were anti-intellectual, you know. And they felt superior.

But it's interesting, because I think my parents would talk that way. They did say that they felt that they came to the backwoods when they came here. They would talk about the wooden sidewalks and whatever. But even with all that, they were so relieved to be here, that it didn't matter.

Z: Eventually after a few years, one woman said, you know, she was outraged to see how people would go out if it was a shpatsirn, Sunday walk, outraged! They wouldn't get dressed! They'd go in schmattas, right. And in Europe it was always a hat, it was always a coat, a suit, a purse, matching gloves, I mean, people would get dressed up. And then when I asked her, when did things change, what did you like best? She said "The same things that I hated, I grew to love that informality, the ability to be who you are when you go out, and how you are."

M: Which is interesting because I remember them going out on the weekends on the mountains, because we lived right there, and everybody was always dressed up, so I don't know where this woman was talking about, but my father was always...

Z: But those were the immigrants. She was talking about the Canadian Jews.

I guess I never noticed, I guess there weren't that many Canadian Jews shpatsirning on the mountains on Sundays.

No, it was all immigrants.

That's right, and everybody would be dressed up. So I guess there were so few around where we were.

But I remember my parents saying that it was a cultural desert, cause my grandmother was a Russian of high culture, so to speak. And so she was, yeah, absolutely. There was that too.

So it's interesting. Which would you think was more sophisticated. So what do you remember of Fletchers Field? I sort of have my nose out of joint that they changed it to Parc Jeanne-Mance, because I feel they're playing with culture. Historically, they're transforming the meaning of this place.

Was it ever really called Fletchers Field? Was that it's name?

Yeah, that was the official name. That's what it was named.

Well this is part of French Canadian Nationalism, the attempt to recapture by renaming.

And I understand that, I would understand that. This is another discussion, but I totally understand and support that, however if the original name was like Parc Jeanne-Mance, and then changed to Fletcher's Field, I would understand that. But the original name was Fletcher's Field, and there's a whole history of immigrants, not only Jews, that historically

No, I understand that there was a big outcry a few years ago

But I don't think that they're interested in having that

They're not only not interested, first of all, there's two things. They tried to change the name of Park Avenue, and there was a whole outcry, but also, there is, for example, part of this Jewish community is the fact that the Jews were very interested, involved in creating the union movement in Quebec. Right. But there is no historical memory of that.

As a matter of fact, this woman Leah Roteback, they've adopted her, nobody knew that she's Jewish.

They don't even know that she's Jewish.

Somebody had to tell them, "this woman is Jewish." They had claimed her as their own.

She's on one of the posters.

But my parents and their friends, they created unions. They were the people who went to organize, one guy organized the sea workers, I mean these guys were in the original, right, and they were persecuted for that.

They went to jail!

But there is no memory in Quebec that these people did what they did. That's ironic, because Quebec is a very strong union culture, ok? But the fact that there were Jews, the memory of



Jews is either as capitalists or as Israeli fascists. But not as, all the Jews I grew up with were left-wing, radical.

I know you're dying to ask about Fred Rose, I bet.

Go ahead, ask him, he was part of that.

I know his daughter.

I tell you what, we can finish this, and you want to stay on? We can ask him about Fred Rose.

We'll have to get together again, because I have another interview later this evening.

So we should let her finish.

What time is it?

It's 4:30.

We're good, we're good. I really am almost finished.

You've lost track of where you are

You are about to ask the question that will open it up again, that's the one you usually ask, which is when do you think the Holocaust became sexy?

Became sexy?

Became something that the Jews became proud of. Not proud of,

But they owned it, they embodied it.

In your household you were always talking about it on a private sphere. But in the larger public sphere,

When did it happen? Probably when Steven Spielberg made Schindler's List. (laughing)

It's when my friend, what's his name, at Concordia started the Holocaust center. Frank? So I mean it became sexy, people kind of made academic careers on the Holocaust.

But I was even thinking, this memorial to the Holocaust that is here in (1.54.52.0), it hasn't been around all the time. I was trying to think about it when I went in April this year, and I said "well when did it start? when did I become conscious of it?" Because I never remember my parents talking about it, I never remember them going, and I remember starting to go about 12 years ago? And I went with Billy, one of his aunts is a Holocaust survivor, and I remember going, she said she wanted to go and I said "I'll go with you." And I remember going with her, so it was the first time, it must have been about 15 years ago, right? And I remember if there was anything, really, in that organized community, communal way in Montreal. It doesn't mean that people didn't have it. But in that it became acceptable and part of the ritual of the community, so everybody goes now, and all the dignitaries are there, and they do their schpiel, and Jewish school comes and sings their songs.

So you have an aunt who's a survivor, yet there was nothing in your family?

No but she's my aunt by marriage,

Doesn't matter, she's been around forever.

Absolutely. And I don't remember any... There's, it deeply affected her family, her children, so we're all aware of it, but it's only, as Miriam says, in the last 15 years where it's become institutionalized. Like, both my aunt Irene and her sister worked for the Montreal Holocaust Museum, and they're very active, and they, Olga goes into schools, and talks. And see all that is quite recent, because when did the Holocaust center start in Montreal? It's not that old.

1990's, late 1990s?

Right, so her time frame of 15-20 years is not so off the mark.

It's not so much it's become, I was going to say mundane but that's not what I meant. I don't mean trivialized either. It's like, we go to Billy's cousin Enid's for Seder, we've been going there now for a number of years. And it's the most untraditional Seder that you could possibly have. But it's irrelevant. The point I was going to make is that they created their own Haggadah that's sort of a left-wing Haggadah from (1.57.16.0), adapted it a bit, to put in the Holocaust. And the Holocaust has become institutionalized there in that way, so there's six candles, and they're lit for his aunt Irene, lights it for certain family members. And I never said anything, for years, and I sit there stewing, thinking "I'm a Holocaust survivor, I lost all these relatives of mine during the war", nobody ever said to me, they knew! "Wouldn't you like to light a candle." It's like everybody was in there, and about three years ago I was talking to Nina's husband, I don't know what he was doing here, and I said, it must have been close to Passover, and I don't know why I finally had the courage to say to him "You know Tony, I have a whole family of mine that was lost during the Holocaust, and nobody every said 'do you want to light a candle.'" So he went home and he told Nina, and they felt terrible, so they called me and they said "you have to light a candle to your family." So I'm thinking it all became ritualized and I don't go to any other Seders, where people actually talk about...

There's a kind of competition sometimes. We have, in that particular Seder, we were just there, and these 90 year old women, were Holocaust survivors, and number of them. So there's still, in this family there's a personal connection with the Holocaust. But even amongst some of the things, human propensity to, you can see competition between the different women who were Holocaust survivors, about who suffered more, or who gets to light more candles,

Well it just happened this year.

And it happened the previous year.

There is a hierarchy of suffering, which is something I'm going to have to address in my book. But there's who's considered...

And who survived how. Like I said, my parents survived in Russia, they had a hard time, but they didn't worry that somebody was going to come and shoot them. It doesn't mean that they didn't suffer, but...

But it doesn't mean... they also lost their families

Absolutely

How can one quantify that. How can one linearize it? It's all... It's objectionable even to think about. But nevertheless, one has to be aware that even though it's a kind of unique kind of event, still, the memory of it, humans assimilate that into human experience and they do what human beings do with other situations is, people use it for self-aggrandizement, and for feelings of self-importance and questions of uniqueness...

But I think the question you raised is an interesting one, it's not just so much 'when did the Holocaust become sexy' but when did the Holocaust become common property, that anybody can do anything they want with it?

Yeah, every Jew owns the Holocaust, it's a collective, so it's...

But it's not only just the Jews...

So it's beyond institutionalized, because it's a collective identity, yet in the 50s, that was not the case.

Yes, but I have a different question about the Holocaust, which is, in the community of Canadian Jews, as the Holocaust became known, every person who was Jewish felt directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, threatened by that situation. And I think that had a big effect on people and often an unacknowledged effect. In other words, how you behaved, was... I think the whole trajectory of the Jewish community was changed by the existence of the Holocaust. People thought it could happen. Right? The German Jews were assimilated too. We may be doing very well now... And so that possibility changed people, and I think for example, you know the variance of the support of Israel, for example, you know, and the unwillingness to criticize Israel, and things like that, is not unconnected from that story. In other words, a lot of the institutions and the psychological adjustment of the Jewish community has something to do with that experience, so whether acknowledged or not, whether you're a Canadian Jew or an immigrant Jew, nevertheless... And I often think about my father and all their friends who were communists, etcetera etcetera, but you asked me, what did they think about the Holocaust - They never acknowledged it! And yet I feel, today, that it was a major effect on them. You know? Even the fact that you lived here, and didn't think about it, while millions of Jews were being slaughtered, I mean isn't that embarrassing? Isn't that... at the very least, doesn't that make you feel guilty? You know, you could feel guilty, you could feel threatened, and in some sense it influences your behaviour, and your feeling about yourself.

So you go to denial? Is that what you're saying?

That's what I'm saying. I'm saying you go to denial and you do all sorts of strange things to deny it, including denying being Jewish.

So do you think it's because it's safe now? That there's all these museums and all these places?

Yeah.

Well one of the people we interviewed, a couple of the survivors, they said 'by the early 1960s we stopped being fearful.

Some right-wing US guy came up, who had been, and ex-fascist or something, this sort of right-wing stuff the US produces, came up to Montreal, and maybe he was a Holocaust denier too, or something, and he came up to Montreal and these guys got together, these immigrants got together and said "we're going to go stand in front of this guys hall where he's speaking, and we're going to yell" and they finally came out as a group

In droves,

In droves. The first "we're out in the street, and we're safe to be here. we belong here. and you can't say that with good conscious, what you're saying." So it was like they suddenly felt different. They felt secure enough to come out.

That's significant.

I think that might be that's what it is. By not feeling embarrassed about being Jews, or not feeling frightened, then you can allow yourself to have these... It's sort of interesting, when you go to the memorial service here, there are people who just wander by. There's always police, and I was walking with Nina, with Billy's cousin, and she said "why are they here?" and I said "you know, it's a risk when you come here, there are all sorts of things that happen all over the place when Jews have gathered, and there's always a risk that you take." But you go and you commemorate.

But that speaks to a certain security, that you're willing to go in public. There's a security. But there's also a paranoia. So you have to take both hands here. OK?

Paranoia?

The paranoia of the fact that this happened. Look!

I don't think it's a paranoia.

I grew up in Canada, and I've had, you know, the best possible education, and I've done very well and everyone I know has done very well. It tells you something about history, that you're never secure. There's a feeling of, you know, that these things are possible, you can't have this illusion, which we do have so often in North America, that we live this privileged thing and wars don't happen here, they only happen in Europe, and stuff like that. So both, I think... (2.05.05.0) said about being Jewish, she talked about Jews as conscious pariahs. And it's what, in my mind, defines a Jewish experience, especially in North America, is to be inside. To be an insider in many ways and simultaneously to be an outsider. And it's this ambiguous position which defines begin Jewish. I'm sure Michelle would put it much better than I do, but it's not that... Some people point to Jews and say "ah they make so much money, they're so secure and etceteras etceteras, they don't realize, and that is the key to understanding the Jewish experience. Right? That no matter how secure you feel you'll always feel insecure, and no matter how insecure you feel you always feel secure because you're an overachiever and

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Do you think that the Holocaust is sexy?

Mhm. I do. I have this theory that it started with exodus and Paul Newman.

Oh what a roy, that's funny, I had forgotten about that.

That was the first, and that was, you know, exodus was published in 1960,

I remember it very well, it was a very significant movie, and...

But all of a sudden it put it out there. But it put it out there with Paul Newman, blue eyed beautiful man, survivor, hero, took risks, right? He was a hero. He was hero. So it heroized, as opposed to, like, sheep to the slaughter. And that changed the narrative at that time.

It changes the narrative around that time from that, the reaction to the Holocaust is that we were all embarrassed, really, that the Jews were killed. I mean, Arent made the point that the Jews couldn't have been massacred without the connivance of the Jewish elite, and that's what made her book so controversial, by the way, it wasn't (2.07.11.0), It was about in the same book, she claimed that, in fact, it was the Jewish elite that organized it and did everything, and that's why the German's didn't have to waste any troops killing the Jews, because the Jews would do it for them, so to speak. And that was extremely controversial.

But there's a degree of truth, right? We were talking about that in the states. Roosevelt's right-hand people around policy were all Jews.

Oh really?

Yeah. Was that yesterday we were talking about that?

Yeah, but those same Jewish people were so identified with not being Jewish,

They were assimilated,

That they refused to do anything. Even bomb the tracks to Auschwitz, because it was going to waste 7 bombs that we could use to kill 7 Germans instead of saving a million Jews. Right? And some of those assimilated Jews were the worst ones in terms of what happened to the Jews.

I don't think, I think there's also the shame of having allowed that to happen to you.

The same thing happened in Canada, by the way.

So it's not just the shame, there was a conspiracy, the sense of shame, I mean, what does it mean about me, about us, about Jews, that this could happen to you. That you could just be rounded up and be exterminated like rats, put into gas chambers. There was a shame that came with it, and I would imagine that it took many years for that sort of...

Well the narrative began, there was a narrative that began, like sheep to the slaughter, and that was dominant I think, in the 50's, part of the 60's, but then I would argue there was the exodus, there was the Eichmann trial, there was the 6 day war, and so, you know, we can go on. I think it took them a good 20-30 years for it to evolve.

You know what else there was, there was a belief that, and this was even among Jewish psychologists, cause I remember this when I was working at Jewish family services in those years, that if you were a Holocaust survivor you were disturbed. There was this rhetoric in the psychological, in the clinical community, that you couldn't have survived the Holocaust without being damaged goods. And they would see, anybody would come in, the assumption was that, so you yourself felt that you were damaged goods. It took years and years and years of people being challenged by survivors who felt healthy and normal, that their rhetoric was wrong, that you can't put all the Holocaust survivors... I remember going to one, to this professor Segal, he was a psychologist,

Victor Segal, something

But he wrote this book, he wrote these articles, and I remember this woman who I worked with stood up outraged "how dare you talk that way about me. I'm a Holocaust survivor and I don't fit that profile. This is not me. And there are Jews who went through the Holocaust who were resistance fighters, and who were in the forest in Poland with the partisans there, and those people don't fit that profile." So there was this conspiracy, on all sides, to see everybody who came through as sick or deprived or depressed, dysfunctional. And it really weighed heavily on the people who came as well.

Well you know I think, myself, that to look at it psychologically, what happens when you're threatened is, there's this, all this business is distancing yourself from the psychological reality, you see. These people are disturbed, so they're not me. I don't have to identify with them. And so I can pike a distance between myself and these people. But if these people are me, that's really threatening.

But maybe there was a belief that to have gone through this you had to come out disturbed.

But let's, like, I'm not disturbed by that. Like, how could you not come out of it coming disturbed. But that doesn't mean you're not high-functioning. And that you're not...

It depends what you mean by disturbed, if you mean you can't come out of that without being mentally ill, then that's a problem. Because if there's mentally ill we can't hire you, we can't... right.

Well, that's right. But I'm not talking about that.

But I don't believe that. I think that people can come through that horrendous experience and not be disturbed.

Well they are disturbed, they're disturbed by the experience. But it doesn't... they're healthy.

They're not clinically disturbed. I'm talking about it clinically. That's what I mean.

You're using the wrong word,

I'm using the word clinically

Disturbed. You're using a word that has a connotation to it.

Social recurse.

It's like significance, right.

People now study resilience. People are very interested in resilience. Apply that to the Holocaust, right. Some people were resilient. It's amazing how resilient people were. If we emphasize resilience instead of disturbed, we would have a different narrative.

Well, you know, I'm trying to present a bit of a counter-narrative, because women actually have been demonized, women survivors particularly, as out of control mothers, you know the literature on the second generation, vicarious traumatization, and my view is, ok so I don't use disturbed in the clinical sense, I use it in, I mean it was hard. You can't erase, there was trauma. There was lots of it. And why wouldn't there be. The problem was the trauma wasn't recognized here, but the social service workers, but it didn't mean... they maintained their families, right? They worked, they cooked, they cleaned.

That's right, and they took care of their children.

They took care of their children, and they maintained a, you know.

And most of their children did very well.

If Miriam's parents are Holocaust survivors, and my parents are Canadian, Ok, her parents were much less disturbed than my parents. This business of, I mean, life is all kinds of difficulties, for example, divorce is a difficulty. We don't say about people that come from a divorced family "you're disturbed."

They used to.

They used to, they still do, actually.

Single parent family, there must be disturbed children.

Now every second kid is, therefore, by definition, disturbed, right? People encounter certain difficulties and some people thrive or manage to overcome the difficulties, and do very well, and I don't remember, I didn't see any bitterness in Miriam's parents and their friends, I saw a kind of very warm open culture. They weren't defensive, they weren't... I don't see the marks, you know, which would, you know.

But then you can think of some of my family and friends and some of the crazy things that...

No, and there are some crazy things, but what I want to say is that I have a lot of people that are crazy

There's crazy, but that's not mentally ill, crazy is, its trauma, it's crazyness, but it's also high-functioning. And there were people who didn't, couldn't. There were people who really collapsed. People who got electric shock therapy, couldn't function, but I think that was a small percentage. But they were there. But I think for most of the people they were resilient.

But I work with cancer patients, ok? That's a trauma. Their traumatized, ok. I mean there's lots of things in life that can traumatize you, and so as another trauma in a series of traumas, you know. I mean look at the history of the world, look at the world today. It's just a history of how many people are traumatized.

In Central Africa, what's going on.

So the majority of people in Africa are traumatized, so

It's complicated. You could say trauma is almost normal. We happen to have, I say to Miriam, we were very lucky to live in a time and a place where there were no wars, with a growing economy, and so we've been blessed. But it's a very unusual time. Even compared to my American friends, who were, you know, drafted to go to Vietnam, and had the trauma of running away to Canada or something like that, so as Canadian, really you know, but I think maybe that's historically unusual. Maybe trauma is normal.

But I think the Holocaust has become, in North America anyways, I don't know about Europe I won't speak for them, an accepted reality. I mean you will have the Holocaust deniers, and not everybody knows about it, but it's acceptable. Like when we were in Washington not that long ago, there's a Holocaust museum, so we didn't get tickets, we thought we'd get in, and there was a line-up. And the line-up was God knows from where to where, and I said "there's no way I'm waiting" but I was watching the people, I think some of them were going to a museum. They didn't know the difference between... Cause I was listening to them speak, whether they were going to the museum of natural history or the Holocaust museum for them it was interchangeable.

"It's Tuesday, we're going to the museum."

My daughter tried to go and she didn't have a ticket, just recently, about a month ago. I forget what exactly, "That's my grandparents story and you're not letting me in! You're persecuting me!" (Laughing)

Did they give her a ticket?

No! They're bureaucrats, you know.

It's become institutionalized.

I think we need to stop...