

Interviewees: Steve and Margrit Stenge

Date: October 20, 2012

Z- Who wants to start?

S- I will. Before the war and during the war and shortly after that, we were all Holocaust addicts, both of us. For us, there is no before the war, after the war. There is Holocaust and that's it. That from the beginning of the Holocaust [0:00:57] and I'm still . . . my favorite . . . both of us favorite reading material is Holocaust. You know, it is like a very simple diary.

Z- Okay, so where were you born and when?

S- Me? Where I was born? I was born in Hungary.

Z- And what year?

S- '22.

Z- 1922, and you?

M- I was born in Germany, 1928.

Z- 1928, okay, and talk to me about your family a little bit, your parents, brothers, sisters . . . what they did . . .

S- Well if they're all gone during the Holocaust, they were all killed during the war, so it's almost like, I don't know, it's irrelevant. It's not special when someone is 90 years old, what can I take? We were poor people in Hungary and I went to school. I was reasonably educated and . . . and we . . . I personally know what poverty is. I came here, you know, like sort of didn't like poverty, so I worked a little harder and I got reasonably comfortable.

Z- So when you talk about reasonably educated . . . can you explain?

S- College, the equivalent to college.

Z- And what did you study, was it something of special interest or . . . ?

S- No, like I went to school for 12 years in Hungary. One of them was . . . it's like not really comparable to north American education, but it's like . . . what can I tell you? Comparably, pretty good education, solid education. And I would say, just for your project, that the immigrants that came here and so suddenly became reasonably adapted and became familiar with the Canadian life, it's because they were well educated in Hungary. You know, we had real good education. Comparably, I have seen my children's education, as comparison, which it's none. And that's the same with my wife, I guess, no?

M- Yeah. But I was educated elsewhere, and didn't continue.

Z- Were you from a small town in Hungary?

S- No, I was born in Budapest.

Z- And what did your father do?

S- I don't want to talk about this.

Z- Okay. And you, you're from Germany . . .

M- Yes, and contrary to his background, my family was pretty comfortable, as a lot of German Jews were. I went to a normal elementary school the first two years and then I continued in a Jewish school for another two year, and then left Germany. You wanted short, so that's it.

Z- Okay, and when did you leave Germany?

M- In 1938.

Z- And where did you go?

M- We went . . . my parents and I all went to Belgium. My father was looking for a position there, couldn't find anything. He left me there and they went on to Scandinavia and eventually ended up in Norway, and that's where I was educated. But then, you know, the war came, so it wasn't quite like that. But I was in Norway a year before the war started there.

Z- So how did the two of you meet and when?

[laughter all around]

Z- It's not he said she said?

M- [laughter]No. Steve had been in concentration camps and forced labor camps during the war, and after the war he went back to Hungary, didn't find anybody, and then he ended up back in Germany because he had nowhere else to go. That was common. And he went to university in Germany and one day he sees a poster, he and his friend see a poster, right? That said "Norway will welcome 400 Jews".

Z- And what year was this?

M- '47. 1947.

S- '47.

M- Because they had lost about 600 Jews and there were very few Jews even then in Norway. So, he and his friend got on a ship and came to Norway.

S- Maybe I'll . . . I didn't know that you wanted to know this, because this is just an incident, anything can happen. I used to live in Germany. I used to live in an old age home. I'm the only one at 22 who knows what an old age home is all about, so we decided to stay here for all days because they gave me . . .so anyways, these old people, I was maybe 23, then came Passover and they . . . a friend of mine and me lived in this old age home, he asked us if we would want to go to a place called [0:08:00] to pick up some Passover supplies. So we said, "why not?".

Z- Were you religious?

S- No, no, no, we are not religious, we have never been religious, I don't think we are ever going to be religious. So we pick up the Passover supplies and this guy who gives out - you know it was a different world those days - this guy who gives out the supplies, says "here's a bottle of wine for you guys too". We weren't used to drink like now. So we open the bottle, we half finish it, and we walk on the street and one guy comes by he says, there is registration for Jews to go to Norway. So don't forget we lived in Germany, you know, we had bad experience with Germany. So we look at each, we say "why not?". He says, "Norway, Polar bears on the street". And I said, "No, no, no I learned in school that they don't lock the door, because there is no such thing as crime in Norway, so never lock the door". So anyway, so I said, "what can we lose?". So we registered and six weeks later we got a phone call that we were accepted. And we were a couple of days later, because we haven't got that much to pack. So they took us to Norway and this is how a few other things happened. It's a long life, things happen.

Z- I know, that's good.

S- I'm telling you, in this old age home, when one of the woman heard that I'm going to Norway, she says, "You know what? I have a brother living in Norway, when you go to Norway, he doesn't live in Oslo, but he lives not far from Oslo, I give you a name, go say hello to him". So I go to Norway and I go to Oslo, next day I decided to go say hello. His name was Houseman, Emil Houseman. So, I go to him. He was in the export-import business, but export-import business those days weren't business like today, because there was no business at all. But this guy is very nice guy, very nice guy, I owe it to him, very nice guy. He says to me, I used to speak in German, I didn't know Norwegian, so he says to me - and this is only maybe two, three days I've been in Norway - he says, "why don't you come and work for me?". But he was a [0:12:14] operator, but he said he knew [0:12:18] taken a few months, on the Norwegian there's nothing to do anyways, because business was poor. But he sort of saw . . . I don't know maybe he was a do gooder. I don't know what his reason was, but whatever it was it was respectable. So I worked for this for a couple of months and it's boring? No?

Z- No. Not at all. Keep going. It's something I know nothing about.

S- It was like August, September in '47. And if you come from a concentration camp you have nothing. So I say to myself "hey, it's going to be winter here". And I didn't have anything, no shoes, no winter coat, no nothing. But I used to have an old relative and this old relative was a Hungarian person. I didn't really know him that much. I don't think I ever knew him. But anyway, he was an expert in export business and he heard, he thought that being with Houseman, that I am also expert in the import-export business. So he wrote me a letter. He says, "Hungary wants to buy something that it calls [0:14:21], [same as previous]". I did not have no idea what the hell that was. Anyway later on, many years later, I found out that they used this for weaving some clothing material. So anyway, since I was in this business, and with my business I always used to have to go to Oslo. I was selling something that we knew we will never be able to deliver, but for future reference this guy figured that it's good for business even if he can't deliver. So when I was in Oslo, I'm going from place to place, which I found from the yellow pages that there is a possibility of, you know, factories. This was big quantities, this was for a country, it's not for individuals, big country, so I had to deal with a factory. I went from place to place, learned a lot while I was talking to different agent. Anyway, eventually I go to an agent and I tell him what it is all about, the little I knew. "Oh", he says, "Maybe can do something". So anyway, this guy's name was Shultz, never forget this. I may forget what I had for breakfast, but [0:16:16] Shultz . . . Anyways, so what happens is about four or five months later, after correspondence and this and that, and I really . . . incidentally I went to something they called [0:16:37] school, you know?

M- Business school.

S- It's a business school. Four years I went to business school.

Z- In Norway?

S- In Hungary.

Z- Hungary, okay.

S- It wasn't totally strange for me. Whatever was strange I could pick up fast, because I was young, not like now. Anyway, so, four or five months later, to put it to you fast, I made something like, the deal, we succeeded this deal, and I made twenty some odd thousand dollars. It was like a fortune. You know, I used to make maybe three thousand dollars a year. Twenty five thousand dollars, half of it I have to spend on this [0:17:40], but still I remain with that fortune. And from then on I never looked back in Norway, and of course when we came here there were different stories like these, not quite . . . [laughs]

Z- So can I ask you a question? The Norwegian government, right, they wanted Jews to come to Norway, but did they support them in anyway when they came?

S- I never got support because I got a job right away, but there were institutions with the government and Jewish institutions. First of all they helped them find a job, which was no problem, because most of the Jews if they weren't educated they had some trade. And

trade was very welcome in Norway. So that was no problem. Nevertheless, when we decided to come here . . .

Z- So how did you meet?

S- There was a Jewish institution there where she was member of and I went there. We had a dance and I like her right away. I liked her. She never let me go.

J- Was this before you made the twenty thousand dollars?

S- That was after.

J- That was after. So you were already a big deal, you were already a big success.

M- Because you know what, I had survived the war in Norway. You know, to make short I was in hiding. We had our own story, it's a long story. After the war, in 1947, my father died in Norway, and I was in mourning for a year and there was this dance at the Norwegian Youth Society, that's what we were called. And my first dance in a year, and I have bought myself a new dress, and I mean I will never forget that, you know, it's a long time ago. But I wore a nice new dress and I also . . .

S- She had a very nice pair of glasses.

M- [laughs] That's right, the glasses were the thing. They cinched the deal. They were rimless, you see them all the time today. And he liked the glasses.

Z- Highly intellectual.

M- Very [laughter].

Z- Were you religious Margret?

M- No. No, my whole family was, well not my whole family, but my parents were secular. I had no brothers and sisters. When Steve came into my life I was only 19 years old, and really hadn't had a lot of fun. Especially when my father died and I had to work after school, and then it wasn't an easy year. So he came along and he . . .

S- Of course she also has her story during the war, which is just as amazing. Tell us.

M- I can give you a copy of my story if you want. If that's interesting to you.

Z- It is interesting to me.

M- I have a copy, it's on the computer.

Z- Okay, I would like that.

M- Steve, I mean, first of all he was generous and I knew it right away. He took me dancing and to movies, and I never had as good of time in my whole life as I had when we met.

Z- Where you in school? You said you were working part time?

M- A that time when I met Steve in 1948 I was in school.

Z- And what were you studying?

M- I was in a commercial college, which was sort of the year after high school. But high school was, again, very on a different level, completely. And this was based on high school and I got a very, very good education that one year I went. Then I had to stop because my father died and we couldn't afford. And so I started to work, but I got a very good job. And in 1948 when we met I was still in school, yeah, I think.

S- You were working already.

M- Yeah, maybe I was already working. I took a course at night.

Z- What were you working at?

M- I was a secretary in foreign languages.

Z- So you spoke English, German . . .

M- English, German and Norwegian, yeah. So that was a very good job. And then we got married in 1949, the end of 1949. So we've been together . . .

Z- And you lived not in Oslo.

M- Yes.

S- In Oslo.

Z- So you moved to Oslo?

S- Another thing, not only did she have a nice pair of glasses, but she also had an apartment. You have to tell them that.

Z- Let's hear about the apartment.

M- The apartment was really not mine. The apartment was a rented apartment, very beautiful, but my mother and I lived in that apartment. But my mother got married for the second time just a few months before us, so I did have an apartment.

S- See. [laughter]

M- So he moved in and we had a very nice life in Norway. We really did. There was absolutely no reason on earth why we should leave.

Z- What language did you speak to one another?

M- Then, Norwegian.

Z- Norwegian was your common language?

M- Yeah, very strange because really his . . .

S- Never spoke German together.

M- No, never.

Z- And you both knew German?

S- Yeah.

Z- Well you for sure because you grew up in Germany. And you learned German after or during the war?

S- Yeah, both.

Z- But not before the war?

S – Yeah, yeah, I knew German from school. I knew German and French from school. I didn't know English.

M- That's right. The schools in Europe were, I don't know if they are today, but they were very different. We grew up with a lot of languages, and that came in very handy.

Z- You didn't know Yiddish did you?

S- No.

Z- And you didn't know, from the German just. . .

M- No, not really. I heard Yiddish for the first time when I came to Norway, because my parents had very good friends who are somewhat older than they. They were from Poland originally, so they spoke Yiddish. First time I ever heard the language.

Z- So you were happy, the cold didn't bother you, the darkness didn't bother you in Norway, so why did you decide to move?

S- The others decided to come to Canada.

Z- Who?

S- The other four [0:25:25] who came with us. For one reason [or] another decided to come to Canada, and this is [0:25:53-55], no?

M- Yeah, absolutely.

J- So friends of yours? People you were socializing with?

M- Yeah. They decided to leave Norway, there's no future there. Also, I'm sure some of them thought that . . .

S- Political situations weren't famous in those days. You know the year there was the . . .

Z- Cold War.

S- I think at that time was the . . .

M- Korean War

S- And the Russian were, you know the occupation powers, and they didn't understand each other, they were fighting. That was when Berlin was, well that was before your time, but Berlin was governed by four powers. The French, the English, the Russians . . . It was for us, we were very sensitive because we have lived through terrible times. We were very sensitive for political . . . even if it was just a touch what we have experienced. We were very sensitive to that, so we decided to immigrate. In fact, first we went to the Venezuela consulate. Thank God we didn't go there because we would have been [0:27:30] would have been a big problem for us now. But they told us that, the consulate was a very nice guy, so he says "I tell you frankly, I give you the visa in five minutes, but this is not for you. Venezuela is not for you".

J- What year was this? What year were you starting to apply?

M- Oh, about 1950, 51.

S- 1950, '51.

M- Well it was funny because we had to go to Denmark. There was no Venezuelan consulate in Norway, so we had to go to Denmark to the Venezuelan consulate. We took our bicycles because we know that everybody bicycles in Denmark, and he was a much better bicyclist than I. And I really had a lot of trouble keeping up with him there. But the consult said that you are a young couple, it's very hard in Venezuela, and you will probably want to have children. And like Steve said, he said "It's not . . . I would not advise you to go to

Venezuela". And there weren't too many places to go, you know, really. I think we really had no other choice than coming to Canada, where we knew nobody.

J- And why was Canada a choice?

M- It wasn't a choice. It was . . . it became a choice of necessity.

S- A choice of one. [laughter]

Z- Did you want to go to the States?

M- No, couldn't get in. I had an uncle at the time, an aunt and cousin that lived in the States, but it would have taken years. And at that point everybody was leaving, so we had to leave, and that was stupid, but yeah. And so, Canada was the only country where we were able to get to without any problems.

Z- So how did you get in? Did you get in on a program? With a sponsorship?

M- No.

S- We came over on our own. Like we didn't know anything about Canada, very little actually, very little. If I would have known a little bit, of course at that time times were different, but we would have been better off to go to Toronto, for sure, if we had known anything at all about Canada.

M- Yes but Montreal was a great choice.

S- We didn't even know there was something like a French fact, you know, those days, we really . . . we were ignorant.

Z- So in terms of immigration here, you generally needed a sponsor to be involved or with some of the programs?

M- No, he got a job, which was really no a true job.

J- You got a job when you were still in Norway?

S- Yeah.

M- But it wasn't a job, you know, it was just a pretend job.

Z- Can you talk about that?

S- You know it's like you had to have a sponsor, but the Jewish community has arranged a sponsor.

Z- Yeah I know my parents were sponsored by someone in Ottawa they never met.

S- Exactly.

Z- So this sponsor just was . . . ?

M- It was, it was, really meant nothing. In reality, to us, it meant nothing.

S- No, I went up there and I thanked him. His name was . . .

M- [0:31:26].

S- [same as 0:31:26]. So I went up to him and thanked for . . . he didn't offer [0:31:37].

Z- He was a Jew?

S- Yeah, yeah. He was in the schmatta business---

J- ---So how did you come? By boat? Did you come by boat?

Z- One second, can we hold on. Let's talk about [same as 0:31:26]. So he was in the schmatta business and he guaranteed you a job on paper?

S- No, I didn't want a job from him.

M- No, no, but on paper he did. You have a job on paper.

S- yeah, yeah, but it's just a formality.

M- yeah, yeah, just to get a visa that's all.

Z- Okay, then how did you get to Canada?

J- Did you ride a bicycle? No, you took a boat?

S- Paid for the trip.

Z- A plane or a boat?

M- Boat.

S- We had furniture from Norway that was on the same boat. And I don't want to talk about the boat trip because I was sick from the minute I stepped on the boat 'til we got of in . . . I think it was, I don't know actually, I think it may have been Nova Scotia.

M- No, no, we came straight to Montreal. But I mean poor Steve. First of all we were both very young. Of course he is older than I am. But I was 22, 23 years old and here I have a husband who is deathly sick and I'm going to strange country. You can imagine how I felt. I was afraid I was going to lose him. He didn't drink, he didn't eat. And we really had a rough trip. This was August, it shouldn't have been rough, but it was a freighter, because my great idea we take our furniture. This beautiful furniture. We bought some furniture to come, and I . . . the truth is it was a nice thing to do.

Z- Do you have any of that furniture?

M- No, no, long story. No. But if things would have been normal we would probably still have some of that because it was beautiful. And the furniture actually, I think, contributed to our having a home right away. I mean we didn't know anybody. We actually . . . My mother had a friend in New York whose son was living here. He was an engineer, and they were very nice.

S- It was Teddy Bolgar that we saw. It was Teddy Bolgar's wife's sister whom we knew from Norway.

M- No, no, but this was [0:34:37]. Remember? They invited us.

S- Yeah, yeah.

M- That was important because [same as 0:34:37] was an engineer and he had been living in Canada for a while, his wife is or was Polish. I don't know if she is still alive. And she was a survivor, is, I don't know. And what they did, which was very valuable. They told us where we should live.

Z- So you got off the boat and what did you do?

M- We went to a rooming house.

Z- Where?

M- On Sherbrook (SP?) St.

S- Where did we go?

M- To a rooming house on Sherbrook St.

J- Well I'm glad that she's here, see you would have lied to us, it would have been some other story [laughter], so this is good.

S- We went to a rooming house?

M- A rooming house, yeah.

Z- So what was it a room and access to a kitchen?

M- That was it, you know. But they invited us, as I said, they invited us one night, they told us Cote-St-Luc is a very nice area. Can you imagine?

Z- In 1950?

M- In 1951.

Z- It was farm land.

M- No, but on Cote-St-Luc Rd., right opposite the [0:36:02] synagogue that's where we rented a sublet. A one-bedroom apartment, and it was a very, very nice apartment. We brought in our furniture, we were at home. All we needed now was jobs.

Z- So you weren't in the St. Urbain, Esplanade . . .

M- No, actually Ted Bolgar's wife Marianne, I don't know if he talked about her, she was also in Norway. She and her parents and her sister, they were in Norway, and they came a little bit before us and they went to Esplanade Ave. And we saw them there, and it wasn't good because the father was very sick and he died six weeks after he came here, it was really bad.

S- But didn't she wait for us at the boat?

M- No, nobody waited for us at the boat.

Z- Okay, so you came, you had your apartment within a week?

M- Yeah, very quick.

Z- And then what? You had some money, you brought some money.

S- She got a good job right away. My career was trial and error, but very fast—

J- So what did you do? What job did you get to start with?

M- Well the first month was not so good. The first month brought me to another Hungarian. And he had a small office, he wanted a sort of "Girl Friday", whatever. I didn't like it at all, so two weeks later I stopped working there.

Z- He was a Hungarian survivor?

M- Was he a survivor?

S- Yeah, yeah sure. He was a survivor.

M- Anyway, made no difference, I didn't like to work there. I decided that I wanted something else, so I put an ad in the paper. I was so different in those days, you know. Put an ad in the paper . . .

J- And what did it say?

M- It said something like that I was an English-German stenographer, okay, and I was looking for a job. It's funny how things get sort of intertwined. The company called [0:38:39], which is still in existence, it's a sprinkler company, called—could I come for an appointment? And they were on Belanger. This I remember very well. And I got dressed up, I mean [laughter] here I had just come from Europe with a hat and gloves and an umbrella because it was going to rain and it was very hot. And I went to see Mr. [0:39:06], very, very nice gentleman. He hired me on the spot, forty-five dollars a week, which was a fortune.

Z- That's a huge amount.

M- He said, "I like European girls, I know they will work". He was from Scotland. So I get back home and I'm flying, "I have a job Steve". He said, "Where?". I told him, "On Belanger". Somehow or another he knew that is very far. He said, "No, don't do it, not for you, too far". You remember that? "Too far". No, no, nothing. So, Marianne Bolgar's sister Suzie was his age, she was six years older than I am—had lot's of experience being a secretary. Was very, very, efficient. Spoke languages beautifully. She spoke Hungarian because she was Hungarian. Hungarian, and English, and German and all that, and she didn't have a job. And I said, "You know what? You go there and I bet with you, you are going to get this job". And she went and she became a manager there, eventually, at that company. It was terrific for her, they loved her.

S- You know, just to show you how small is the world, eventually I got into building business. And what she's talking about with Teddy Bolgar's . . .

Z- Sister in law.

S- Mother in law [means sister in law], they were in the sprinkler business [same as 0:38:39]. I think everybody know [same as 0:38:39], and I was building industrial buildings for these kinds of occupancies, and just so happens that [0:38:39] was looking for space and I had space to rent. So I go to this place and I talk to the same executive. I knew the story and I knew the name. And I go there and they introduced me to [0:41:34], that was his name. And he rent a space from me; they have been there for 10 years, terrific tenants. And I told the story and he was very impressed with the story—talked about Teddy's son in law, mother in law . . .

M- Teddy's sister in law, was his sister in law. Marianne's sister, Suzie.

S- Teddy's mother in law.

M- No, sister in law. Because Marianne and Suzie were sisters.

S- Oh, they were sisters. I just wanted to say how small the world it is.

Z- So let's go back, Margret found work right away, what did you do?

S- Well I had a few not so famous encounters, but a couple of years, maybe a year or so later, I was working for a company . . .

Z- When you first came, your first job, what was it?

S- When I first came I worked for a small company and that small company was working for a bigger company, and the company owner was a Jewish guy, his name is [0:43:15], he says "why don't you come and—" , they were promoting a product, so the guy says, "Why don't you come to work for me, for us?" .

Z- So how did you find that first job? Did someone help you?

S- I don't know. Jobs were . . . there were no problems getting jobs. In those days jobs were, you know, the country was growing. The country was a very small country. That was way before your time, you know, that country was [0:43:53]. Anyway . . .

Z- So do you know how much you got paid?

S- Very poor. She got a good job. I got very poorly paid.

Z- Do you remember?

M- He made maybe 25, 30 dollars, and in the meantime my first real job was with a German company, because I didn't go, I didn't work for [same as 0:38:39], so I still had to go somewhere else. So, I got a call from a company and I was interviewed by a very nice gentleman and he asked me what religion I was in German. I said, "I'm Jewish". And they hired me. I figured they can't be German, they wouldn't hire me. Why would he ask me my religion? If he's German he's not going to hire a Jew. But it turns out that this was a German company and I was not comfortable, but I had a terrific job. And I was, oh my goodness, I had raises all over the place. Remember? It was unbelievable. Because I was exactly what they needed and they were what I needed.

Z- So they paid you well.

M- Very well. I mean we were not, it's not that we had a lot of money, but we lived well, we lived okay. And you bought groceries for ten dollars a week and that was good.

Z- So when did things change for you?

S- Yeah, I had been working for this company, but in the meantime I must say that this was . . . just so happened that her mother's husband died and she was very well off, or reasonably well of.

Z- Your mother?

S- Her mother.

M- My mother, which was second marriage.

S- She came here and she had some money. Maybe today it wouldn't be that much of a fortune, but those days it was a respectable amount of money. So we were already looking around here and there, and she had a reasonable amount, I would say small capital, so I . . .

M- You bought that house.

S- How much time have you got? [laughter]

Z- All the time in the world. As much as you want to give me.

S- I was working for this company. They were plumbing manufacturers, and you know, plumbing manufacturers are connected to real estate, to building this and that. So I work in there, and I had a friend who was selling aluminum windows, but he was very . . . he's only maybe . . . older immigrant than I was, but he was reasonably successful. So one day he comes to me and he says, "Steve", he says, "I hear that real estate is a good business, and I also hear that the city is auctioning out land and we just have to pay down 10% and the balance in five years". So I said to him . . . No, actually I had a little money and he had a little money so I didn't really need at that time my mother in law's money. But I said to him, "Look I'm working here, I can't get out, I can't go to the auction, I can't do anything. I'm working here". So he listens, one day he comes to me, he says, "Steve, I want to congratulate you. You are a proud owner of ten lots on Cadillac Street".

J- On what street?

M & S- Cadillac.

S- Today everybody knows where Cadillac is. You know where Cadillac is.

Z- I don't. Where is it?

M- Cadillac is in Montreal North I think.

Z- Laval isn't it?

M- Where is Cadillac?

S- He says, "You have to pay down maybe thousand dollars, and three hundred dollars a year. Thrity-five cents a foot". I'm owner, I have no choice, he bought it for me. Next Saturday when I don't work, I go look for Cadillac St. You know where Cadillac is now?

J- I still don't know, nobody is telling me 'cause I'm not from Montreal. So it's in North Montreal, but I don't know what that means.

S- Anybody in Montreal these days knows where . . .

M- I don't. Where is it? In Montreal North?

S- Very good street, but this is only 50 years later. So that afternoon, that Saturday afternoon go look for Cadillac Street. I have a map in front of me. You know, Cadillac it was like absolutely nowhere, absolutely nowhere. I said to myself, "Goodbye my thousand dollars, it will never be good". Anyway, he spoke excellent French this guy and he was a go-getter. One day he comes to me, he says "Steve I have good news for you". He says "We sold the land". "What?". I said "How much?". He says "thrity-five cents a foot". I think we paid a cent and a half a foot and we sold it for thirty-five cents a foot. And from there on I knew where the business is.

Z- What year was that Steve?

S- '53. And then of course, things happened, you know, this city there's so many immigrants were coming. It was really sprouting out this city. People were building, people buying, selling, so on. And I jumped on the bandwagon and I got luck. But, you know, it's ups and downs like in any other business.

Z- So you got into development?

S- I was building.

M- So where is Cadillac St? Do you know where it is?

----talking about Cadillac street----

Z- So who were your friends when you came?

M- Good question.

Z- Your social life.

M- Can I tell them about our social life? Because it affected me a lot more than him; they were all Hungarians, and I didn't understand.

Z- Immigrants.

M- Immigrants, all of them. All of them. All of the people that we came with, and he met one very old friend here from Hungary. And we only had Hungarian friends. And I was struggling because I didn't understand a word they said.

Z- You were speaking Norwegian to each other at this point?

M- Oh yeah we still spoke Norwegian.

S- Only in the very beginning.

M- Oh, very much 'til the kids were born.

S- Maybe.

M- Yeah, because that was our common language. That was the only thing. So our social life, although it was good, because we had a lot of people that we knew, but they didn't speak English yet. Not well enough to socialize. And it was very unnatural for them to speak English. So here I was until we met . . . then we met, I remember, we met a couple from Finland, they weren't Jewish and they had a baby. And you know I tried to meet somebody, that was more like, somebody that I could socialize with. But then one day we met a couple, they were just made for us. He was Hungarian and had actually gone to the same school as Steve, but they didn't know each other from Hungary, and she's French.

Z- France, French?

M- From France, but had lived in the United States.

Z- Was she Jewish?

M- Yeah, all Jewish. And we became friends and that was a very good thing for me. Because here was somebody who was really in the same position as I am, because she didn't understand any Hungarian either. That's really what happened the first years. That was our social life.

Z- Why only Hungarian immigrants?

M- Well, it takes time to meet Canadians and you're not really Canadian yet, you know.

S- But not that many years later we met . . . but didn't we get Herby and . . .

M- Okay, but that was many years later. We already had kids. Once we had children it changed a bit because it's different when you have children.

Z- What about the established Jewish community? Non-immigrant.

M- We didn't . . .

S- Very easy to join.

M- But we didn't.

S- Well didn't we . . . Herby and this whole group of people, and then the golf course.

M- Yeah, but that was much later Steve. That was not so soon.

S- It takes time.

M- Exactly.

Z- So why at the beginning do you think there was not much integration?

M- I think, as far as I'm concerned, I didn't feel Canadian. You know it takes time to feel . . . although I have to tell you I loved Montreal right away. And the reason for that was because there's lot's of Jewish people here. And I felt very comfortable although I didn't know them. The winters were cold but . . .

Z- Norway. . .

M- No, no, it's not colder than Norway.

Z- No but it's similar.

M- They are very similar.

Z- Yeah.

M- The sun shone here, the sun never shone in Norway. And I loved Canada, I mean Montreal, right away. I felt very much at home, but the social aspect of it came later.

S- Yeah, maybe but I have never felt any different—that I wasn't born here. You know, like I've done business and I was rubbing shoulders with Canadian Jews, which of course you can explain that they were also, they were second generation Jews. You know, it's not like American where it would have been like fifth generation Jews. But the Canadian Jews were . . . if they didn't have parents as survivors, but they were immigrants themselves, and that's why it was so easy to . . .

Z- But that was later . . .

S- Very easy to blend in . . .

M- That was later on, because the fact of having children, then we moved from one house to another, we moved to Ville St. Laurent, and then we got married that I became friendly with. They are Canadian and we're Canadians and having Canadians. And our kids became friends. Once we had children it changed.

Z- Okay, so I'll get to that in a second. You didn't know English when you came here right?

S- Not much.

Z- So how did you learn English?

S- It came with the territory.

Z- So you didn't go to classes or anything?

S- Yeah, Yeah.

M- French. He went to French.

S- Yeah, yeah. French. English.

M- No, you didn't go to English classes, you didn't learn any—

S- No you said I didn't go to any French classes.

M- Yes you did. You went to Madame Lette. You had lot's of French lessons. Don't you remember the Lettes, where you learnt your French?

S- yeah, yeah, yeah.

M- Oh, yes. He spoke very well French.

Z- When was that? Right at the beginning?

M- No, he decided he's going to have to speak French because in construction—

Z- So that was later on?

M- Well not really that much later. He realized that pretty soon, and somehow we met this French couple from France and she gave French lesson. I can't remember exactly when. Before we had the kids?

S- yeah, yeah.

M- It was soon somehow.

Z- What was the role of the Jewish community in helping you in terms of integrating?

M- No. Nothing.

Z- How come?

M- I don't even think . . .the Jewish community, we had nothing to do with the Jewish community.

S- Well you don't deal with the community you deal with people in the community.

M- No, because you what, once our lives were really busy working and that's enough for a young couple when you immigrate. Then in the meantime Steve was saying that my mother's husband died, but he didn't tell you that we moved back to Europe. We moved to Sweden because she said that there would be good opportunity for Steve. And so we did something that I did not want to do, but we did it anyway because we wanted to help her. It was a very poor decision.

J- What year was that?

M- That was 1953. And it was a bad decision because Sweden, although they had not been in the war, they had a shortage of apartments. It was supposed to be a temporary arrangement that we stayed with my mother, but anyway, three months later I said "no". We both thought that it's not the right thing. We wanted to get out of Europe and we're back again. I mean, mistake, mistake. That's when we sold all the furniture before we left. And then we came back and we started all over again.

Z- So you had to get a new job?

M- Yeah but then . . . yeah I did . . .

S- I also took the same job.

M- You went to [1:01:37], back to [same as 1:01:37].

S- Same job.

M- You, but not me. I started and then I found out that I was pregnant and I couldn't work because I had some problems. That was the end of my career working for others. Didn't work anymore. I did, but not for anybody except the two of us.

Z- So you had the baby.

M- I had a baby.

Z- And where did you live?

M- We lived on what is now St. Kevin. Very bad apartment, very bad. But it was a two bedroom apartment we wanted.

J- This is 1954?

M- That's 1954. It wasn't a very good apartment. It was third floor walk up. But you know I have met my neighbor, and again, you meet people when you move, and I had a baby. And that's also when I met this couple who were Hungarian, but we became friends because we did some business with them. He's the one who had the window, who was selling aluminum windows. The one that he bought the lot on Cadillac St. with.

S- After that, just to show . . . how much time have you got?

Z- We have time.

S- You know, I worked for this guy [1:03:31] and one day when the business became slow he fired me, with quite a few others. And she was pregnant, I never forget this. But I already knew that I look around for real estate, because Mike and I we made a very nice little dollar by selling this land on Cadillac. So I go around from agent to agent. And this guy, his name was . . . how can I forget his name? He talks to somebody that he said "tremendous deal", so when he puts down the phone, so I ask him "what's this tremendous deal that your talking about". So he says, "On [1:04:41]". I don't know, you know [same as 1:04:41] here, in Outremont?

Z- Yes I do.

S- He says, "This guy, he's on his death bed, he is an owner of a distillery". His name was [1:05:08]. So he says, "his house was for sale". So I said, "Give me the address". So I get the address, I go there. At that time I don't have job, I'm fired, so go take a look at the . . . didn't know, what did I know about real estate? I go in the house, I go down to the basement, there's a billiard pool there, on top of the billiard pool there was ice because the roof was leaking, and this was in the basement. You can image how the other condition of this building was, but it was, all in all it was, something that I said . . . he gave me the price at like nine thousand dollars, and I figured that there may be something. And I see that people are coming and going, people are looking. So I said to this guy, "You know what?" . . . No, he tells me, he says "You only have to pay a thousand dollars down and I'll fix up a mortgage for you for the rest". So I'm thinking, thinking . . . He said, "You know [1:06:42] you only pay down five hundred dollars. If you change your mind the only thing you can lose is five hundred dollars". So I said, "That's reasonable". I signed off with shacking hands and I go home, I never forget, maybe she'll remember this. I go home, I walk up our third story walk-up, and I arrive, just stepping in this house, I get a phone call.

M- I remember this.

S- Do you remember this?

M- Sure I do.

S- So, this agent calls me [1:07:24], so he says, "You know, you were faster than my client, my client wanted to buy this house, but you were first, but I tell you", he says "my client wants to give you a thousand dollars for the offer". You know, because in other words he wanted to take over the offer.

J- And give you a thousand dollars.

S- Yeah. So I said to myself – of course I was very tempting, because at that time for a thousand dollars I used to work for four months – but I said "You know what, I don't think a thousand dollars is sufficient". Anyway back and forth. At the end of the day they give me \$3500. I paid them \$500, they gave me \$3500 and I gave them the offer. I didn't have to do anything. So from there on I certainly didn't have to even look back, because I saw that this is where the business is. And I bought a few lots from the same agent, and I was very successful with those lots. And really thereafter we have never looked back.

Z- So you had the baby and then how long did you take off before you started working with him?

M- Oh, I didn't do anything for him for a while, because we work differently. And working together didn't seem to be too tempting for me. And besides, there really wasn't anything that I could particularly have done at that moment. And then two years, we lived in Bedford Rd. at the time and two years later we moved to St. Laurent.

Z- You bought a home?

M- Yes, we bought a house. And I was very, very, happy. It's the first, oh my god, I was . . . that house meant so much to me. Even today I still have that feeling that---

J- ---and where along St. Laurent?

Z- Not the street, it's a neighborhood.

M- An area of Montreal. I felt grounded, you know, I was just very, very happy. And then I had . . .oh no, before that, my goodness no . . .My daughter was born when we were still on Bedford Rd. and that was also really, I mean, I couldn't believe how lucky. First I had a boy and then I had a girl, I had everything. And then we moved into that house, when she was three years old, she was already three years old, and I got a car. Because now it was getting serious, the older one had to go to school, and I was supposed to learn how to drive, so I drove, and very happy. But then Steve started to build apartment buildings.

Z- This was in the 60s?

M- This was in, yeah, in the 60s. Then he started to build apartment buildings and that's when I came in. Because in the house that we bought, the previous owner, whom we became very friendly with – you see how these things sort of . . . they were also, she's a survivor. He was in Israel. Did Ernest . . . He was in Israel, no?

S- He was Czech originally.

M- Yeah I know, but during the war he was in Israel. Anyway, we bought a house and the previous owner had built in the basement so that there was a maid's room. We made that into an office for him, oh no, me. There was an office and in the maid's room I got a typewriter, and I was done. Manually typewriter. So I helped him, I began to help in. The kids were away at a certain time during the day already, so that's how it went.

Z- So when you had the kids earlier on and you weren't working it wasn't a financial problem, you were able to manage?

M- No.

Z- And you didn't work at that time?

M- No I didn't work. At the time his income was always very sufficient. We were never ever, ever were lacking for anything, but it was irregular, and I had to get used to that. You know, somebody is used to having a salary and seeing money coming in regularly, it was an adjustment, but not because there wasn't enough money to buy everything for the kids, to have a very decent standard of living. And then when he started making more money we started to travel, he and I. Thank god we had a good life.

Z- So what about the Holocaust after the war? Did you talk about it? With friends? At work with people who lived in Canada, non-immigrants?

S- We don't have to talk about, we've been thinking about it, we lived it. Because we made a few dollars it doesn't mean we have forgotten.

Z- No, no, right after the war, your early years.

M- You know what, we . . .

S- You know what this is? This is an ipad.

M- You don't know the ipad?

Z- I know the ipad. I didn't know what it was when it was closed.

S- Well this happens to be about Spinoza for the simple reason that it has something to do with a guy named Alfred Rosenberg. You'll excuse me if you don't know anything about

Rosenberg, but he was Hitler's associate. He was one of the worst anti-Semites that you can think of. I'm trying to get you the . . .

M- But in the meantime I want to tell you something interesting . . .

S- See this is what we have here. Most of these, these are the titles that are in here. You see these are the titles. Most of it has something to do with the Holocaust. Most of it. And I just want to, you know, The Garden of the Beast, you must have heard of. The Invisible Bridge, that's 100% Holocaust. The Last Brother.

M- When you read it, I didn't read it yet. I have it in my kindle, but I didn't read it yet.

S- So most of this is Holocaust. Besides, because the reason why we read on ipad, because my eye are not like an eagles eye anymore. So this is . . . But like you wanted to know . . .

Z- I just wanted to know those first few years after . . .

M- I tell you what I think is very strange. We lived in Oslo, I was in hiding [the place was] maybe two, three hours by car. Maybe four hours drive. And I never suggested to Steve that we should go and see where I had been in hiding. Isn't that strange? And he never brought up the subject, so at that time, I don't think we really wanted to deal with it. That came later. That came later.

Z- You were friends with a lot of Hungarians, did they talk?

M- No we didn't talk about it at all, ever, no. The Holocaust with the friends in the beginning? Never.

S- No.

M- Never. Later, you know, much later.

S- What is it to talk about the Holocaust?

M- Well you talk about your past. But we didn't. Absolutely didn't.

Z- Did people want to know about here? The Jewish community in Canada?

M- Nobody asked.

Z- Why not?

M- I don't know.

Z- Why do you think?

M- I don't think they were interested. I don't even think they connected us to the Holocaust.

S- No they never spoke about the Holocaust. I don't think any of these people who I know now, which is, well very few, that they know that I have been in a concentration camp. 'Cause it's past history.

Z- Did you talk to your kids about it?

M- Yeah, that was a little different. Well I didn't really talk much to them about it, no. But when my grandchildren were, I think the oldest grandson was maybe 10 years old, I think so, I decided to write down my story. And I always liked to write, you know, to kids at camp and stuff like that. I just like to write. So I wrote my story very simple and I showed it to the grandchildren. And my second grandson who was eight I think at the time, seven or eight, he was very interested. The oldest one, not particularly. And I have to say that I don't know how interested they eventually became when I re-wrote my story and it's on the internet, and I liked to . . . at that point I had already sort of, I like my story, I wrote my story in a different way. I do a lot of reading, so I became a better writer that way. So my story . . . But how much of an interest they really have I don't know.

Z- One of the things that I found, you know people are people and everyone is different, some people talked about it and some people didn't. A lot of people who I interviewed basically said that the established Jewish community, they were simply not interested in hearing anything about it.

M- That's what I think.

Z- But that's no longer true. What's changed.

M- Yeah, not at all, not at all. I mean even the Holocaust museum itself, I had an issue with them at one point, which I won't go into. But since then it has changed tremendously.

Z- Can you talk about that issue?

M- Well, it was an issue of non-interest, because I had translated a book and gotten the princely sum of three thousand dollars for it. Remember that book? And I decided it doesn't make me rich to keep the three thousand dollars, I'll give it to the Holocaust museum, because I just felt that I wanted to do something. And I went to them and I was received by, who I know now was, one of the people who worked there. And she went in to speak to somebody who was working there on a voluntary basis, but in a big position. And she said "well suggest the brochure". I don't know if you know but every year there's the Holocaust education series, which is on right now. And I said to her, you know, "I would really like something a little bit more permanent if it's possible, three thousand dollars is not a lot of money in that context, but something a little bit more permanent". And she said, "Okay we'll see what we can do". And they never called me back. So three thousand for the Holocaust museum, not matter what, was a big sum. So I got very upset and I wrote to this

particular person who was supposed to decide eventually. And she was so apologetic and “how could this happen”. It happened. And she invited me to cocktail party that I know now is for the volunteers, and I said, “No I’m not interested in cocktail parties”. Which I am truthfully not. And that was it for the Holocaust museum. But then my children, our children, when I was eighty years old they decided to buy a spot on a plaque in our honor, and they did that. And because they did that they got in touch with . . . do you know Alice Herscovitch?

Z- Oh she’s the director, I don’t know her though.

M- Yeah she’s . . . and a very, very good executive. And that’s how I got in touch with the Holocaust. She then asked if I would come by and I didn’t, and I became a speaker, which I never thought I was going to be. Ever. For Anybody. But I like it, I love to talk to the kids because I have a story that’s not hard for the kids to listen to, because I was in Norway, and so, this is it. But the truth is that the community definitely wasn’t interested. But now it’s so different.

Z- What do you think changed? Why the transformation?

M- I think it’s because right now they know that we are on our last . . . we are the last. In fact, yesterday I was telling a friend of mine that I got an email from the Holocaust museum, “Could I go somewhere next Tuesday?”. She said, “Are they still calling you?”. I said, “Yeah, I’m one of the youngest, of course they call me”. [laughter]

Z- You are one of the youngest, you are, that is very true.

S- We are a little bit different because I have tried to understand in the last fifty years how this could have happened. And I read a lot on it, all kinds of other things over there. And I can’t understand how this could have happened.

M- So can you understand why we have so much anti-Semitism today in this day and age? Do you understand that? That’s even worse.

S- I don’t think . . . they might understand it, I will never understand it.

M- It’s terrible.

Z- Yeah. Now, all your friends, or most of your friends, were survivors. Some of them I assume came to Canada with very little, right? They came with nothing.

M- Yes. Yes.

Z- How did they manage?

M- Very well. We have friends who really did well here.

Z- But did they get help from the community?

M- No, no, no.

Z- Why not? Why do you think that was?

M- I don't think they, Victor for instance, they didn't get any help.

S- No, no, no. They have identical stories that I have. [Not sure, response begins at 1:25:37]

M- I mean this friend of our, they live in Florida.

S- Fifty years ago this used to be a different country. There were opportunities for people who wanted to better their lives.

M- I mean even . . .

S- All the people whom we came with, they are well-to-do. You know, they are not [1:26:08], but they're all comfortable, middle class, very comfortable middle class life.

Z- You were going to say something about Victor?

M- yeah, even Teddy he came with nothing and he did okay. I mean if his wife would have been healthy, and she wasn't, I think they would have had a nice life. It must have been hard. But otherwise they all had good lives. Really good lives. Decent lives.

S- Do you know Teddy's daughter?

Z- I don't know her?

M- She is incredibly. I mean she's a librarian by profession, but she also gives book reviews, and I go to her book reviews once a month, and she is unbelievable. She is so smart and so great. Really. Can be very proud. Religious, very religious.

Z- Do you have any questions?

J- Did you give to Israel?

M- We give more than most because all our family is there.

J- Your family is there, that's right.

S- I think that maybe as a p.s., it may be interesting that we have four children, and none of them are here. Three of them are in Israel the other one is in the State [1:28:08], but he also is going to move to Israel. So you explain it? I mean this is a great country. Nobody bothers you. You want to be a religious person, you don't want to have a religion, it's your choice.

Z- You weren't religious?

M- Never and we have these ultra religious grandsons with the black hats. Where does that come in?

J- Yeah, where does that come in? How does that happen? [laughter]

Z- Now your parents were not religious before the war. Was your family religious before the war?

S- No, not my immediate family, but some of my family I knew of, but I have never seen them. They were ultra religious, but whatever the family is I don't think that it has anything to do with me, because they are part of another generation, you know. My set is completely different, as if I would have been remaining in Hungary.

Z- Yeah. Well my mother for example, my mother is from Poland, my father is from Lithuania. My mother, you know, made a promise to her father that she would always maintain some religious life, right. And she kept that. My father I think became an atheist after the war, so there was this, you know, struggle. But does it matter? I don't know. People that we have interviewed, a lot have not become religious, or became religious later in life or . . . you know a lot of people right after the war abandoned religion.

M- For sure. I could have been either. I really could have.

S- You were brought up in Nova Scotia?

Z- No Montreal. My father was a tailor.

J- They came in when? In 1952?

Z- '52.

S- Oh they came in '52 too. They were in concentration camps?

Z- Yes, both of them.

M- It doesn't go very far does it.

Z- No. Okay, any questions you have?

