

Interviewee: Strasser

Date:

Z- So let's start from the very beginning, when you were born, where you were born, talk to me about your family.

S- As I mentioned to you on the phone, you know, I was born actually in a country which doesn't exist as such today. It was Czechoslovakia., which today is being separated into two different countries: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. I was born in the Slovak part in 1926. October '26. So in another few days I'll be celebrating, or maybe regretting [laughs], one or the other. The . . . now. . . the population there actually, even though it belong to the Slovak part, but it was mainly ethnic Hungarians, because Czechoslovakia didn't exist before 1918, it was only formed then. So, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. So . . . In my family I was actually the only Slovak, the rest were all Hungarians. In 1938 the allies, the English and the French, were, in their generosity, handed over to Hitler, you know, Czechoslovakia.

Z- Okay, before we go there, we've skipped 12 years of your life.

S- Oh I see [laughter]

Z- So I'd like you to talk to me about your parents and what it was like growing up, your education, family, brothers, sisters . . .

S- I was born in a town called [0:02:16], which had about 24,000 inhabitants. I don't know exactly at what age we moved. My parents and I moved to Bratislava, which was the capital of the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia, where my father was working as a bookkeeper for the Philips company.

Z-The Philips appliance company . . .

S- The Philips company, yeah. My mother was of course a housewife. I mean it didn't exist in those days, Europe, you know, the wives, women, women shouldn't we working, you know. Their work was at being a housewife. My education, elementary school evidently was in Slovak.

Z- What did you speak at home?

S- Hungarian.

Z- Hungarian. And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

S- I was an only child.

Z- You were an only child. That was unusual for those times right?

S- Yes and no. Well, basically, I think, I once . . . you know, just as a childish curiosity I asked my parents, how come I'm all alone. Seemingly they couldn't afford it. You know, couldn't afford to have another child. So, I remained an only child. Now, in 1938, it was just regular education, you know, at elementary school.

Z- Secular education?

S- Yeah, right.

Z- Now, was your family religious?

S\_ My grandparents were. My father, not at all. Not at all.

Z- and your mother?

S- No, my mother was born, brought up in a religious environment, but she being married to my father evidently, you know, it's sort of like petered out, you know. And me as well as a consequence, I'm also, I'm not religious. I'm a traditionalist. And I think so were they. You know, we observed all the holidays, the Jewish holidays. But I don't recall going to the synagogue, for instance, in my childhood. Until, again, coming back to 1938 when we were technically thrown out of Czechoslovakia, because my father, later father, never took out his citizenship so when the . . . Czechoslovakia was dissected by the allies all non-Slovak, or Czechoslovak citizens were more or less, not necessarily deported, but asked to leave and go back to their home towns. So we went back to my home town, and there I continued my education under the Hungarian regime.

Z- Okay, so that was part of Hungary. So you were 12 years old.

S- Yeah, I was 12 years old that's right.

Z- Were your friends Jewish? Did you hang around with Jews particularly?

S- Yes, of course, of course. Because I mean it was a given, you know, I mean the separation was always there, you know. The . . . the . . . My home town actually was really, very agricultural, so it was peasantry. So they, of course, you know, the Jews were the higher, hierarchy, the peasants were the bottom, you know. So even if you would want to associate with non-Jewish kids, they shied away from you, so more or less you were practically forced to, you know, to . . . to be with your own kind. Although, it was . . . I had nothing against it. The only place where we actually mixed was in school. And even there, for instance, you know, we had . . . the high school, because at that time I was already going to high school, they had the religious hour. You know, I mean for Catholics, Christians. So then we were actually sent out of class and we went to our synagogue, where we had one hour of Hebrew or Jewish education during the same time. Seeing that it was within walking distance, you know.

Z- Was there a large Jewish community or . . . ?

S- There must have been approximately 400, 500, thereabouts. I think there was . . . If I'm not mistaken, by looking at some books that I read, you know, from my hometown, about 10% of the population was Jewish [0:07:22] over 2,000, a little bit over 2,000. However, again, there was a separation, of course, you know, of the religious aspect, you know, like the orthodox and the neolog, which you know it a type of . . . here they call it conservative, you know. So those factions didn't mix you know. So we belonged to the neolog community. My grandfather was very religious and was very prominent in the Jewish community.

Z- Your mother's father?

S- Yeah, my mother's father. I never knew my father's family.

Z- Because?

S- Well, he came from a city not a town, but a city called [0:08:13], which was one of the largest, I mean, not necessarily the largest, but one of the largest cities in Hungary. And that's about all I knew, from him and about him. Once when I was, which eventually I'll tell you about that part, when I became an apprentice in Budapest, he introduced me to some half-sisters of his, which was something completely unbeknownst to me. I never knew that he had 'em and never did I meet them afterwards, you know. So I never knew my father's family. Everything was on my mother's side.

Z- So when your father went back in '38 to the town you were born in, did he work as a bookkeeper as well? What did he do?

S- Nothing. Unfortunately there was no jobs available in a small town like ours. Philips didn't exist over there, you know. The bookkeeping was, I don't know, I guess they didn't need any bookkeepers or something, so he was idling, you know. First of all he had a well to do father in-law, you know. So he spent his time, I think, in a club playing cards all day.

Z- So your mother came from a wealthy family?

S- Well not wealthy, far be it from wealthy, but comfortable. My grandfather had a clothing store and I guess, you know, that's how they . . . that's what they made their living from. So we had . . . although then having a maid was actually a given. Everybody had a maid, you know, so as compared to here where having a maid is practically a luxury, over there, you know, you hired somebody that was it. So even that aspect, if I mention the fact that we used to have a maid, people are "oh you must have been well off", not necessarily, but a comfortable life. Comfortable enough they were even able to sustain my father without him working.

Z- So you're still in high school, you went back to high school, and then . . .?

S- Well, after my fourth year, well actually in wasn't really high school. There it was a different education. You may be familiar with it, it's called gymnasium, which is eight hours, eight hours. Each classes of education, you know, which . . 'til you get your university level. After the fourth year, I got fed up, I got tired. I was bored in school frankly, so I told my parent and they gave me only one alternative. " You don't want to go to school, learn a trade".

Z- And how old were you?

S- I was . . it was '42, 16.

Z- So that was 1942.

S- 1942, yeah. So the trade was handbag maker for the simple reason that many of our extended family were in that business. In Budapest they had factories and stores.

Z- So leather?

S- Yeah. Handbag, yeah, handbag. You know, manual labor, you know. Not with machinery but, you know, do everything by hand. And I was apprenticed in Budapest to one of my cousins in 1942. I was doing that until 1944 when the Germans took over, occupied Hungary. March 1944. Interesting aspect of it was, actually I don't know if you want to go into that part, in . . . they entered Budapest March 19, 1944, which was on a Sunday morning, 5 o'clock. I know the exact dates for it for one simple reason. I decided on March 17<sup>th</sup>, on a Friday, that I was homesick. I wanted to go see my father, my parents. And my cousin who was my boss, she was adamant she didn't want to let me go, she said "because before the Easter season, you know, very busy, blah, blah, blah". Anyways, I said I don't give a darn, I wanna go, I want to see my parents. So I went home. Took the train and went home. We were about 200km from Budapest, you know, so it was like a couple of hours of train trip, and I . . . Sunday morning, I mean it's amazing how news travels. Sunday morning, Germans came into Budapest 5 o'clock in the morning. By 5:30 or 6 o'clock the rumor were flying already around that, you know, that happened, that the Germans are in. But it was only rumors, we didn't know. In the interim, Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup>, my parents got a telegram. You know, I give actually, by the way, apropos, I give lectures, I mean just speeches to school children, you know like holocaust survivors, memory, you know, speeches and all that. So I always tell them that in case you don't know what a telegram is, it's predecessor of email, you know, so that they know. When you tell them telegram they don't know what that is. So anyways they got a telegram from my cousin that if I don't show up to work Monday morning my contract will be broken. So naturally that was like a tragedy, my gosh my whole future was in peril, you know. So it was decided then, Saturday once they got the telegram, that okay Sunday afternoon I will take the train, I'll go back to Budapest. Now there's dilemma that supposedly the Germans occupied Budapest. There was a little debate, I said what are we going to do, you know, are you going are you not going? So finally the decision was made, it was such naiveté really, you know, we didn't know. My parents says "look if it's true and you see, remain on the train and come back home". As I said, naiveté, you know, because . . . So one good thing, if you want to call it that,

was I never said goodbye to my parents. Whenever I come to that I always choke up. We just said "see you tomorrow" incase, and if it's not true then the German, no problems, so we will see each other. So that was the last time that I saw my parents. On arrival, a strange uniform shows up on the train. A German soldier, you know. Chased everybody off the train and as we were going out, they lined everybody up, you know. There was a Hungarian policeman on one side of the exit and the German soldier on the other one. And you had to present your ID, which at that time already carried the big big letter indicating Jew. Now I don't know whether the police man was negligent or good willing, or whatever, he looks at my ID, which clearly shows Jew and says "okay go'. As I was going out there was a group of people, kids, old ladies, pregnant women, babies, like a whole conglomeration of people, so I just passed them by. When I got home, to the home where I was living, that's when I found out that that was the first group of Jews taken out to trains and the first group of Jews deported to Auschwitz. So I was saved . . . in a way. So anyways, 1944 I started, you know, I didn't go back. I, first of all, I went into the [], you know, to the shop, my cousin's shop, and I treated her all kinds of names that you can imagine. I swore at her. I said, "how dare you separate me from my parents. Look at what you did to me, I'm here without them". In retrospect, if not for her I would have been deported with my parents.

Z- She wasn't deported?

S- No, you see the Budapest Jews were actually saved for something better, I don't know what it was. Actually she ended up hidden in one of the famous hidden homes, and I ended up in the ghetto in Budapest.

Z- And you were there the whole war?

S- I beg your pardon? No, no, no, no. First of all in . . . that was all like after March, after, you know, the Germans came around to the home where I was living. It was a home strictly for out of town apprentices. And they came offering jobs, naturally, without pay, but at least certain advantages that we had. Everyone had to wear the yellow star at that time. We were exempt if we were working for them. Therefore it means we are able to go to movies, which people wearing the yellow star couldn't. We were able to shop anytime, anywhere, which the Jewish people weren't. We were able to go to libraries, which the Jewish people weren't.

J- And you were exempt because you had work with them?

S- Yeah, because we working for the Germans, yeah.

Z- You were making leather bags.

S- So we didn't have to wear the star. Actually it was clipped on you know. If and when we didn't do any work we had to wear the star. When we were working with them, so our job basically was, you know, basically emptying confiscated Jewish homes, transporting to them . . . you know, lugging it into a truck, transporting to a huge warehouse where we displayed them again as rooms. And the German officers came, selected their furniture and

then we delivered it again, to the confiscated Jewish homes. So they moved in, you know, the German officers. So that was our work.

Z- You didn't do leather. You didn't work with leather then?

S- No, no, no. That job was finished. Then in later on, I think it was around July, something like that, the Germans got sick and tired administering the country, so they handed it over to the local Nazi party, the Hungarian Nazi party. The famous Arrow Cross Party. I don't know anybody ever heard of them or not yet. So they . . . their first thing was right away to come, how do you say that, to put all the Jews into specific Jewish houses, you know, apartment houses. Which were all indicated with the big yellow star of course. And just to give you an example, you know, like an apartment that normally would have, a house let's say, a couple with two kids, we were there about 15-20 people. You know, they congregated us together so they should had an easier way of getting rid of us because that was their whole goal. Which eventually they did, you know, one day not too longer after they put us in those houses . . . they marched us out on the streets and with hands held high, we were marched for about 4 or 5kms to a soccer field where we were formed into labor battalions and sent out to dig [ ] around the whole city of Budapest in order to stop the Russian tank advances, which were already approaches, you know, Hungary, the capital. And when . . . Eventually, I mean just to . . . I don't want to make a long story out of it, eventually when the Russian were already practically at the doors of Budapest, they started retreating, the German, towards the Austrian-German border, and they took, unfortunately, they took us with them. So that was one of those famous . . . one of them I was with . . . practically every one of them was called a death march. A death march, it was a death march definitely. 'Cause if someone lagged behind or somebody wasn't able to walk anymore they just shot them right on the spot. At night we were sleeping on the field. That was already, I think, September, October and it was an unusually cold month. So the morning when we got up, often times we left about 20-30 people frozen to death while they were sleeping, behind us. Again, a very interesting thing actually, it so happened it's going to be a special affair now, this Thursday at city hall in Montreal, Raoul Wallenberg. You may of heard of him.

Z- yeah.

S- He is the one who actually saved me.

Z- He was a Swedish Ambassador?

S- Yeah, well no he wasn't an Ambassador, he was working at the Swedish Embassy, he was a diplomat, Swedish diplomat. As we were marching there was . . . a couple of cars were following us. And every night when we stopped to sleep they got out of the car, they took some portable chairs, portable tables, portable type-writers, sat down in the middle of the field and started typing out so-called safety letters, which specified let's say that the holder of this, of course they put in the name, pardon me, of this document is under the aegis of the Swedish republic or whatever, I think it was . . . what was it. I don't know.

Z- Monarchy, yeah they have a monarchy in Sweden.

S- Okay, Sweden whatever, Sweden and therefore was considered a Swedish citizen, you know. So, often times, most of the time, it was good. It saved people from the deportation, however, I witnessed, for instance, one time when somebody presented this letter when they were ready to be deported. He says, "I'm a Swedish citizen". "Let me see that paper", tore it and said "well now you're not a Swedish citizen anymore". So it was worth the paper it was written on more or less, say. But most of the time they did help, unquestionable. He is being credited as saving tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest. And we were already practically at the Austrian border when he, I don't know how did it, he sort of like made some sort of a deal with the German commander to work, that all those under 16 and over 60 will not continue to be deported, but will be returned to the Budapest ghetto. So I was already over that age, but I tore up all my IDs and seeing as though I always had a younger face than I am, you know, like I presented myself to the German officer and he looked at me says "okay, you're alright". Okay, so that's how I ended up at the Budapest ghetto in about, I think it was around October, '44. So I was there for three months actually because the ghetto was liberated by the Russian in January 1945. So and actually my first thing was return home as soon as I could. The town actually was a fairly important, what do you call it, transport point, you know, for trains. So was bombarded to smithereens by the allies, you know, to stop the German trains. So I barely recognized the place. The only place actually that was available was the courtyard of the orthodox synagogue. That's where all the Jewish survivors gathered. So out the 2400 or thereabouts, Jewish people that used to live in my hometown, only about a 100 returned. I haven't had anybody . . . my whole family was wiped out.

Z- Were your parents in Auschwitz?

S- I don't know where frankly, I surmised they must be in Auschwitz. There is no record of it, but the population of my hometown was actually deported to Auschwitz. So I surmised that that's where they perished. My father, actually, there was a witness to my father's death. He was also in a labor ghetto and he was quite a portly man, you know, well built and supposedly these were the ones that died first. Because the ones that were big eaters, you know, the heavy set ones were the first to go, because they suffered more from malnourishment and all that. And somebody actually saw him die, but the rest of my family was all in Auschwitz. My mother, my grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephew, cousins.

Z- So what did you do after?

S- Well, I . . . we got together about three or four, you know, survivors, about my age. We took over an apartment.

J- You were about 18, 19?

S- In '45, no I was 17, no wait a minute, I was 19 you're right. I get all confused [laughter]. We stayed there for a few months and then we decided that we don't want to stay anymore nor in our hometown nor in Europe for that matter, so we started migrating towards the

west, with a stopover in the Czech Republic in [0:28:50] and from there we snuck over the German border. We were there for . . .

Z- And what month was this?

S- That was in '46 of January. January, February of '46. And then I snuck over the French border and wound up in Paris.

Z- And you were alone?

S- Yeah. Well, no, no, actually we were three of us. You see, we were six originally. Three decided to go to Israel and three decided to go to France. So we were in France . . .

Z- Illegally?

S- For about two and a half years.

Z- Illegally?

S- We were legalized . . . we were transported from one place to another by the Jewish community where we wound up eventually in a Jewish . . . what would you call it, centre, if you wish. And the French police used to actually, you know, come to check IDs, they knew they were a lot of people there illegally. But in the meantime, whoever was looking after us they went to the city hall, obtained permits. And, actually, if I recall, as the police was approaching, you know, for a check for [0:30:21], you know, to check the IDs, while they were at the front door, they snuck in with the IDs through the back door and handed them out fast. So by the time the police came to us we already had our IDs in our hand. From there on we were legal, you know, because we had landed papers.

Z- So you were in Paris?

S- Yeah.

Z- For two and a half years?

S- Yeah.

Z- Where did you live?

S- Originally, well, as many of the newcomers we used to live in hotels, and then through again, the offices of the Jewish community there was also a home for youngsters, which was in the suburbs of Paris. And there we . . . we paid rent based on our yearnings, which by the way, I went back to my handbag making trade because one of my cousins, again, he was . . . he lived in France since the 30s. And he had a handbag manufacturing, so I was working for him there.



Z- In Paris.

S- In Paris.

Z- So why did you want to leave?

S- Because as I mentioned, I have no one left and I didn't want to stay in Europe anymore. To me it was nothing but bad memories. So I figured, I want to get out. We had two choices eventually. One was Canada, through the auspices of the Jewish community in Montreal, in Montreal, the Canadian Jewish community. Or the other one was Venezuela, but there you had to be Catholic they didn't accept Jews. Now it was very easily done because the agency that was actually offering these choices were willing to give you papers showing that you are a Catholic. Now that's sort of, you know, even though I'm not . . . again, far from being religious, but it didn't sit too well with me, you know, that I should be . . .

Z- Playing Catholic . . .

S- Number one, I mean, just tradition. And number two, Venezuela at the time was nothing but a, you know, a backward country. It so happened that the three of us, you know, there was two brothers out of us, myself and two brothers. Now those two brothers they were inclined to go to Venezuela. So one of the brothers he decided he's going to go and, you know, scout the premises. So he wrote us back how the life is. He happened to have gotten a good job. He became a driver for a diplomat, but the way he described life there, you know, people with carts and oxen, you know, like there was no cars, very few cars, and you know, in those days, again, Venezuela was like a backwards country, so I said "who wants to go there". Canada on the other hand, being offered by the Jewish community, you know, right away was more favorable.

Z- So how was it offered?

S- Well you had to be an orphan under 18.

Z- But you were . . .

S- Well I qualified on one . . . I was an orphan, but I certainly wasn't under 18. I was 22.

J- But you were still looking young.

S- Again, that's what it was you see. So a friend of mine, sort of like, he was my godfather if you wish. He falsified my birth certificate. He changed the year, only the year, you know, because otherwise I wouldn't have remembered. So I just left the month and the date I left, but the age was changed to four years younger. So I became 18, I became four years younger. And . . . the . . . So that's how we came here.

Z- So you were under the orphan scheme.

S- Yeah, yeah.

Z- And you didn't care where in Canada or . . . ?

S- Well no, my preference evidently was French speaking. I hadn't spoke a word of English, you know, so to me a French environment was preferable.

Z- And you were fluent in French?

S- Yeah, of course, yeah. Although, I never went to school, but, you know, you pick it up on the street. The same way like I picked English up on the street.

Z- So you take a boat?

S- yeah.

Z- Land in Halifax?

S- No, directly in Montreal. We went to England first, South Hampton, and from there we took the boat that brought us direct to Montreal.

Z- And when was that?

S- '48

Z- What month?

S- June.

Z- June '48. So you get to Montreal . . .

S- Yeah, well I tell you my first impression was . . . we got into a taxi that was, you know, from the port that was supposed to bring us into the city, and I got into a conversation with the taxi driver. It so happened the man was telling that he's a university professor. I said, holy cow, what kind of country is this, you know, the university professor has to moonlight as a taxi driver. So that was during the summertime, you know, for him it was like a summer job.

Z- Oh, he was a university professor.

S- He was. I had no proof, but that's what he told me. Or maybe he was just a plain teacher and he sort of like promoted himself, but in any case he was in the teaching profession. And, you know, like I said, things must be touch here you know, the guy has to moonlight as a taxi driver. Then I found out, as I said, that a lot of people did that, you know, like while they had their two month of three month vacation so they were looking for other jobs.

Z- So where did he take you, where did you go?

S- Well they brought us directly in the . . . they had a centre set up on . . .

J- And you were in a group of people?

S- Yeah.

J- So you knew on the boat who the so called orphans were?

S- Well we were always together, you see. Like there was about . . . I must say there'd be 30-40 of us. They're always sitting at the same table, you know, have our meals together.

Z- How many of you changed your age?

S- I haven't got the slightest. I never inquired, you know, like I don't know. Probably, though, quite a few. I imagine. Funniest thing though I have never ever met, or re-met any of those people that I came with, ever.

J- Of those 30-40 people?

S- Not even fairly recent, after recently our arrival you know. You know, we sort of like dispersed. 'Cause like I said they brought us to a centre on [0:38:22] street, near Mont Royal. It's at the Herzl Clinic, or whatever it was at one time, so they transformed it into a reception centre and that's where we stayed until the Canadian Jewish Congress, which is federation today, placed us first of all in . . . you know, in vocations, in rooms, and found us jobs. And then we dispersed, you know like, just in different directions. A lot of people were, a lot of them were . . . well, the earlier arrivals were luckier in a way, they were adopted.

Z- Into families.

S- Yeah. You know.

Z- But not you.

S- By the time we got there I think the quota was already . . . you know [laughs]. But I know a lot of people who actually were adopted by well to do wealthy families and now they're the heirs, you know, they're a . . .

Z- So, what job were you given? How did that work? Did you meet with someone? Did you go to J.P.S.?

S- Yeah, well the Jewish Vocational Service was the one, which today doesn't exist anymore, you know.

Z- I believe it does in Toronto.

S- Beg your pardon.

Z- It's quite big in Toronto.

S- Yeah? Well here it's now all concentrated into one, you know. Now it's OMETZ, they do everything.

Z- OMETZ, yeah.

S- So but at that time it was separate, The Jewish Vocational Service interviewed us, you know, and based on our experiences, and or professions, or whatever, trades, they placed us you know, they found us jobs. And seeing that I was in the handbag making business, naturally they put me in a handbag store, a handbag repair store, whatever you used to call it.

J- Where was that store?

S- That was downtown on I think either University street or one of those streets. I don't remember which one, Mansfield maybe, or somewhere around there, Stanley, you know, around that part of Montreal.

J- And how soon after arriving did you get that job?

S- Yeah, yeah, well because they needed the place for the next group, you know. So they were placing us into . . . as I said, you know, people that were willing to rent rooms, and of course we have to pay, we have to pay rent, you know.

Z- So how long was it before you got a job? Was it a week, 3 days, 5 days?

S- Frankly I don't remember anymore. I mean, you know, don't forget you're going back . . .

Z- A lot of years.

S- A lot of years.

Z- Your time at the centre was quick though?

S- Yeah, comparatively yes. I mean I wasn't unemployed too long. However, I was unemployed for the simple reason that I didn't last too long there. You know, the handbag . . .

Z- Oh before, how much . . . do you remember how much you earned?

S- Yeah. Oh, there, no I don't remember. But after when I went back the Jewish Vocational Service, as I said because I didn't last too long there, I think maybe a reason or so, for the simple reason that I was used to working with my hands. You know, in Europe, I mean everything was done by hand, with hand. Here everything goes with machinery, you know, like sewing machines and even the bags themselves they weren't actually put together by hands, everything was mechanized. So to me it was a completely strange trade, I mean it's almost as if I would have had to learn it all over. So I went back to the Jewish Vocational Service and I told them, I said "that's not for me, can you find something else for me?". I took some tests, interview, etc., etc. And they decided that I'm better suited for office work. Office work . . . now, I didn't speak a darn word, I mean maybe two, three words in English, so that was problematic also. So I . . .

Z- They couldn't place you with French?

S- Yeah, I know, but like English was still predominant. You know, in offices, okay. So I started off as a filing clerk. I mean that you didn't need no language. There I was earning I think \$18 a week and the Jewish Congress subsidized us to the maximum of \$21. That was, I think, the minimum wage in those days or something.

Z- And that was under the orphan program?

S- I don't know if that was the orphan program or it was a general program.

J- So you were subsidized for another \$3 a week, was that it? (further explains his question)

S- That's right. So I should be able to earn . . .

J- So you can be a minimum wage person.

S- That's right.

J- that's right okay

S- And in those days mind you, my rent was \$5 [laughs] and a loaf of bread was 10 cents, you know so it was quite . . .

Z- So \$5 a week or . . .

S- \$5 a week.

J- So you were sharing a room with some other guys?

S- No, no, no.

J- By this point you had found a room for yourself.

S- Yeah, they found the room for us. I guess there was quite a few people that handed in their requests that in case---

J- They could take a room, they could rent a room, so where was this room?

S- That was in Outremont on Dudemaine Street. If you are familiar with that area.

Z- What street?

S- Dudemaine.

Z- Dudemaine.

S- It goes parallel with Vanhorne.

Z- So that was \$20 a month?

S- Yeah.

J- And where was this office job.

S- Ah . . .[Sighs]

J- Just trying to trip you up. No it's fun it gives us a flavor . . . .

S- The original I don't remember. I know . . . I think it was a construction company, I think, if I remember, vaguely. But where it was [sighs].

Z- So how long did you last there?

S- Quite a while, quite a while. How long off hand I don't know. You see, my recollections of my earlier years are not exactly, you know, as far as years are concerned, you know. . . I know I have somewhere, because when I made a CV, you know, I evidently marked down all these things.

J- Do you still have those CVs, do you still have a record of those times?

S- I must have, but where? I don't know where I've put them.

Z- Okay, so what happens then?

S- Afterward, I can tell you that I had a variety, a huge variety of jobs, you know, in my lifetime. I was . . . let's see now. From that office, that filing clerk job, through friends that I made . . . actually as a matter of fact I have to tell because that's a very very interesting coincidence, is I was together with a boy in the forced labor camp in Hungary and we shared the food, shared our sleeping, you know, so we became very good friends. And then

after the liberation, he was originally from Budapest so he remained there and I went back to my hometown and we said goodbye to each other. When we got here one of the perks that we had was a free membership to the Y, which was just around the corner. I don't know if you recall or not, the corner of Mont Royal and . . .

Z- . . . and Park Avenue.

S- Yeah, Park Avenue, yeah. So that's where the Y was and seeing that we had a free membership, I walked in there.

Z- So this was for the youth?

S- Yeah. So I walk in there one day, I'm in the first day or the second day when I was already in town. Who was sitting at one of the tables? This friend of mine.

J- And what was his name?

S- George Strauss. Unfortunately he passed away---

J- Alright.

S- 5 or 6---

J- So you met George, that's great, that's a nice connection.

S- Yeah. And through him actually, that's why I mentioned, we became again bosom buddies, you know, as before, and through him I got a job in a fur factory.

Z- So that was what, one, two years later?

S- Yeah. Not even that, it was possible 6 months later, you know.

Z- Okay. He was a furrier?

S- Not really, he wasn't, but he became so, he became like an apprentice.

Z- So he came under the fur-- . . .

S- No, no, he also came as a . . .

Z- Youth

J- As an orphan?

S- Yeah, except that he came in '47, even before me. And anyways, both of us were apprentices, you know like, in the fur trade. Then . . . Eventually they asked me to work in

the front office of that firm, fur company, you know, like examining coats and receiving customers, etc., etc.

Z- Where was that company? Do you remember?

S- On Mayor street, downtown, you know, Park Avenue and Mayor street. That's where the fur trade was actually prominent in those days. Anyways . . . Eventually I started to writing, it was, you know, studying the books. Afterwards I became sort of like an assistant bookkeeper. So assistant bookkeeper that was more interesting.

Z- Do you remember what you got when you started at the first shop?

S- Salary?

Z- Yeah.

S- No, no, I know that there was about four or five of us that became very good friends there, you know. That was actually all Hungarians.

Z- Survivors?

S- Yeah. They were all working for the same company. I know the ones that were actually in the fur trade from before, were qualified furriers, were earning at those days \$50 a week. So mine probably wasn't more than about \$20-25. I don't remember exactly.

J- Can I ask you one question? I was reading, when I read about that time, that on Fletcher's field during the weekends a number of the refugees used to meet up socially. Can you remember that? Like would you have been part of that?

S- Of course, we attend the soccer games there, as spectators.

J- Sure, so you go there on Saturdays?

S- Sundays.

J- On Sundays.

S- Especially. . . I was just a block away. Oh yeah sure that's where we gathered all the. . .

Z- Can we hold on that, we'll talk about social life in just a second. I just want to talk a little bit more about the work, before I forget, lose my train of thought. So you worked there, how long did you work?

S- On and off, you see because it was very seasonal. When the fur season was, let's say, slack, they last off most of the people, especially the apprentices, so we had to find other job. So three of us went to Sainte Agathe and worked as waiters.



Z- In the summer?

S- Yeah, at the Castle des Monts to start with. I don't know whether you recall that. It doesn't exist anymore you know. I Actually . . . Sainte Agathe became a second home to me, you know. Because practically every summer I found myself there. First I worked as a waiter then they put me at the front as a receptionist. And . . .

J- Was this just a restaurant or . . .

S- No, it was a hotel.

Z- A resort.

S- A resort, you know. Then our adventure was also, another thing. . . the first summer actually, was in 1950, there were three of us working there, four of us were working there.

Z- The Hungarians?

S- Four friends, yeah. Three of them were waiters and I was in the reception area. One of them got into a fight with the owner and then the other . . . another friend of mine cut his leg while he was swimming, so naturally he couldn't work, you know, he was limping around. So that was reason enough to fire him. Now that's what caused the fight actually, you know. My friend George stood up on all his four legs, you know, and started fighting with the bosses, "how can you do this, just because he's laid out, give him a chance". "If you don't like it you can go too, okay". So we the four musketeers, naturally, one goes . . . one for all, all for one, you know. They fire him, we all go. So all four of us quit in the beginning of the season, you know.

J- And this good job. . .

S- Well sure.

Z- The owner was English? French? Who was the owner?

S- Jewish

Z- The Jewish owner.

S- Yeah, sure. Stich and Berger. There were two.

Z- And he knew who you were and your situation?

S- They couldn't care less. Business was business, you know, so that's it. So . . . And especially when one of the other waiters was Italian by the way, he said, you know, because for a minute there they were panicking you see about losing four people at the beginning,

you know, just before the season starts, what are we going to do? So the guys says, the Italian waiter says, "don't worry I'll get you some other waiters". So that's why they let us go. So what we did is started to inquire, what could we do, where could we work? "You know what, let's go to Banff, Banff is a good place to go to, it's a resort town, you know, so let's go". So we went to Banff.

Z- This was 1950?--

J- You took the train?

S- Yeah, by train, yeah. First . . . or no, pardon me, in order to work in Banff you had to present yourself in Vancouver, you know, because that's where Canadian Pacific was . . . was the owner of the Banff hotel. So we went to Vancouver by train, then we go into Canadian Pacific office and they said "sorry we have no jobs available currently, no openings". So we're stuck in Vancouver. So in Vancouver we found ourselves a place worth to live, we found ourselves jobs. We were working in restaurants and we were quite well off there, I mean we did alright until one of the boys got homesick for his girlfriend, you know, and says "well, I'm going back I want to see my girlfriend". So again, all for one, one for all. You go, we go.

Z- So how long were you in Vancouver?

S- Just a few months.

Z- And then you went back to the fur job?

S- yeah, again, because by the time we got back luckily the fur season was in full swing, you know, so they re-hired us again for another year. Then again when the slack season came again they let us go, you know, so it was every year. It was on and off. I was working for that company on and off for three years or so, but only periodically you know, never full time.

Z- So, when you were laid off did you go for help? Did anyone offer to help you financially?

S- No, we were always able to find a job, you know, somehow. See like by that time I already had experience as a waiter, so I got a job at the Bucharest [? 0:56:56], I don't know whether you recall that. You know where Moishe's is? Just across from Moishe's was a restaurant/night-club/catering, you know, like a building in a building. As a matter of fact Sophie Tucker I saw there, imagine. You know she appeared there because it was part nightclub. So that was mostly like catering, you know, for weddings and affairs, so I was working there as a waiter. I mean that was just a, you know, like . . . weekends mostly, but it was enough to sustain us or sustain me, you know, for the week, with tips and everything.

Z- In the meantime you were living in the same room?

S- No, no, no, no by that time we got together three of us, we rented an apartment.

Z- And where was that?

S- Rachel.

Z- Rachel and . . .

S- Rachel and Colonial I think, so somewhere around there, you know.

Z- So there was three of you of four of you?

S- There were three of us, two brother and myself. Who I met actually in Montreal, you know, through Fletcher's field probably.

Z- Okay so let's talk about Fletcher's field. So after work you hung out with your three Hungarian friends?

S- Yeah.

Z- So one of them is George, right?

S- No that's besides George. George by that time was completely, you know, separate. I mean these are two other friends, you know two different friends.

Z- And how did you meet them?

S- On Fletcher's field, like I told you, you know like we were spectators at the soccer game. I mean, you know, we get together, you start talking, yak yak. So and then eventually wound up with them, you know, renting an apartment.

Z- So talk about Sundays on Fletcher's field.

S- Well that was actually that was the social gathering place, you know, for all the new comers.

J- And women too? Just men or were women . . .

S- No, no, no there were girls as well.

J- Great, good, okay, so that really made it more social I'm sure.

S- Yeah, sure, oh yeah. Of course the women, the girls weren't that interested in soccer, you know. They weren't watching soccer they were just—

J- Roaming around.

S- Yeah they were just walking around, you know. So we . . . and some of the Hungarian guys were in playing. They were in the Jewish soccer team called [1:00:02] I think if I'm not mistaken, that's what it was called. So naturally we were more interesting in watching the games, you know, because we had some friends playing there.

J- And that league that they played with it wasn't all Jews, like they would play other teams?

S- Yeah, yeah, course. Even the so-called Jewish team was not comprised of all Jewish players. It was predominantly Jewish player, you know, but they had some non-Jewish players on the team.

Z- So was Fletcher's field full of people.

S- Oh yeah, oh yeah. Because there were other activities going on too, there was a children's area so families, Jewish . . . a more . . . because at that time the whole area was really predominantly Jewish so to them Fletcher's field and Mont Royal was actually, the . . . you know, the hub. That's were people got together.

Z- So did you take English classes.

S- No, no. I have, you see, it seem that I have an ability to pick up languages. I speak about seven of them, you know, so it was very easy, you know.

Z- Yeah, because your accent is almost non-existent.

S- Talking about accents, I was the most amazed person, you know, one day I was playing as a matter of fact if I'm not mistaken just to look at the . . . I show a tape you know that they gave me. So I was playing it and I looked away and I heard a voice and I thought who the hell is this talking with this heavy accent. I look, I say, "it's impossible, that can not be me". I was so proud of myself, you know, that I'm accent free. The hell I am.

Z- It's very slight, I mean you do not have the typical heavy Hungarian accent.

S- No of course. But, however, I recognize a Hungarian from miles away, you know. They do have that, you know, that very heavy Hungarian accent.

Z- You don't.

S- No. Even my French actually, I speak the Parisian French, you know, but people take me for Belgium. I don't know why [laughs]. So there is an accent, there's no question about it, you know.

Z- So did you only hang out with other survivors?

S- Yeah, yeah.

Z- You weren't integrated into the mainstream?

S- Yes and no. But I'll tell you, it so happened you see that on [1:02:58] where we used to live, while we were there, you know, like the . . .

Z- When you first came?

S- Yeah, at the, you know, where we got the reception hall. So even there the . . . I don't know who, whether it was the Canadian Jewish Congress, or whoever, were encouraging the locals, the ones living there, to co-mingle with us, you know, like welcome us and make us more . . . you know. So . . . the only language at the time for us was Yiddish, you know that we were able to communicate . . .

Z- And you spoke Yiddish?

S- Yeah. Either French or Yiddish.

Z- Where did you learn Yiddish?

S- Germany. You see in school German was one of our compulsory languages. Now, Yiddish is nothing but a bastardized German really. So it was very easy, you know, to actually to learn it, seeing that in Germany I was in an [1:04:06] camp. I don't know if you know the . . .

-----phone interruption-----

S- So where was I. Yeah, so at the [same as 1:04:06] camp 90% of the people there were Polish and the only way to communicate with them was . . .

Z- Yiddish.

S- Yiddish. So I picked it up. Then when I got married, you know, my in-laws were also predominantly Yiddish speaker, so I just perfected it a little bit more.

Z- Okay, we'll get to that.

S- So anyways there were quite a few girls our age who came to visit us, came to see us, you know. At first we were a curiosity.

Z- So this was the established Jewish community?

S- Yeah, yeah ,yeah, oh yeah. These were like third of fourth generation Canadians or something. As a matter of fact one of them was living just across the street, the Glazers. The Glazer family, they were one of the most populous Jewish families in Montreal. They had 14 children or something like that, you know. They lived just across the street and of the 14 children I think about seven were girls, you know, different ages, but they were within

our age group. So it so happened I picked one of them up as a girlfriend, eventually, for a short while. So these were the ones that we were actually . . . and then at the Y also, you know, like they used to throw parties. Sort of like socials to meet people, you know. So that's how we mingled a little bit, but other than that most of the time we kept to ourselves because of the language difficulty. It took awhile 'til we were able to communicate in English to be able to, you know, become more social.

Z- We were you interested in communicating in that . . .

S- Of course, of course, especially being all alone. I needed the company, you know.

Z- So was the Jewish community, the mainstream, were they interested in you people, in your experiences, and learning about you. I shouldn't say you people . . .

S- Not necessarily, no.

Z- Why not?

S- Who knows. That I couldn't tell you. You know like it seems after a while maybe became a burden to them, I don't you know.

Z- How so?

S- Possible, you know, because of financial contributions I guess that they had to suffer or something. But . . . you know . . . and besides that frankly for us, even ourselves, we were shying away from them for the simple reason, you know, when we were talking let's say that pick berries, you know, like in the camp, when we were picking up raw potatoes to eat if you were lucky to find it or something, you know, or peelings of whatever or grass just to chew on something. So what they said, they said "oh we also had our problems, you know, our butter was rationed and the bread was rationed". I said "bread, are you kidding, who had bread". You know so it means the differences were enormous, you know, they couldn't comprehend what we went through.

Z- Or they didn't want to comprehend?

S- Or maybe they didn't want, it's possible. But in any case in our eyes it was that they just couldn't, not that they didn't want to. So in a way it was very hard to associate, you know, with the . . . with the Canadian Jewish community as such. So we were practically forced to stay together amongst ourselves.

Z- And in terms of help and aid, in terms of settling or supporting?

S- Personally, no, no. Everything was done through the agencies. I mean other than that, sort of like I mentioned before, the early arrivals were adopted, so evidently they did help some people. They were willing to do so.

Z- But after they got your first job or so, they didn't have much to do with you or?

S- Well they still asked us to report, or incase we have any problems. The agencies were willing to cooperated, there was no problem. They looked after us until we became self-sufficient. Then, you know, that's it.

Z- You're on your own. Okay so you worked as a furrier for how many years? Many years?

S- On and off three, four years, I think, something like that.

Z- So that would bring you to what? '52, '53? And then what happened?

S- Yeah. Well then again from the Bucharest part I'm waiting job, I jumped into Moishe's as a full time waiter, I was working there.

Z- So you worked at Moishe's?

S- Yeah.

Z- That's fabulous, how long did you work there?

S- Maybe six months, eight months or thereabouts. I was a junior waiter. I was always the last one to get the tables, you know. The last one to get the guests.

Z- So did you have to develop schtick?

S- No.

Z- No. So how come you were only there for six – eight months?

S- For that simple reason, that I was always the last one . . . I was always the last one. When the whole room was full already that's when they gave me tables. So I got fed up with that, you know. The other guys were making oodles of money in tips and I was sort of like schlepping, you know.

Z- So what did you do?

S- What did I do after? I had already some experiences like in office work, so I went into an office . . . to a jeweler. Custom jewelry or something, I think. You know, and I presented myself as a full fledged bookkeeper. So they made me into office manager and believe me I was fumbling my way through it [laughs]. I knew a little bit and then what I didn't actually was I went to Concordia, which at that time was Sir George Williams, and took night courses in bookkeeping. I also gave that one up because, you know, to work all day with figures and then go to school and continue with figures, my head was full. I just couldn't do it, you know, so I did it for a few months. But still I picked up enough that by the time I quit

that job, or that job quit me I don't remember anymore, I was already technically full fledged as a bookkeeper, you know.

Z- So there were jobs, but there weren't jobs at the time . . . It wasn't easy.

S- Yeah. Eventually, at the beginning I had such a variant career, you know, as far as jobs are concerned . Then for a period of time, again I can't tell the time, you know, the . . . what is the word. Sometimes have to look for words. The . . . you know, the exact year or when it . . . for a while I was working as a dance teacher at Arthur Murray's.

J- Oh of course with all your bookkeeper experience.

S- [laughs] Okay, yeah, there you go you see.

Z- Do you remember when you were working at the dance . . .

S- Yeah, of course, because that was around '59 '58.

Z- So that was later?

S- yeah. In the interim, like I said, I was back in the fur trade, like office . . .

Z- Yeah, this has been one of the most surprising things about this research is that my impression of the 1950s was a stable time when there were lot's of jobs, people found work, and that's not really quite true. It was a lot of precarious employment, right. People were working, not working, working, not working . . .

S- Well when you were in specific trades, you know, the layoffs were quite often, you know. I mean, because, you see, we weren't unionized of anything, so they could lay me off at anytime. Unionized people naturally they couldn't, you know, in the schmatta trade or something they were all unionized. The fur trade, I don't know frankly whether it was a uniform unionization or if it was up to the individual firms to join the union. In any case, the firm that I was working at, you know, they were able to layoff people.

Z- 'cause they weren't unionized?

S- You know what, I tell you, in retrospect maybe they were unionized but we didn't know.

J- Did you work for other sch-. . .

S- Furriers?

J- yeah or other companies in the fur trade or the schmatta trade?

S- For a while I was working for a pattern-maker.



J- And where were they?

S- They were in the same building were they . . . you know also Mayor street. It was the same building where the . . . where the fur factory was. The only thing is that when they laid me off, you know, the guy asked me would I like to work in his office. You know, because he used to make the fur patterns, you know, like they used to work on, like you know, paper patterns to cut the fur. So he used to supply the patterns to this manufacturer, that's how he knew me. So when I was laid off he asked me would I want to work there, so I worked there for a few months. But again it was all . . . you know short-term positions. Everything was short-term.

Z- And you said the schmatta was unionized?

S- Oh yeah.

Z- So they weren't laid off?

S- They couldn't lay them off. I don't think that the conditions, you know, the union conditions allowed them to lay them off. I don't think so. I'm not too familiar with it, but I know that being unionized gave certain advantages.

Z- And were most of the jobs non-unionized? Most of the work available was non-unionized work? Here in Montreal.

S- You mean in the different trades?

Z- Yes.

S- The union movement was quite restricted, you know. I think the church was not too much in favor of having unions or something, you know. I don't know why. Because in those days, in the 50s when we arrived the church was predominate, you know. Like they were ruling the world, in Montreal anyways. Especially during the [1:16:50] time, you know.

Z- So, you did get married.

S- Yeah that's why I say I remember the Arthur Murray thing, because in 1959 . . . Oh yeah, excuse me, then that time, in '59 I was working for another friend of mine who was in the type-writer business. You know, selling and repairing type-writers and I was working for him also partially in the office and partially as a salesman on the floor. And his wife's cousin was also working there in the office. Now the wife's cousin was getting married and she invited me to her wedding. That's where I met my wife.

Z- Was she also an immigrant?

S- No she lived in Toronto and she was a cousin, not blood relation but indirect relation to this girl that I was working with, that was getting married. So she was invited to the wedding and that's where we met.

Z- So you were what, 32, 31?

S- Yeah. 34.

Z- And you had no interest in settling before.

S- Well yes I would have if I would have found the right woman, I would have. So anyways, in 1959 I was 33. Later she told me that as soon as she saw me she told her mother "that's the man I'm going to marry". So I was a goner already. Anyway, it so happened that at the wedding we were seated at the same table and then when it came to dancing she started dancing with somebody else and I was dancing with somebody else, and we noticed each other that way. We are sort of like doing the same steps or something. So we started dancing together. It turns out that she was also a dance teacher at Arthur Murray's in Toronto. And we danced our way through our life. Unfortunately she passes away about five and a half years ago now of ALS.

J- What's her name?

S- Annie.

Z- Was she younger than you?

S- Oh yeah, 11 years. 10 and half years.

Z- So she was quite young then [in the picture possibly]?

S- Well she was 69 when she passes away, when she died, yeah.

S- Yeah so anyway we got married.

J- Wait, she lived in Toronto.

S- Yeah, but she moved here you see.

J- Just for you or what?

S- Well basically what happened, you know, when we decided we were going to get married, it was a fairly quick, you know, courtship. We met in 1959, in August, and got married March 1960. So when we decided, you know, that something serious is going to on . . . she used to work for Simpsons so she had herself transferred here to Montreal, lived with an acquaintance at first. At that time I was living on Balls street in Park extension, again with some friends. When we decided to get married my father-in-law proposed that I

should move to Toronto, he would open a store for us, you know, that we should live there. So me, even though I had nobody here really per se as family or anything, I was so attached to the city after so many years with friends and acquaintances, to go to a strange city I said "no". So the choice was my wife's so she said "okay, I move to Montreal". So we got married and as a matter of fact in 1963 my in-laws came here. They bought this house, you know, in 1963.

J- Her parents?

S- Yeah, her parents, yeah.

Z- Montreal was still a happening place, yeah.

S- 1963 we bought this house. So we were living here.

J- So they moved upstairs?

S- No, no, no we were living downstairs. As a matter of fact people were admiring me at "how can you live with your in-laws?". I said "they were lovely people". My father in-law was an angle, my mother in-law didn't like me.

J- So two out of three.

S- Two out of three [laughs] that's right.

Z- So let's go back to those early years in Montreal. Was it hard for you being here? Did you like it when you first came?

S- It took some getting used to. You know, I mean, you see if I would have come let's say from a small town or something and come her directly I would have been probably flabbergasted or something. But to me, after Paris, you know, Montreal was not really something extraordinary.

Z- You didn't like it?

S- Well what I didn't like eventually, and I still don't like it and I don't know whether I'll ever get used to it, is the winter. You know, to have a six months winter it's . . . I don't have to tell you 'cause you guys have it even worse in the Maritimes.

Z- Actually the winters are milder than here. It's a myth.

S- Yeah. Well it's not a myth, because when I hear the weather forecast, you know . . .

Z- I lived in Montreal and I live there, actually the winters are lovely.

S- Well I don't know, again, you know the winter to me is . . . that's the only thing I can't get used to.

Z- So what was your impression that first year of the city? Disappointment?

S- No, no not at all. As I told you I got so accustomed to the city and so used to it that when my in-laws proposed to me that I move to Toronto, even with the promise of a business and a store and this, whatever, I didn't want to move.

Z- I'm talking more from the standpoint of 20 year old, 21 year old, 22 year old, right. What was that first adjustment like here, what was your first impression that year? Were you sorry you left Paris?

S- Of course. I mean, the Parisian life, you know, like compared to Montreal, it's like dull, you know, in Montreal. Paris no matter where you went it was lively. Here, I found that the people were very cold. You know like it's . . . I don't know whether it's an eastern trait really. They claim the further east you go the less friendly people became. The further west you go the more friendly they become. Is that a fact? Or is that also a myth?

Z- A myth.

S- Anyways, so I found like, you know, at the beginning anyways that the people are not communicative.

Z- Which people? The Montrealers?

S- Yeah, Montrealers.

Z- Was it like the established Jews, the non-Jews?

S- Immaterial. Any of them. All of them. You know they . . . it's not where . . . you go on the street and you say "hello" or something, "how do you do?" and you give a smile or something. No, no, here it didn't occur, didn't occur. But as you develop a circle of friends it became, you know, like more pleasant. But the population itself . . . Well of course we didn't think of that too much as I told you because of the language difficulties, you know, so we were mostly amongst ourselves. So to a certain extend maybe it was our fault too. It's possible. Maybe we didn't want to mingle, could be. But it took quite a while, you know, it took quite a while to get accustomed and to get used to it. The city itself, I mean I liked it. You know because there were a lot of interesting places to go and see. Eventually we found even the social life interesting. We discovered some nightclubs and the places to go to dance. So . . . you know, so we finally got the thing going. And then of course you pick up a few friends, girlfriends. So that helps.

Z- So for young single women, survivor women, who came from Europe, was it different? Was it harder for them?

S- Oh yeah, yeah of course.

Z- How so?

S- For women . . . well their main goal first of all was to get married as soon as possible. You know, like teenagers let's say. They wanted to establish a home, a family, especially survivor, you know, who lost everything and everybody, that was their main goal. So it was very hard for them because there was a . . . again, an estrangement, you know, from the Canadian Jews to the newcomers. You know it was very hard to bring them together. Different customs, different beliefs, different language. You know, everything was different. Not too many actually, as far as I can recall, not too many did get married to Canadians. Most of them married amongst themselves, you know, the survivors. However, the opposite was true for the male parts. A lot of the newcomers, the men, married Canadian girls, but . . .

Z- How come?

S- Well I'll tell you why, the . . . how should I say, the remnants, the leftovers of the Jewish girlhood that no Canadian boy wanted, got eventually hooked-up with the newcomers and they got married. So you know, I mean no dispersions you know, but the ugliest girls you can imagine were lucky enough to get married, because they would have never gotten married because of their looks or their behavior or their intelligence or whatever, but they were grabbed by the male newcomers. I know of many cases, many many people that actually go married to Canadian girls, but none of them is a beauty, believe me I know, none of them was and none of them is. Like I said, the leftovers. You know, the ones that the Canadian boys didn't want got married to the newcomers.

Z- Why . . . because there weren't any immigrant women they could marry, or wanted to?

S- Yeah, well basically . . . one of the reasons was probably also that they thought they were going to be better assimilated into the Canadian society by marrying into Canadian families.

Z- So they wanted that?

S- Yeah, yeah, yeah. And also the fact is that often times it offered financial advantages too. You know, it's a . . . if you got married into a well-to-do Canadian family then you were set for life.

Z- Of your three Hungarian friends, they married newcomers, or Canadians, or?

S- Most of them married, like I said, amongst themselves.

Z- So you're the only one who didn't?

S- No, no, no. I also married a newcomer. My wife was a new comer. Oh yeah sure, she was originally from Poland but she lived in France, she was brought up in France, educated in

France. And then they came here because her uncle was living in Toronto. My late mother-in-law's brother. So they only arrived here in '57 or so. '55, '56, '57. Oh yeah she was a newcomer. I didn't marry a Canuck.

Z- I thought you married a Canuck [laughter all around]. So one of the things that fascinates me is the, you know, the story you're sharing, the disinterest of the established Jewish community, of you know, of your lives. Didn't want to have much to do with them, perhaps you didn't want much to do with them either. But somehow there was a transformation, somehow there was a shift, where there's been enormous interest in the Holocaust and the experiences of survivors, and it's become sort of absorbed into the mainstream, the diasporic identity, the Holocaust is a collective tragedy, right. Which was not the case when you first came, right?

S- Because people became more educated about it.

Z- And how did that happen?

S- Through the auspices of all the Canadian organizations, the Jewish organizations. They spread the work, you know. They spread the stories. Let's say for instance even like Spielberg actually created a tremendous interest in survivors.

Z- Okay, but that wasn't until when 2000?

S- Yeah, well until then, you know, we were absorbed in the Canadian society without any fanfare, without any, you know, special interest or without any special mentions. So it wasn't really that the Canadian society or the Jewish society, if you wish, actually became aware of our existence or they became aware of our suffering or something. It was, in fact I can't believe, you know, they had taken for granted that we arrived, we settled, we married, we live, we work etc., that's it.

Z- If you reflect or think back would you . . . are you surprised or . . . how should I say that. You know, here the Jews in Europe went through these years of genocide, suffering, horrible pain. In a sort of maybe detached intellectual way, you've come to another community, one would think that the Jewish community would rally around these people, right? But it didn't happen.

S- Possibly in the earlier transports that arrived maybe that did happen.

J- The first orphan transport so to speak?

S- Yeah.

Z- Yeah, but the mainstream immigration really didn't happen until after '47, '48. The bulk was in '51, '52 and repeatedly I hear the same stories, right. There was nothing, nothing. People didn't want to hear stories, you know. "We were rationed chicken, we couldn't have

chicken". Like "we suffered too". Exactly the same thing that you're saying I'm hearing over and over.

S- And that actually to a certain extent made people shy away from the Jewish society, because of that. You know they said "how can you even say that you're suffering was not having butter with your bread", you know, it sort of disgusted people. You know, what do you know about suffering, when you said you suffered because you didn't have no butter for your bread. I mean we didn't have bread, we didn't have butter, we didn't have anything. You know, they couldn't grasp the enormity of what we suffered through, you know, because they felt that they suffered as well. I mean what kind of suffering is that if you don't have butter on your bread. Give me bread, you know, that's it. You know, so that sort of like alienated, if you wish, the newcomers. So the . . . if you said that there's an interest now in the Holocaust and all that, that's because they got . . . it's a different generation now. You know, the current generation is actually being educated about the Holocaust. Now they are actually starting to realize what the Holocaust was. More than actually when it happened. Interesting.

Z- That's the one I'm trying to grapple with, right. Why was there such a distancing from it? Why was there such a reluctant to hear the stories or to help out in a way?

S- See for that you would have to ask the Canadians, not us, not the survivors. That why didn't they sort of like commiserate if you wish. I mean not that it would have helped any, you know, but it certainly would have. . . maybe it would have helped. You know if they would have been more sympathetic for want of a better word, you know, to our plight. Maybe the approachment would have been a lot easier and faster, possibly. I don't say for sure, but possibly.

Z- What could have made your assimilation easier?

S- I tell you, I assimilated very fast. My assimilation, to make it easier, even though I wouldn't trade it anymore, you know, for my life, for what I went through, that if I would have gotten married into a Canadian family, you know, in all probability by now, you know, I'd be 100% Canadian, although I am. You know far be it . . . you know, don't misunderstand me.

Z- I mean you said you didn't find the right women, but was it only a sort of hurt . . . you know, settle down have a family.

S- Oh yeah. I was always family minded because I lost my family.

Z- That's right.

S- To me that was one of the most important things, you know, to have a family.

Z- But it didn't happen that quickly.

S- Well eventually it did. Eventually it did.

J- So you and Annie have children? I see pictures around. I how many children?

S- Three. Two sons and a daughter. The first one, the one holding the . . . kid in yellow, that's my oldest. He's adopted. You see, we tried for five years we couldn't have any kids, you know, went through all kinds of tests and everything. So eventually we decided to adopt, and then boom, one, two, three. One after the other. Natural.

Z- So one adopted, two biological. And . . .

J- Then your whole life starts again in a whole busy way doesn't it.

S- Oh yeah.

Z- And where do they live?

S- Well my oldest is in the Canadian diplomatic core, so as a matter of fact he just came back from a stint in Indian. He was there for three years. He lived in Ottawa naturally, I mean he works in the foreign affairs department. And the middle son and my daughter live here in Montreal. They each have two kids.

Z- And what do they do?

S- Well, like I said my oldest is in the diplomatic core. My other son is a sales manager for [1:40:42], you know, the computer company. And my daughter is working in human relations and my son-in-law is general sales manager for VTEch, you know, the phone company.

Z- So did you settle in one career? After you got married?

S- After I got married, yeah. We opened . . . I mean I went into partnership with . . . no, it wasn't even . . . it started when my in-laws moved here. Until then, again, I was sort of like all kinds of jobs. In '63 when they moved here we bought a business, a discount store. You know, health and beauty, which was a novelty at that time. That was the very first discount store in Montreal. And from then I went into partnership with the guy that we bought the business from and opened another store, also discount store. So my father-in-law and my wife were running the original store, I was running the other store. Then when my lease expired, let's see 60 . . . '70, in the 70s late 70s. No, middle 70s, my lease expired and the landlord didn't want to renew so I bought a grocery store. So I was operating that with a partner for a couple of years, till we went bust. Then I retired, no, before . . . yeah. I retired but still I was working part-time as a salesman for a company.



