

Interviewee: Renata

Date:

Z- Why don't you start with when you were born. When? Where?

R- Okay. My name is Renata. My married name is Zajdman. I was born Renata Skotnikcka, October 23, 1928 in Warsaw, Poland. I had parents; my father's name was Lucien, and mother's name was Natalia. And I had a half-brother and a half-sister, Alexander and Anna. They were my mother's children from her first marriage. Then she was a widow with two children, she married my father and I was born. So that's the background.

Z- And there was just one child between them?

R- Just me.

Z- And what did your father do?

R- My father was a lawyer, yeah, in Warsaw.

Z- And did your mother work?

R- My mother was ahead of her time because my grandfather was a very well known philanthropist in Warsaw, very rich guy, and my mother had two sisters, and they disobeyed their father and married whoever they wanted, and my mother did listen to her father, so she inherited everything. She was a very rich woman, not my father, and she ran the business. They had department stores, so my mother was ahead of her time.

Z- So she ran department stores in Warsaw?

R- Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, she did. It was a very famous . . . people knew the family when I said family [0:02:16], that's my grandfather's name, "Oh, wow, wow". Yeah. Yeah. As a matter of fact I was able to confirm it because . . . Were you ever in Poland after the war?

Z- No.

R- At the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw my grandfather's. . . I even have a picture of it, [0:02:34]. "He fed the hungry one. He clothed the naked one." Philanthropy, that was my grandfather, so, so it was not just [0:02:48], he must have been a very powerful man, a rich . . . You know the Jewish . . . if you read Bashevis Singer, that's the . . . When I read Bashevis Singer, this is my family.

Z- Yeah, no I've read all of Bashevis Singer.

R- So did I, oh yeah. That was the family. And the district where we used to live – exactly what he describes. Everything, it's like the [0:03:12] here. I learn about my family, my background from Singer.

Z- Well the novel is an interesting form of history, right.

R- Hey?

Z- The novel can be an interesting—

R- Oh god yes. Yeah, when I read it I gave it to my daughter, I said, “Meet your family.”

Z- What about religion?

R- Religion. I was getting mixed signals. My father was an atheist, my mother was very progressive, but yet came from a religious background. Mind you, I have a picture, my grandfather even wore a hat. I have a picture of my grandfather, unbelievable, 1900. And my grandmother never wore a [0:04:00], so obviously they were acculturated. And they spoke Polish at home, so I never learned Yiddish. So religion was absolutely . . . Education was the key, not religion, absolutely not.

Z- So Polish was the language of the family?

R- Yeah, well my parents spoke Russian.

Z- They spoke Russian to one another?

R- To one another. The nanny was Russian, that's why I learned Russian when I was a kid, but Polish was the . . . Even my aunts and uncles, they all spoke Polish, so I never learned another language, that's why I was able to survive. My Polish is still impeccable.

Z- Yeah.

R- Yeah.

Z- So your family was wealthy . . . You grew up in a fairly wealthy family . . .

R- I didn't know I was rich. Didn't have a clue. My mother was rather strict.

Z- In what way?

R- Well, I used to get stuff from my older sister.

Z- Hand-me-downs.

R- Hand-me-down, yeah. My mother would get very upset if I didn't eat something that was on the plate. No such thing as throwing things out.

Z- What was your mother's name.

R- Natalia.

Z- Natalia, you said that, right. So then the family . . . was there music, culture?

R- No . . . they were Polish patriots, but they knew that they were Jewish. Living in a very rich Jewish district makes them strict. And they were acculturated, I wouldn't say they were assimilated. My father was assimilated, not my mom. My mother was not assimilated. She was a Zionist, [0:05:46]. Yeah, that was my mom's dream. She was buying up land in Israel before the war. Her cousins were there, yeah.

Z- So were you raised with that?

R- No. Because my parents separated when I was 7 years old, I was mostly with my dad.

Z- So that was unusual at that time.

R- Yeah.

J- 1935.

R- Yeah. Around that time, yeah. My mother left my father. He had a mistress and that's it, she left him.

Z- She had a mistress?

R- No, my father had a mistress, and my mother left him. I didn't know those things. I learned later, after the war.

Z- But you went with your father?

R- Most of the time. Later they made a deal that when I was . . . My father moved to a little place near Warsaw, about 50km [from] where my grandfather was living, he was in [0:06:24], near Warsaw, so my father opened his practice there. So they made a deal. During the summer I was with my grandparents [0:06:56], or with my nanny in Warsaw when later I was in school. Mind you I had mostly tutoring at home. So weekend was with my grandparents, you know, paternal, school was during the day, so it was absolutely . . .

Z- So you said you were privately tutored most of the time? You didn't go to regular school?

R- Not much because of the fighting among my parents, who do you want to be with? It was awful what they did, very dysfunctional. You don't ask a child who is 7 years old, You want to be with daddy or mommy? I said daddy. Can you imagine? You don't do those things. So I don't really remember . . . Like some kids talk about school or friendships in school, I never went through that thing. I had two fantastic friends, girlfriends, but it was different.

Z- Did you take any music?

R- No, my sister had a piano and she was awful.

Z- And so how did you pass the time outside of school?

R- My father was a fanatic about education. I had to do homework even before I was able to go out and play. So I grew up among adults mostly, yeah, and especially my older sister, my older brother, so I absorbed . . . yeah, very precocious, spoiled brat, from my father.

Z- So you spoke Polish and Russian, you didn't learn French—

R- I knew Russian because my nanny . . . Later my wonderful nanny was Polish, Polish catholic. But the first one, which was with my grandparents, she was Russian. What was her name? Veronica. So she spoke Russian. That helped me later too, because I spoke Russian, I picked it up just like . . . I still speak Russian.

Z- Did you learn any English or French?

R- In the Warsaw ghetto, illegally we were learning. So I picked up some French. German I learned in Germany, yeah.

Z- So what happened then, '39 Warsaw was still safe?

R- No. No, December 1st, Friday, 1939, my mother's birthday. And the Germans started to bomb Warsaw. So I was caught in the siege of Warsaw. 'Kay? And the Germans marched in. First of all that part where [0:09:49] was a very [0:09:50] part of Warsaw was bombed, completely, practically. Whatever was left the ethnic Germans, the Volksdeutsche, took over. So we became homeless within four weeks, finished.

Z- And you went into the ghetto?

R- Oh no, ghetto didn't start until a year later, November '40.

Z- That's why I got confused, because I thought it was later.

R- No, no, no, no, '39. We were already homeless in October of '39, a month later. We were lucky because my sister, Anna, was already engaged and she was already 21 at that time. Yeah, 21, 22. And she had an apartment and a workshop. She was very, very bright and

very creative, and she had a workshop, designing workshop, in other part of Warsaw, Praga, across the river, which was not bombed. So she had an apartment, we moved into that apartment until it was time to go into the ghetto a year later. I didn't go because I went to the Russian side with my mom. There was another story, I don't know . . . My mother died in Bialystok four months later. She was one of the first victims of typhus, because the typhus epidemic started during the siege. People were throwing, you know, dead horses and bodies into the river. It was epidemic. My mother was one of the first victims. So she died in a Russian hospital four months later. January the first 1940, in Bialystok.

Z- What happened to you?

R- What happened to me. I was on my own, 'cause my brother decided to go back to Warsaw to be with my sister who was in Warsaw. He wanted to take me back and I was afraid. Now I can— I just didn't like my sister, she was mean to me because I was from different father, [0:11:49]. So I was afraid of her, I was afraid of the Germans, so I ran away. So he had to smuggle himself and I ran away from the place . . .

Z- You were 12 years old?

R- Yeah. It was January '40, sure. Yeah.

Z- So during the war . . .

R- No, no, no, but there were a lot of refugees in Bialystok, 'cause actually I left my father's cousins there. So I wasn't really homeless because, you know, people would take me for one day here . . . Then they decided the child has to go to school. So they enrolled me in a Russian school, and since I spoke Russian there was no problem. I told them I'm three years older, I looked big. I stopped growing when I was twelve. I said I was 15 and they took me there to school. So I was in a boarding school, a Russian boarding school. So I had roof over my head. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I stayed there, studied Russian until operation Barbarossa, which was June '41. June '41, yeah. When the German attack the Soviets.

Z- So then what happened?

R- Since I was in that school, I was running together with this group, east, away from the Germans. Of course they were moving faster, and I was caught in a little town east of Bialystok. And that's when I saw the first atrocities. And since I was running, and people don't recognize me that I'm Jewish, I was able to get some bread. They were already beating up the Jews. So I decided to pass, that was . . . that started already, that was my [0:13:47] started. I have a chance to survive, so I never told any . . . I didn't have documents. So I decided to pass, but you know . . .

Z- As Polish? As Russian?

R- Ukrainian [0:14:05].

Z- Okay, and you passed as a young Polish Catholic?

R- Yes. Yeah . . . as a village idiot, you know . . .

Z- And your name was as you mentioned earlier?

R- No, nobody knew who I was.

Z- No, but what name did you take on?

R- No, no, no. My name is Renata, so [they] used to call me at home Rena or Renia, which is close to [0:14:29].

Z- Yeah.

R- Okay, but I always liked the name Christina, so I decided to call myself Christina.

Z- And you were called Christina?

R- Yeah, and I stayed Christina 'til the end of the war. Some friends that I knew from [0:14:43], they still called me Christina. Yeah. But I had no documents, and so I decided to go back to Warsaw, join my family, felt guilty. So the Germans were here, the Germans were there, I might as well go back. So in order to go back, I had to go back to Bialystok. When I came back to Bialystok the Germans were there already. There was three days, or four days later, and the horrors started. They took about 2,000 Jews into synagogue, burned them alive. And I went into the ghetto, as a matter of fact the guard asked me, "What are you doing here?", I said, well since I was stealing potatoes in order to eat, I said, "I want to change some potatoes." So I ran into the . . . "Oh, come on it's not for kids like you." You know, get away. But as I said I was pretending I'm some idiot, village idiot, you know. I ran into the ghetto and I was able to find my cousins there. So I stayed with them and they had nothing to eat. I looked like a mess, you know, [0:16:00] from all those running. And my cousin's husband knew somebody in the Jewish [0:16:09], and he sent me there, "Go to this gentleman, he'll take you to work." So they were taking me with the battalions to work. Outside the ghetto, we were fixing the pot holes on a highway from Bialystok to Warsaw, for the Germans. It was tough, but they were giving us some food. Was even able to bring some food . . . That lasted five, six weeks, and then my catholic nanny walked all the way from Warsaw to find a child. Okay. Her name was [0:16:47]. She walked and she didn't know that I was running away out here, so she decided well she must be in Bialystok, I going to find her. And I came back with a group of people. There were a lot of Poles, Ukrainians screaming, yelling, buying from us, all kinds of horror stories near the gate. And I heard someone calling my name, [0:17:10]. She was trying to get into the ghetto and she saw me coming with a group. Of course she came for us, she came prepared with money, with documents. And . . . So it . . . the next day we bribed somebody, we'd tell what was going on. She said, "I came to take you home." So we bribed somebody they should stay home, because the Germans didn't count how many people were going back when we were leaving. She put one . . . In mean in Warsaw we had armbands, in Bialystok

we had yellow patches in the back and in the front. So she put on the yellow patch, it was very small, and she walked with me, as a Jew, and she brought, you know, medallion and everything prepared to save me, false documents for my cousin. And we run away from that group during the . . . Germans were drinking beer and they fell asleep. They didn't think anybody would run away, there was no place to run. We were on a highway and there were just fields, would you run? So we just crawled out and we walked all the way to Warsaw.

Z- So you spent the war in Warsaw passing as a . . .

R- No, I was in Warsaw ghetto. I went into the ghetto where my brother and my sister were. She briefed me on everything what happened.

Z- So how did you get out of the ghetto?

R- Few times I got out and there was a lot of [0:18:59] going on . . . [0:19:02] I will start what happened there. I was there until, on and off, until the uprising, which was right now will be 70 years. But before there, Yanka was able to take me and my sister also escaped to the Aryan side. And I was in some people homes, they were hiding me and Yanka was hiding me. There was a lot of things going on. And finally there were denuncements and my sister paid a bribe to the Polish policeman and they let me go before the Gestapo came. I went back to the ghetto, so I was later in the ghetto, illegal. My brother knew where I was. There was a lot of kids like myself, you know, we were like scavenging in the apartments, until the uprising. And then a day before the uprising he threw me into the sewer, it was prearranged.

Z- Your brother?

R- Yeah, my brother. He was fighting in the Warsaw ghetto, yeah. So that's how I got out. And at the same time, I don't know if you realize, that the Germans were forcing Polish people to work in Germany, forced laborers. They were rounding them up, there were no volunteers actually, not too many, because they were treated very badly. They wouldn't kill them, but they treat them very badly. And I was caught in a [0:20:33]. As a matter of fact people said run away because the Germans were catching people. And I made a split second decision, I figure out I have a chance in Germany to survive if they catch me. And I walked into the [same as 0:20:33], and that's what happened. And I was deported to Germany as a Polish slave worker. So I survived the rest of the war. I was lucky I was liberated by the Americans, southern Germany, March '45, as a Polish catholic. [0:21:13] like Poland, and I was working there first as butcher, then was arrested because I stole a piece of salami for someone else, so then I worked in a chemical factory, yeah, in Germany, as a Polish slave worker, yeah.

Z- So you were 17?

R- When the war ended I was 17, almost 17.

Z- So what happened then? The war ends, the American liberate you . . .

R- Yeah, at one point I was reunited . . . my sister survived and my brother survived. Different places. We were all saved by Poles. And I knew where my brother was hiding, because my brother was fighting later in the Polish uprising. He was saved by a woman, who saved him, and he married her. So I knew where he was if he survived. So I walked back to Poland in '45 to find him, and I did find him. I stayed in Poland six weeks. I couldn't take it anymore. And I decided this is my chance, I have to go back to Germany, or Austria to go to a DP camp, you know, displaced persons camp, in order to get out of Europe. That's what I did.

Z- And where did you want to go?

R- Anywhere. Anywhere. Well some of my friends actually wanted to go to Palestine. I was very ambivalent about it because my mother was a Zionist. She told me that if I survive [0:22:50] family there. But since my brother married a non-Jew and my sister married a non-Jew, so I felt if I would go to Palestine I will abandon them, they'll never go back there. Wouldn't happen, you know, that was the atmosphere. So I decided to get out of Europe and channel my energy and get them out, which I did. Took me a long time. My brother to Australia, my sister came here. He passed away already. My brother was 15 years older, and he would 100 now, almost, yeah. And my sister, in Montreal. She passed away. Yeah.

Z- So you . . .

R- No, I went to a DP camp and I registered everywhere. Wherever they would take me; Australia, Canada, the States, the States was no no, because there was a quota for Polish Jews, and South Africa, whatever. So I applied everywhere, Canada came first.

Z- Which DP were you at?

R- Bensheim. That was Southern Germany. Since I was liberated in Mannheim, Bensheim was about 30km between Darmstadt and Frankfurt. Yeah. Very close to Darmstadt, yeah.

Z- So did you come under the orphan program?

R- No. No, I didn't want to be an orphan. I told everybody I'm 20 instead of 17 so they want touch me. I was very grown up. No.

Z- So did you come under any program?

R- No, I became a nurse. The DP camp sent me to study in Frankfurt, in [0;24:33]. So I had to come as a nurse. I was able to get in here as a nurse, which didn't help, couldn't get a job as a nurse.

Z- Really?



R- No, I didn't speak French, didn't speak English. It was a fake . . . apparently it was not a . . . very bad story, because the person who arranged it for me, it was a fake contract anyway—as a nurse. So I landed here as a domestic.

Z- Okay, but you actually did nursing in Germany?

R- Germany in DP camp, sure, yeah, yeah.

Z- So when did you come over here?

R- December '48. I was 20 years old.

Z- You were actually 20?

R- Actually. Officially 23, but I was 20.

J- So you had signed an agreement that you would work for someone . . . what do you remember about . . .

R- I tell you what, there were people . . . I met some people, they knew my family from Warsaw so I trusted them. And one gentlemen, may he rest in peace, he knew my family so I trusted him, and he had family in Canada. He was going to Canada. So I gave him money, everything that I saved, he should get me a contract. Because Canada was restricted country club at that time, '48, before St. Laurent came to power, you know. And as a nurse I had a chance to come to Canada. When I came, excuse me for the fake thing from doctors hospital here in Cote-des-neiges. He paid a lawyer or something, he got the rest of the money, and the contract was a fake.

Z- Let's go back to the 1930s for a second. You were a small kid, but did you . . .

R- I wasn't a small kid. Come on.

Z- Well you were pretty young.

R- I grew up with my father. I was the only kid, so I wouldn't . . . my father never said go to your room because the adults are talking. No such thing.

Z- But did you have dreams and aspirations to be something?

R- Oh yeah, a lawyer like my father.

Z- So you wanted to be a lawyer?

R- Oh yeah. My father would schlep me to court when I was 10 years old. Absolutely.

Z- So you came here, there was no job, so what did you do? Where did you come to, Halifax? Or Quebec?

R- No, Montreal.

Z- Oh, the ship landed in Montreal?

R- No, I came by plane.

Z- Oh, by plane?

R- Oh yeah, oh yeah. It's a beautiful story. I came by plane.

J- A domestic coming on plane.

R- Listen, yeah, yeah. Was a lottery in a way. I was in a camp, in Bremerhaven we were waiting for the boat. That was a transit camp, [0:27:28] and Bremerhaven. And November '48 we're a few thousand people, Ukrainian, and Poles and whatever. Not too many Jews there because they wouldn't let them in. And waiting for the boat, and then I see in the dining room a list of 20 names, and my name [is] there. And I have a very Polish name Renada Skotnikcka, so everybody thought that I was Polish. "Report to the office." You know, I was scarred. You when you're in a camp, report, something was going on . . . And the 20 people, the young people, I was the only Jew among the people, so obviously they figure out I'm Polish. And I came to the office, they said, "Canadian government decided to make a gift and send you to Canada by plane." You know those planes . . . those propeller. . . I think they call them Northstar or something.

Z- They had the four propellers.

R- Propellers, yeah, yeah. Trust [possibly trans?]Canada, but you have to . . . you know, I said, "Fine. Of course", but "No luggage." I said, "I have no luggage." I go for the weekend to Toronto I have more luggage than I had then. No problem. So they sent us, the 20 group, 20 people, I was the only Jew among them, they send us by train to Rotterdam, Scandinavian express to Rotterdam. From there we went to Hoek van Holland, in Holland, and by ferry, Duke of Kent, to England, Harbridge. If you know geography, that's what it was, yeah. From Harbridge they said welcome to England, they gave us some tea and cookies, whatever, and took us by train to London, and we were in London for 10 days. And after 10 days they told us again I had to sign, in case there is a crash or something, you know . . .okay, and they sent us to Canada.

Z- Were you scared about flying?

R- No, I didn't know any better. I was never on a plane, why would I be scared? If you don't know an experience you're not scared, you think that's what it's supposed to be, right. [laughs] It was December, '48 and we were supposed to land in Montreal . . . oh yeah, we got stuck in Gander for three days.

Z- Gander, yeah, 'cause they couldn't do the transatlantic flights. They all stopped in Gander.

R- No first we went from London, went to [0:30:11 sounds like Shannon], from Shannon went to Gander, we were supposed to go to Montreal and there was a big storm or something, mechanical problem, I don't have a clue what it was. So we got stuck in Gander at the airport there for three days. And from Gander they were supposed to come to Montreal and there was a big storm so we landed in Toronto. So I landed in Toronto, got my entry visa, landed immigrant in Toronto, and they put us on a train to Montreal. Actually me, I was the only one who was going to Montreal.

Z- So what happened when you got to Montreal?

R- [laughs] That's [where] trouble started. Excuse me, the contrast . . .

J- You took a train?

R- Took about 10 hours at that time. I got five . . . that the money what I got, I got five dollars from the Red Cross in Toronto.

Z- So you weren't greeted by JIAS or anybody?

R- No. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. I got from the travels . . . I don't know, the Red Cross or whatever, they gave me 5 dollars. I stuck it in my bra, you know, 5 dollars was a lot of money.

Z- It was a lot of money then, yeah.

R- I had nothing else, right.

Z- Yeah.

R- Because that 300 dollars I gave to that fellow to get me that contract. I came here and he said excuse me but . . . you know, like it was just . . . you know the lawyer took 150 and the doctor took another 150, you got nothing, so that was quite a wakening here when I came. December 13, it took me 13 days from Germany to come to Canada, yeah.

Z- So you get to Montreal then what?

R- I had 5 dollars so I rented a room, which cost me 2 dollars for the whole week.

J- Where was the room?

R- On Esplanade, in Montreal. Also, some people which came before, I had some addresses from people. And then I met a lady and I told her I'm a nurse. She said, "A friend of mine

just came back from the surgery, she needs somebody to take care of her. Would you like to work there and live-in?" I said, "Yes". Live-in, a roof over my head. So I got a job with a lady, but I worked as a domestic there, was not a nurse.

Z- You took care of her kids?

R- No, I took care of the woman. The kids, well, the boy was 10, the girl was 16. So I worked there as a domestic for six months.

Z- And where was that?

R- In a very fancy district here, Swanson [0:32:57 sp ?]. Do you know Montreal?

Z- Yes.

R- Well, at that time was already very fancy, in duplex, yeah. So I worked as a domestic there for 6 months. You ask me how they treated me? They never hit me. If you would ask me 60 years ago, 64 years ago, how did they treat you? I would say never, nobody hit me. It was ugly. I didn't eat at the same table, only in the kitchen. I had better table manners than they did, believe me. And . . . what else can I tell you . . .?

Z- Did they ask you about your past? What happened? Anything?

R- Oh, yeah. The lady asked me, "Tell me, how did you survive? After all you were such a pretty girl, you probably flirted with the Germans."

Z- Assuming you were . . .

R- [0:33:43]. Yeah. No, they were not nice people. Not at all. Oh, they changed my name. "What's your name?" "Renata." "That's such an exotic name, what kind of name is that?" How did they call you at home?" I said, "Rania." "Oh, that's Irene, we'll call you Irene." So they called me Irene. I didn't have enough self-esteem to say that's not my name. Okay, so they called me Irene.

Z- You were dependent on them.

R- Of course. Oh yeah. It wasn't nice. I thought something was wrong with me, but later when I spoke to other survivors I knew that was dime-a-dozen. People were . . . some people were lucky and they got a good welcome, but by-and-large, no, no. There was no understanding at all.

Z- They weren't Jewish?

R- Yes, of course they were Jewish. Pillars of the society. Very Jewish, oh yes, very well known. I won't mention the name.

Z- And they didn't give you food? I mean they gave you food, but they wouldn't welcome you at the table?

R- No, of course not. I even had to do laundry by hand because there was no washing machine. Oh god, yeah. As a matter of fact, I had to clean the carpets outside with horrible weather, so I got a sinus infection. They got scared, they called the doctor, and got penicillin and everything. They took it off from the pay later.

Z- They deducted the money from the pay?

R- Um hum, yeah. I was getting 2 dollars a day, yeah, so they deducted that, I remember 50 bucks there [? 0:35:30].

Z- But after 6 months I imagine you began to learn English.

R- I tell you what. I wanted to learn English, so I was told that there are classes in the Jewish Library in Montreal. And that was quite a schlep from Cote-des-Neiges, at that time, to the Jewish Library on Esplanade. It used to be there on Park Ave and Esplanade.

Z- Yeah, Esplanade and Mont. Royal.

R- Yeah. So I met some other people there. Actually, Irving Layton taught me English. Okay. So once I learned and . . . so I said I have to get out of there or something. So I got a job . . .

Z- So these were night classes right?

R- Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember one ugly thing what happened there. I missed the train . . . not the train, the streetcar . . . was street car going there or bus? I don't remember.

Z- It would have been street cars, yeah.

R- There was still streetcars there?

Z- Yeah.

R- Yeah, course there was. Streetcar, yeah. And I missed it. I came late and usually I was supposed to be 10 o'clock at home, right. It was like a duplex. In the front, downstairs there was a door and then you walk up the stairs. So the front door was open and the door to their apartment was closed. And I was too embarrassed to knock at the door, and I stayed the whole night sitting. Can you imagine my self-esteem that I was embarrassed to knock at the door? And they didn't even think what happened to that child? Never opened the door. Only the milkman came. Okay. The whole night I was sitting there on the stairs. Know I remember.

Z- What amazes me is of course you didn't have self-esteem, you were in hiding, you were in passing the whole war. You were scared, right, of everything.

R- Of course I was scared. And I said, "they never hit me". But now I'm angry. There was absolute lack of understanding. But it wasn't only me. It was . . . tough . . . I mean unfortunately. There was . . . instead of having a brother, we got, "What you do to survive?" You were scum if you survived or victim if you didn't. That was by-and-large, unfortunately. Some people were more lucky. I heard that in Winnipeg, people [who] came [0:37:50] transport, some of them came to very nice, good families. They were in touch with them all their lives. Yeah. I heard some good stories too. But here in Montreal . . . later when I met other people . . . I wasn't lucky.

Z- So after 6 months you spoke English a little bit? Quite a bit?

R- I had to. I had to, yeah. I had to. I learned, yeah.

Z- Did you learn Yiddish?

R- No, they didn't speak Yiddish there.

Z- No, but just from other survivors?

R- No, I learned Yiddish from my husband when I married him.

Z- Okay, we'll get to that shortly. So where did you go after 6 months?

R- Well some people told me get away from them, you know, like . . . so . . . I got a job at Steinberg's. You remember Steinberg's?

Z- I do.

R- [0:38:41], which was very far, so I said I have a job there. So they said, "Well we'll make a deal with you. Why don't you stay here, just maybe . . . you help a little bit with the dishes, and you can work, and you have a room free." I was very happy, you know. But of course, I would come from work [laughs], oh the dishes, everything was left for me. And the weekend I had to babysit with the boy, he was 10 years old. So actually I worked double. So after a while I figure out I have to get out of there. I was already making, what? 15, 18 dollars a week. So I got a room, the old lady on Mont Royal, and that was another disaster [laughs]. Mrs. Fish [sp ? possible Finch], who came probably from a little shtetl, never saw a car or a [0:39:32] in her life before she came to Montreal. She only spoke Yiddish.

Z- Was she a survivor as well?

R- No, she came 50 years ago. She was renting rooms. I got a room in the back there. She gave me instructions, she came, showed me the toilet and she said, "Remember, don't wash your face here." You know, here, [0:39:59]. Sorry . . .

Z- [to J] That means here we shit.

R- [laughing] Don't wash your face . . . ! Sure, look, she was frozen in time. Let's face it. She came probably 50, 60 years ago. She never saw a car before she came to Montreal. She didn't understand that we came from different background. We didn't run away from the [0:40:19], we came because it was different. Okay. And then I was only allowed to take a bath once a week, Friday. Because you to . . . there was a heater sort of like with the gas or whatever. I mean whose . . . I'm laughing my head off.

Z- It was probably kerosene.

R- She did other things. I would go on St. Lawrence, there was this store Warsaw, remember Warsaw?

Z- Warsaw, yeah.

R- I would buy some stuff. Each time I came I bought two, three oranges. They were rotten two days later. She would switch them [laughs]. Milk, a couple of days later milk was transparent because she would take the milk and put some water in it. It mean it was hysterical what the women was . . .

Z- Who else lived there? There were other boarders?

R- Yes, as a matter of fact she rented her double parlor. Those people were known in Montreal. As a matter of fact, I'm in touch with their daughter in law. [0:41:18], that big orthopedic store, [same as 0:41:18], they were refugees. [0:41:24] probably gave them the room there, double parlor. And then they moved out, so she decided to discontinue the telephone. I said, "Mrs. Fish when I rented the room, that's my only contact with people." So she said, I don't know if you speak Yiddish, [0:41:43] [laughs]. I don't know if you understand . . .

J- I didn't.

Z- She said you're . . . again you're a greenah . . .

R- No greenah chaya . . .

Z- Right, [to J] you know what a greenah is, chaya is an animal.

R- The green animal, did you ever see a telephone in Europe? [laughs]

J- Course not, no, no.

R- [laughs] No I never did [ironically]. Now I can laugh about it, but it was tough, it was very tough.

Z- So who were your friends there? Who did you hang out with?

R- I met people there in the library. You know, some nice people, also refugees.

J- So you kept going when you could? For a couple of nights a week? To the JPL? You know ...

R- Well I had Sunday off, so Sunday [I] used to meet people at ...

J- Fletcher's?

R- Mont Royal and Fletcher field—...field?

Z- Fletcher's field, yeah.

R- Yeah that's right.

J- So you would go there Sunday morning?

R- Sunday, Sunday I would go there, yeah, and meet some people, and the other refugees. Then I met some people which I was in a DP camp with. We're still friends, you know, meet with our children. As a matter of fact, I get my glasses usually there. You know. So eventually I wasn't so trapped. There were other people, "get out of there, do this, so that." You know, it was different.

Z- You were a single woman, a lot of the refugees who came were married ...

R- Yeah. Oh god no I didn't want to get married in camp. I saw that mess that was going on. The wife got sick, the husband got sick, they couldn't go for three years. I wanted to be free. I had think ... to get my family out of Europe, so I couldn't get trapped. Anyway, I didn't want to get married and have right away baby. Everybody had babies there in camp.

Z- So how was it as a single woman in Montreal?

R- Okay. Single woman. Yeah, I was pretty good looking. I had some offers, yeah. I had some offers. And then I met my husband.

Z- Okay, let's talk about dating first. You dated with some other ...?

R- Yeah I dated somebody, yeah. For four years, and then I married his friend. [laughter all around.] That's it. Sharon! Where is she? I want to talk about your father, come on.

Z- So you dated somebody for four years. He was also an immigrant?



R- He was and he wasn't, because he was from Poland, but then he studied in France, and he came, during the war he was in Tangier, and in '41 he came to Montreal.

S- Yeah?

R- Come over we're starting to talk about your father, you can stay here.

S- No, I was lying in the sun.

Z- We're actually talking about her boyfriend before your father.

S- Well my father . . . oh you're talking about Albert.

Z- It's Albert, okay.

S- I know everything.

Z- So Albert, how did you meet Albert?

R- I met him practically the first day I came to Canada. He was a friend of the people I used to work for. Yeah, so I met him and we started to date, yeah. And he came in '41, from Tangier they came to Montreal, because his family they were very textile rich people and they sponsored a group of people from Tangier, Polish Jews, they came during the war in '41

Z- So how much older was he?

R- He was not a refugee, he was doing okay. He was much older than me, yeah, much older than me. Yeah. And then I met my husband.

Z- So what happened? Why didn't it work with Albert?

R- Because I met my husband. That's it. That did it.

Z- So was your husband also an immigrant or Canadian?

R- My husband survived the war in Russia, in Soviet Union. He came here. He had family here.

Z- When did he come?

R- Six months before I came. He came through France.

Z- And he came alone?

R- He came alone, but his family came before because they had some rich family here.

S- Member of Parliament.

R- Yeah. That's right.

Z- So what's your husband's name?

R- Abram.

Z- Abram Zajdman.

R- Yes, yes.

Z- So you met Abram through Albert.

R- That's right.

Z- And what was Abram doing when you met him?

R- [sighs] Wasn't doing too much. Struggling. Peddling. Very poor. So I left a rich boyfriend and married a poor guy. Best thing what happened to me.

Z- And where was he living?

R- In Montreal.

Z- But where?

R- Waverly, somewhere. Waverly? Somewhere in that district.

Z- He was peddling for someone else?

R- He was working as a salesman, I don't know, toys, other stuff. He was struggling, really struggling. Yeah, we were struggling.

Z- How much older was he than you?

R- Really? No, because I always pretend that I'm older?

Z- Yeah.

R- Then it was 11 years.

S- 11 and a half, but he didn't know it.

Z- He thought it was 9 and a half?

R- Yeah.

Z- So you were living still with Mrs. Fish when you met him?

R- Oh god no. I left Mrs. Fish a month later.

Z- So where did you go?

R- Again, there were some people, refugees, they survived in Russia, Mr. and Mrs. Rocha, nice people. And they had a flat on Hutchinson, and they were renting rooms. It was me, I rented one room, and there was another couple with a child that rented another room, that's how they supported themselves. As a matter of fact they had two daughters, Rachel and Tamara. And Rachel married somebody else and Rachel's son . . . [laughs] it's crazy, it's Jewish geography. Rachel's son married a girl who is a partner to my husband . . .oh, my son. They are both physicians in Toronto. They work in the same clinic.

Z- Yeah, so . . .

R- Yeah so I know what's going on with Rachel. She's there in Toronto. But we were good friends there—

Z- —Okay so this is '49.

R- No, I met my husband in '53.

Z- Oh, '53.

R- Yeah.

Z- So between '48 and '53 . . .

R- I dated Albert on and off.

Z- You dated Albert, but you worked at . . . as a domestic, then you went to Steinberg's, 18-20 dollars a week, let's say 1949. Then what happened?

R- Then I got a job as a cleaning lady in a showroom. Eliah's Brothers, it was import and export china, something like Pascos, Eliah's brothers. And I was cleaning dirt in the showroom. Okay, I was already making 20 dollars a week, and I got a real break. The manager took a liking to me. He was a German Jew, Mr. Nemerov. And he said, you're too bright to work . . .he said, come on up, I'll teach you everything in the office. So I became like a gofer in the office. Go to the back, do this, do that, and I learned everything. And within four years I had my own secretary. I became a buyer in that big company.

Z- Almost like your mother.

R- Yeah. So I learned everything about import and export ,so when we got married we started our own business, me and my husband. We had a partner.

Z- So you probably learned a little bit subconsciously from you mother. You think?

R- I don't . . . I think my father would turn in his grave if he knew I am a business woman. He hated business. He never helped my mother, that's what I mean, that was that friction probably.

Z- So you worked for this Nemerov person . . .

R- No, no, he was the manager there.

Z- Okay.

R- The company was the Eliah Brothers. China, and porcelain, and house-ware.

Z- So you were buying, you were running the . . .

R- Oh, yeah. I became a buyer. As a matter of fact they used to take me to Chicago for the buyer shows.

Z- So this was still in the 50s?

R- Yeah, yeah, yeah. Until . . . When I married my husband I was working there already. That's what he told his daughter, mommy was making 5 dollars a week more than I did. So he married me for my money [laughter all around]. Yeah, so I was there and I quit when I got married with her.

Z- So how long . . . So you got married with Abram . . .

R- And I was working there. When I met my husband I was already a big shot, I was working as a buyer for a company.

Z- And what was he doing?

R- On his own he worked as a salesman for some toy company, all kinds of stuff. He was really struggling.

J- So he would sell toys to other stores . . . so he would make . . .

R- Yeah, my husband by profession, he was a businessman. He came from a family from Radom, which is central Poland. His father had wine business. So his real profession was wine taster. Of course he couldn't get a job with Brothman [sp?] here. But he knew

everything about sales. He couldn't get a job so he was working . . . but he knew everything about sales, yeah.

Z- So he spoke Russian, you spoke a little bit Russian?

R- I do. I still do, yeah.

Z- So what did you speak to each other?

R- Polish. His language was Yiddish, first language. Because his brothers and sisters all spoke Polish to other people, but at home they used to speak Yiddish, because he came from a very religious home. His mother wore a [0:52:25]. That was another friction because they didn't want me, his family. I wasn't good enough for them. I wasn't religious.

Z- So was he religious?

R- No. [0:53:35], he busted out completely. His family was, he wasn't.

Z- [same as 0:53:35] is a left wing, sort of . . . it was socialist, Zionist. So they were atheists, Marxists.

R- That's right, yeah. So he busted out completely after the war. When he found out his family was killed, he rejected religion. So there was no religion.

Z- Okay, so you decide to get married. Talk to me about the wedding.

R- Sharon!

S- Yeah!

R- Come here. They want to know about the wedding. Oh, here's my wedding picture, over there.

Z- Okay we will look at it shortly.

R- So the wedding was in his family home, in his cousin's home. They were rich. As a matter of fact the cousin was a member of parliament, first Jewish member of parliament.

Z- Who was that?

R- Crestohl, ever heard of him?

S- Yes mom?

R- They want to know about my wedding.

S- I wasn't there mom.

R- I know you were not there.

Z- When did you get married?

R- Well I met him on January 18 and we got married May the 3<sup>rd</sup>. If he had his way we would get married 10 days later.

[discussing picture]

R- 60 years ago, yeah. May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Z- So his cousin was an MP for what party?

R- Liberal.

Z- Of course.

R- It was the first . . . that was the first Jewish Member of Parliament. Leon Crestohl, yeah. So that was the family.

J- Sorry, is this the Rosenbergs? No. The Rose family . . .? no . . .

R- Crestohl

Z- Fred Rose was elected, but he never was a member . . .

R- Rose was a communist.

Z- Yeah, he was elected, but never . . .

R- I know. Rose, No, no, no . . .

J- I'm sorry, I heard the labour progressive, no? He was . . .

R- liberal, not labor

Z- So where did they live? In Outremont?

R- They lived in Outremont, so the wedding was in their basement, yeah. But that was just before the election, so they were very nice to me. And they decided they want to have the wedding so they can show the refugees that they marry them. Besides the point, my husband paid for it. But that's what it was. [0:55:10] and all together there were 60 people, the rest was his friends and family.

Z- So you became a political agenda.

S- Oh, yeah.

R- As a matter of fact, they had . . . It was on Sunday, we married May the 3<sup>rd</sup>, it was a Sunday. Friday they made rehearsals.

S- Oh the dog.

R- With a dog yeah. As a matter of fact Mr. Crestohl's wife was the daughter of the founder of Keneder Adler, Wolofsky. So can you imagine those . . .

Z- Keneder Adler is a Yiddish newspaper translated it's Canadian Eagle.

J- Oh, okay.

Z- Yeah, was a Yiddish newspaper.

R- Oh they past away now so I can talk about it now.

Z- How do you spell their name?

S- C-R-E-S-T-O-H-L

Z- IS that German?

S- The original name is Crystal, like Billy Crystal, but they changed to Crestohl. Well actually the son is still alive, he's a lawyer, so have to be careful about it.

Z- Okay. So you had a wedding with your five friends . . .

R- Five people and all together there was 60 people in the basement, but we had rehearsals on Friday. And the Crestohls had a dog, and Leon Crestohl said to his wife, to Sophie, he said, "Are you going to dress up . . .?" What was that dogs name? Fella or something . . .

S- Oh come on.

R- Yes, something like that. So I blew up. I said, "He won't be the only dressed up dog at my wedding." That's it. That's it. And I had no choice, right. I mean . . . so I got married there, yeah.

S- Actually you didn't want to get married at all.

R- No I didn't.

S- You said, Let's live together. [laughs]

R- So my husband said, Nobody's testing me we're getting married.

J- Nobody's testing me.

R- That's right.

J- My loyalty to you . . . he said it that way.

R- No, no, no.

S- No.

R- Look, my parents were divorced. I didn't have good role models, right. My sister had a miserable life with her husband. My brother married her out of gratitude. She was a real character. Okay, so I was afraid of getting married. I was scared of marriage. I had no role models.

S- What he meant was, when she said let's live together, he said no way nobody's testing me. Like you marry me or that's it.

J- Oh I see. Yeah.

R- He figured out that I'm trying just to test him, you know. Nobody's testing me, we're getting married. So we got married. Best thing what happened in my life.

Z- So what happened? You got married. Where did you live?

R- We lived with his family; with his two brothers and his two sisters. It was another nightmare.

Z- Where did they live?

R- Outremont. Because he wanted to save money and help, because one of his brothers came from Israel so we had to help out, you know. So we paid 50% and the brother paid nothing in order to help the family. It was a mess.

Z- So you had a flat in Outremont?

R- We had a flat in Outremont, yeah, with two brothers, together with us, three.

Z- So it was tight?

R-Yeah.

Z- So what street was that? Do you remember?



R- Yeah sure I remember. Duchamp [?] and [0:59:04].

S- It's all trendy now, but . . .

Z- No, but . . . I think of all three families in one flat . . .

R- Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Z- So what were you . . .

R- I was already at Eliahs Brothers when we got married. That's what I mean, my bosses came to the wedding.

Z- When did you and your husband start the business?

R- Later on. Took me two years to get pregnant with her.

Z- So he kept working are a peddler, a salesman?

R- And I was working, as I said I made more money than he did, as a buyer. And . . . she was born.

J- In 1956? 1955?

R- She was born in '55, December '55, yeah. So we decided, you know, start our own business, which we did. I knew everything about import, and he knew everything about . . . I knew everything about buying, he knew everything about—

Z- So you didn't really stop working?

R- No.

J- So what products did you . . .?

R- Houseware.

S- Well you started with baskets and then started to expand.

R- We started with baskets, yeah, yeah.

Z- And what was it called?

R- Variety Import. I have a catalogue still.

Z- That would be very neat to look at. So . . . [phone rings] So what did you do?

R- Ran the business. [possible worked the business – difficult to here b/c of phone]

Z- And you worked together?

R- We worked together always.

Z- And you did the buying and he did the . . . ?

R- The buying and the office, yeah. We were very good partners.

Z- And how did you handle childcare?

R- It was hard. Later my son Michael was born 1958, two children. It was hard.

Z- So how did you do it? How did you work and have the kids?

R- They were lunch kids. We used to live in [0:01:22] street, two blocks away from school so they didn't have to cross the street. And I paid the neighbor some money so they should keep come home for lunch and so on. You know, it was hard. It's very tough. But since my husband drove a car, he could come and keep an eye on the kids, you know, like he was . . . he didn't have to work from 9-5, so it was something . . . so he was there with the car.

Z- But what about when they were younger? Preschool?

R- It was hard. I worked all the time. We had some nannies, we had Mrs. Jane for a while taking care of kids, and then neighbors. It was struggle. Really struggle. We had no support from the family because they didn't want me, so wouldn't help him.

R- Because you weren't religious?

Z- Part of it. And I was a poor refugee.

S- So were they.

R- Not only a refugee, I wasn't religious and I was poor. And they had somebody in mind for him before. Somebody from a rich family. And my brother wasn't married to a Jew and my sister wasn't married to a Jew. That was another stigma at that time. So I was . . . no, no they rejected me from day one. It's their loss.

Z- So you did all the . . . and the housework and cooking? Was that you too, or no?

R- Not much. I'm not a good cook. My mother never taught me.

S- We had cleaning ladies later on.

R- We had Miss Jane, right. They want to know how I managed with you guys when you were small.

S- When my mother was . . . well is it okay?

Z- Yeah.

R- Come on, come on.

S- I ended up writing about it. We had a nanny, Miss Jane.

Z- How old were you?

S- Oh, I wasn't in school yet. No, I wasn't in school yet. I couldn't read yet, so I had to be less than 5. My mother was working in a bakery in Point Claire. I don't know if you told that . . .

R- No I didn't. They don't know yet. Later when we decided to have a business . . .that was before we started the business. We opened a bakery in Point Claire.

Z- When was this?

R- I remember the pictures. I was about 3 years old, so late 50s.

R- So the business, I forgot that we had that bakery before, so we started the business later on. Before that we had the bakery.

Z- Okay, but you helped always, right.

R- Oh, yeah.

S- There was a point when my mother was living in a basement in Point Claire and coming home only on the weekend, because they were about to start a business, but my father panicked in the last minute. He was afraid to give up his job. He was afraid what would happen if he let go of his last . . . you know.

R- Yeah, that's true.

S- So my mother . . . He kept his job, my mother ran it alone, slept in a basement in Point Claire because it was too far to travel back and forth. They hired a French-Canadian lady, Jane [1:04:56], half French, perfectly bilingual, you know. Half French-Canadian, half Irish. She lived with us. She was our nanny. So Miss Jane took care of me and my brother, I think it was for about two years. It started for me, I mean there is a reason I remember this, I ended up writing about it. It seemed to hit a note, it's been published all over. It started because we had a Christmas tree, and the Christmas tree was put there for Miss Jane. But I knew that we had a Christmas tree, and when Miss Jane left, no more tree. And I didn't

understand. Like how come we had a Christmas and how come we don't have a Christmas tree anymore? So my father said, "I'll get you a Chanukah bush." And I was even more confused 'cause there's no such thing as a Chanukah bush. What I did not know at the time . . . We also had a German neighbor who ended up taking care of us. And she's like the caregiver memory more than Miss Jane, because Miss Jane knew that she was working for Polish immigrants. I mean in her mind she was working for Polish immigrants, and Poles are Catholics, right.

R- Oh I remember that.

S- So one day she asked our German neighbor, Mrs.[1:06:32], she wanted to prepare fish for Friday. Where was the fish market so she could make fish for Friday?

R- She was a Catholic.

S- And Mrs [same as 1:06:32] said, It's not necessary 'cause they're not Catholic. Miss Jane did not realize that she was working for Jews.

R- She panicked.

S- And she never met Jews before. She was convent raised, 1950s, from Quebec City.

Z- Yeah, very anti-Semitic.

S- She . . .

R- No. She never met a Jew in her life.

Z- Yeah, no but just the culture . . .

R- She probably thought I had horns.

S- She didn't realize that she was working for Jews and that's how she found out, and she got very upset. She didn't say anything to my parents. It was the German lady from Berlin who explained—the irony of it—that a German woman explained to a French Canadian woman that Jews are as human as we are, and we don't have horns. I mean the irony was . . .

R- She stayed with us for three years. She loved the kids.

S- She didn't say anything to . . . My mother told me that . . . Miss Jane didn't say anything to my parents, but Mrs. [same as 1:06:32] told my parents, and they offered to let her go. Like you have a problem . . .

R- I said look . . . if you're unhappy.

S- And she said, "No, I love the kids, I love these children", [in a crying voice]. You know, "they're wonderful".

R- I got her a good job later. Later, I really set her up with a nice, good job, with nice people.

S- After Miss Jane . . . When my mother was able to come back home, they placed Miss Jane with other people. My mother was home. What I remember is I always. . .

R- I was never really home, I was just in Montreal.

S- You were home. I always remember my mother working, I never remember my mother being home. I remember only a period, my mother being home . . . I was already in school, but my brother wasn't in school yet. So what I remember is coming home from school, opening the door, and seeing my mother and my brother on the living room floor with like a 2,000 piece puzzle. The kid's like three years old. And I mean, my brother is brilliant. And she always had so much patience with my brother, and they got along . . . well 'cause my brother was finding her glasses for her when he was 2 years old. My brother never spoke, he just, you know, watched everything, saw everything. He was a little gentleman. In my memory the only time my mother . . . it seemed like an intermission from her work, was when my brother was at home. And I remember walking in the door and feeling so lonely and so left out because they're the two . . . I mean there's two of them and so quietly, you know, doing this puzzle. And I just felt left out.

R- Didn't last too long.

S- Well I'm just telling you how I felt.

R- Well I started the business, so I had to be working fulltime.

S- When they started the business, what I do remember . . . Probably, my mother was always very, very creative . . . I don't think anybody else had it [. . .]. They arranged with bell to have an extension line, the office line to the house.

R- That's right, oh yes. You remember those things.

S- People work at home, it's the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so the office line would ring at home. So that whatever happened, even if my mother, if they were not in the office, if somebody called the business they could still pick up the line. And I don't think anybody else at the time every even thought of doing a thing like that.

Z- It's almost like now. Working on your computer and taking care of your kids.

J- Well it makes sense. You're in import/export company, so you have different time zone . . .

.

R- Oh, different time.

S- But I don't think anyone else even thought about doing a thing like that. . .

J- Putting it at home, yeah.

S- But what I do remember. This Mrs. [same as1:06:32], we ended up moving to the same building where she lived, she was our neighbor, across the hall. I didn't realize she was being paid. My mother told me later. We just knew our neighbor took care of us. We came home from school, Mrs. T made our lunch, you know, made our snack when we came home.

R- Yeah, I had no family, I had to depend on . . .

S- But she did have family. And the irony of it was, No, I had aunts and they weren't far away, my father's sister. Nobody offered to help, but when they hired a German woman to take care of . . . Look at this! A Nazi bitch. How can she let a German woman take care of their children, Abram's children?! They twisted everything. Never helped. When my mother would find solutions, they were always twisting whatever she did. I do remember once saying something, I was 8 years old, saying something to an aunt *immediately*. She [said], "Oh what that Rena is doing to that poor child." My mother was sitting with the relatives not able to say anything. I went over to my mother. I said, "Don't worry mommy she didn't fool me." But about Mrs. T, so . . . but when we came home from school—we came home at lunch and we came home after school—we always have to call the office.

R- That's true.

S- The first thing we did, "I'm home."

Z- Check in.

S- Check. Well we checked in, she didn't call us, we called. First thing, come home, pick up the phone, "Mommy I'm home." I still do it [laughter].

R- She still does it [laughter]. She doesn't live too far [more laughter].

S- I moved here. I always swore I'd never end up as an old Jew in Cote-St-Luc. I left this neighborhood 30 years ago, swore I'd never come back.

R- She moved in two years ago.

S- I moved here, back, three years ago. Two years ago. To be in close proximity. I'm very happy by the way. I'm amazed. I live behind the library and I love it. And . . . When I'm with my mother, I go home, "Ma, I'm home." It doesn't cost, just to be . . . So even though she was working and later they would talk about latch key kids, I never felt that way.

R- But you did.

S- I mean there were other kids, you know . . . And I grew up [1:13:10] street, there were a lot of kids like that and mommy wasn't home, and they had a key and nobody to greet them. There was always somebody there. Mrs. T was there at lunch, Mrs. T was there when we checked in with her in the afternoon, and we called. So Mrs. T was next door until mommy and daddy came home.

R- Was very funny, when I was in Toronto now for something. I said, Michael you know we were so poor we were living on [1:13:34] street. And he said, We were poor? I didn't know we were poor.

S- We never felt it.

R- You really were poor, yeah.

S- When there was like food drives at school, my mother would give me cans to take to school for the poor children. Expo '67, we all had passports. We were all down there. April 27<sup>th</sup>, the day Expo opened, my parents took off from work. The four of us were down there. The first thing, my father, you know, who was born in April 1917, survived the war in the Soviet Union, ferocious anti-communist, would never allow . . . my brother could travel the world, was not allowed to go to Russia. He was terrified of them, hated them, was terrified. Loved the Russians, loved the people. Said to me, "I love the country, love the people. If they would let me open my mouth, I would stay there." Took me years to figure out what he was talking about. First day, 1967 . . .

R- Soviet Pavilion.

S- The first thing, my father had to go to the Soviet Pavilion.

R- Oh yeah.

S- We did . . . We were there the very first day Expo opened, we got hungry, this is 1967, they had like a cafeteria some kind of supper, hot dogs. Hot dogs, \$7. This is 1967, they were charging \$7 for a hot dog on a bun, in the Soviet Pavilion in 1967. Had no choice, the first day my father said, "God damn communist hotdogs!" And he always said, "You know the difference between a capitalist and a communist? 50 bucks." You know, and there were all the Russians around and my mother is going, "Abram, [1:15:25]." He said, "I'm in Canada now, I can say whatever I want." [laughter] From then on we always packed our own food when we went to Expo.

The kids around . . . I grew up, we went to Bedford [?] school. I found out later there were 24 different mother languages. Everybody was an immigrant. I was designated, I don't know how it happened, but every time some kid came from Japan or some kid came from Greece, they always had me teaching them how to read. You know, I mean I was kind of designated little teacher.

R- It's true.

S- my mother would never speak Polish to me or my brother. In her mind she thought we would end up with an accent. She didn't want us to sound like immigrant's children. I had to speak, you know, English and French. When her friends from New York—they really did have an uncle in Brooklyn, they were in a DP camp together, so they ended up in New York, she ended up in Montreal—And they came to visit, they said, "Your daughter speaks the Queen's English." And my mother who was listening to Elizabeth's Christmas broadcast on the CBC each year, said, "Oh no, my daughter speaks much better than the Queen."

So when you asked how she managed: There was always somebody around. There was always love, you know, there was always a line. We were not latch key kids. We never felt neglected. We never felt . . . And everybody else around was in the same boat. When we ended up moving to Cote-St-Luc, and I think I know why it happened, someone drew swastikas. I got in trouble. I was an honours student, and I ended up getting in trouble for drawing [1:17:32]. The first swastikas this was around June '67. And my mother freaked out.

R- Yeah, that's true.

S- She wanted to get of the neighborhood. My father never wanted to move to Cote-St-Luc.

R- That's true.

S- My father was a man of the world. For him Cote-St-Luc was a ghetto. He didn't want like ghetto. And I did not understand what the nuances and the resonance of the word ghetto.

Z- Can we hold on, I just want to go back a little bit. [S says something] Well no, it's all important. I just want to get a little bit of background information. So let's go back to the bakery for a second . . .

R- Yeah, I forgot about the bakery.

Z- Did it work?

R- I kept it for a while, and was struggling. And then there was a fire next door and it was just before Christmas. And the smoke contaminated food and everything. And we didn't have insurance because it was a new shopping centre. And I lost everything. That was the end of it. About a year and a half.

Z- So you came back home fulltime.

R- Yeah, and then we decided to do the business, yeah.

Z- So how long until the business took off?



R- Oh, about a couple of years. Couple of years. We had no help. We had no capital. We were struggling. And right away already my husband was at the end of his rope. I got money back from the Germany for my restitution money.

Z- That was in 1960 though right?

R- '63.

Z- So that was later.

R- '63.

Z- So you spoke English . . . I want to pick up on the language thing. You spoke English to your kids right from the get go.

R- Right from the beginning.

Z- And what did you speak to Abram. [S laughs]

R- When the kids were around English, otherwise Polish.

S- Polish when you didn't want us to understand.

R- Yeah.

Z- Did you understand?

R- Not much. Not much. I don't think so.

S- Not much.

Z- So your language very quickly switched to English.

R- Yes.

Z- Who were your friends?

R- Survivors. I always felt good with survivors. Funny hey.

S- Irving Layton was her English teacher. You told her that?

R- What?

S- You told her about Irving Layton? Taking his class?

R- Yeah, yeah it did. She knows. Survivors, funny hey.

Z- Why do you think that is?

R- Oh it's very simple. I felt better with them. I had more empathy, no matter how they behaved. I know what's behind it. Because there was no empathy from people which came here before. I didn't have any empathy from the people I worked for, or the people I met. There was absolutely no understanding what we went through. Even though maybe some of their relatives were destroyed, nothing, nothing. Greenah, you know. Accents. Stuff like that. No emotions. I just . . . absolutely. No, I felt better with the survivors, no matter how primitive they were, I'm sorry. I still felt better with them, I still do. I work in the Holocaust Centre even now. I'm very much involved in the [1:21:09] on Sunday. We had rehearsals yesterday. No, I feel better with them. I'm working Holocaust Centre, and I work there as a [1:21:22] and as a speaker, and I still travel, and . . . I'm more limited because of my health.

Z- And did you talk to the kids about the Holocaust?

R- I didn't, but I was screaming at night so my husband had to . . . , "Mommy's nervous, mommy went through the war." They were getting mixed signals.

S- I started asking questions, not my brother.

Z- When?

S- You want me to come back?

Z- Yeah, yeah, you were always welcome back.

J- You shouldn't even leave.

Z- You shouldn't have left.

S- No I just thought . . .

Z- Oh.

S- It started . . . my mother . . . the first photographs. The existing photographs. Oh it's not here anymore because now I have it in my house. I have taken the ancestors to my apartment.

R- I still have my mom picture.

S- There was one picture. One photograph. My mother's mother.

R- Yeah, as a young woman.

S- And I was always fascinated by this photograph. Especially since my mother told me that I looked . . . Everyone said [1:22:39], that I looked like her. And my mother said, "Oh no, you look like my mother."

[looking at a picture]

But she had one that I think my aunt saved in her underwear, like one tiny little beat up picture. And then they restored and they, you know . . . and my aunt had a copy too. And it had a prominent place on the wall. And I was always staring at this picture. It started when my brother went around telling people that Mrs. T was his grandmother. [laughter]

R- Well everybody had a grandmother.

S- Everybody had grandparents and she was a grandmotherly type.

R- She was very good to him.

S- She just . . . Michael, he was blond, blue-eyed, looked like a little German boy.

R- She really loved him.

S- She had two daughters so . . .

Z- Was Abram blonde?

R- Oh, no.

Z- Who was blonde in the family?

S- Nobody. They told Michael he was adopted. That he was really a prince, like from the royal family. He actually did look like prince Andrew for a while. It was weird.

R- My mother was blonde and blue-eyed.

Z- Okay, that's . . .

S- Well, there was some Cossack invasion somewhere. We all wear rape on our faces.

R- Cossacks were not blonde.

S- Well, you know what I mean, like American Blacks, we don't look [1:24:14]. And so, you know, everybody had grandparents except us.

R- So he had to invent . . .

S- He was embarrassed by the fact that he didn't have grandparents. And I somehow knew this is not kosher, I just knew, you don't do this. And I was . . . I knew that the lady on the wall was our grandmother, but that wasn't good enough, I mean he wanted a real grandmother. So I was really . . . I said, "Don't you tell mommy that you did this. You don't do this." So it started with photographs. And my mother always said that I looked like her mother. I saw this elegant, you know, long neck and the cheekbones, and earrings. I thought, oh my, she's not old . . . and she said, well that's what you're going to look like when you grow up, and she was right. It was not having grandparents . . . My mother started to pull out photographs, she had . . . most of the photographs were postwar, they were Germany, because that's when you could take photographs and keep them. Later things started to turn up. But the war photographs did not exist, she found later in Poland or a relative found. And my mother would sit, 'cause I was always asking, 'cause my mother was . . . When they spoke English they would say before the war or after the war, the word Holocaust did not exist. It was before the war or after the war. They didn't talk about the war. They talked about the war or after the war. They didn't talk about the middle part.

[audio ends 1:26:03]

