Interviewee: Ilsa Zilversmit
Date: April 8, 2013

Z- So let's start. When were you born?

Il- I was born in Amsterdam, in Holland. Do you want my date?

Z- Sure.

Il- 26 September, 1926. Alright . . .

Z- And talk about your . . . were you the only family?

Il- Was I . . .?

Z- Were you the only child in your family?

Il- No there was a child born before me, but she died before I was born.

Z- And were there any children born after you?

Il- My sister, Marty. Martha.

Z- Yeah, and how much younger was she than you?

Il- Her birthday was 6-6-29 [laughs]. So she will be 84 in June and I'll be 87 in September.

Z- And where does she live?

Il- She lives in Israel, in [0:02:13]. Have you been there?

Z- Yeah. And your parents, talk to me about your parents. What about them?

Il- My father was born in Holland and my grandparents, which was very unusual in those days, were divorced. And then my grandmother moved to Germany, to Frankfurt, and opened up a . . . what is this called? A house for people to rent rooms.

Z- A boarding house.

Il- A boarding house. See, I'm loosing words. And my father moved in, finished high school there, and met my mother. My mother was in from the place that she was born, [0:02:58].

Z- In Germany?

Il- In German, [0:03:01]. And was one of four children, the one with the brains.

Z- Who your mother? Um hum.

Il- And my grandfather said, "Which one of you would like to go to business school in Frankfurt." So the older one and my mother both put up their hands. He said, "You're not going because you're engaged to be married." My mother was 17 and she left [0:03:29] and that's where she found my father.

Z- So they met in Germany.

Il- They met in Germany.

Z- So how did they get to Holland?

Il- He moved back to Holland, he was born in Holland. My father was born in [0:03:42].

Z- Okay.

Il- You know where [0:03:44] is?

Z- Yes.

Il- That's where he was born.

Z- Okay. So what did he do?

Il- Well, what do I know about his childhood? Very little.

Z- No, as of when he married your mother.

Il- When he married my mother he worked for uncle Issac, and they had a billiard factory, and selling.

Z- A billiard?

Il- Billiards. Billiards and probably also . . . what's the smaller one? I forgot the names of all these things. They had . . . the other people [0:04:13], we had a factory there. And my uncle and aunt lived there and then they moved to fancier places, and so we took over

the second, third and fourth floor where the business was downstairs.

Z- So those were those long houses on the canal?

Il- On one of the canals, but not on the inner city, the first canal on the outer city. I was a big house.

Z- And did your mother work?

Il- No, women didn't work in those days.

Z- Okay. And so was your father well off?

Il- My father was a general manager for his uncle. We lived very carefully. And then a cousin of my mother's brother in law, a very fancy fellow, moved to Holland. And he wanted to open . . . And we got to meet them. My father helped him out with money when he wanted to open a cosmetic factory.

Z- Cosmetic?

Il- Yeah. It started with shaving cream, then toothpaste, and then eventually it became big and into cosmetic. And yes, we had money, but we didn't spend . . . Dutch people in Holland were careful with what they did. They know what can happen eventually, you know. But me and my sister weren't needing anything. What we needed we got. My mother had maids. It was a big house. And . . . Relatively normal childhood, because my sister nor I realized that it wasn't a normal childhood. From 1933 on things god bad in Germany. My mother was born there, had family there, friends there. And people started coming to Holland, and waiting in Holland for a visa to go elsewhere. They tried to escape. So to my sister and me this was normal, always having families, including full [0:06:19] families. They stayed 'til they got a visa somewhere.

Z- Were you religious?

Il- No. I don't know what you call religious. I am a Jew through and through, but do I stick to kosher? No, I don't.

Z- So you are culturally Jewish.

Il- Culturally very Jewish. I once asked my mother why we don't have a kosher household. She said, "Honey, much more important

what comes out of your month than what goes in." And I've lived that way. She was a smart cookie. A very smart woman.

Z- Yeah. So they weren't observant?

Il- Oh yes, we were. We belong . . . when in 1933 the liberal movement came to Holland. Now, what is liberal? Conservative is organ music. Men whore hats, not [0:07:14] in those days. We went to shul every Friday night. On the way to shul my mother, my sister, and I used to sing. And . . . next question was . . .?

Z- Well, just talk about the religion, like the observance . . .

Il- Yeah. We loved it there because the music was beautiful. We never had our own synagogue. We rented the place from the . . . was a big synagogue actually. I don't know what they called it. Ever heard of [0:07:48].

Z- No.

Il- I don't know what it was. I only know that my teacher was a member of it. I could probably look it up in my Dutch dictionary and could explain it, but I'm not sure. And my mother was friends with my teacher in one, two and three. I went to through Montessori system, which I loved.

Z- So education was very important in the household?

Il- Very important, and it was close by. And . . .Was a private school in those days.

Z- It still is.

Il- You've been in Amsterdam?

Z- No but I mean here it is.

Il- Here Montessori is private, that's right. But it's a wonderful system. It really is a good system. You can work, for instance, [if] you're interested in a particular subject, you can work at it for five, six weeks in a row. You don't sit behind each other, you sat at tables, four tables, and each had their own table, sometimes two tables, you know. If you were a naughty girl in class you were sent to on table [laughter]. Happened sometimes. I keep forgetting what I'm talking about.

Z- Okay, so education was important in your family.

Il- Very important. And [I] even ended up going to the . . . Born in September, I could have gone right away after grade six, but the teachers and my parents said, Socially she's not ready for it. So I had a seventh year in . . .

Z- The Montessori?

Il- In the Montessori. And I went to the Montessori [0:09:34] and spent two years in the facility and we were thrown out by the Germans, because by that time they had a war going on.

Z- So what were your ambitions then?

Il- Children that age have no ambitions. The word teenager doesn't exist. You were a child 'til the day you got married.

Z- So did you have any sort of dreams of like what you would like to do?

Il- Oh if I did I wouldn't remember. Like I said, I'm 86 years old. I live with today, I don't think too much about that.

Z- Did you play music?

Il- Yes. Piano lessons, we had piano lessons because one of the people that came from Germany was an organist and a teacher, a music teacher. And my parents found it necessary to let the man earn a living, so that's why he was hired to teach us.

Z- So you learned piano . . .

Il- Yeah, I have . . . what's that called? In my figures . . .

Z- Arthritis?

Il- Arthritis, yeah, so I don't play anymore. So was going to wait which one of my grandchildren wants a piano and they can get it.

Z- So did you sing too?

Il- Oh yes, we were singing. Both my mother, my sister, and I were in a choir, and it was beautiful music that we had in the synagogue. [0:11:11], it was music that I heard here in a particular place and we joined. It was an offspring . . . can you say an offspring? From

Temple Emanuel, people that left because of the rabbi, they didn't like him.

Z- Here in Montreal?

Il- Here in Montreal. And that became Temple [0:11:30-38], and today I thinks it was taken over by the Mormons, that didn't work and know I think there are condos there.

Z- On Tarabon [sp?] ?

Il- On Tarabon. It was 6666, that's all I remember, so one of those numbers much be 6666.

Z- So you were from a fairly cultured home . . .

Il- Yes, yes, yes.

Z- Music, education . . .

Il- Music, education, and . . . My parents played bridge, and I heard them fight when were upstairs in the children's room, we heard the fight going on.

Z- When they were playing bridge?

Il- Oh yes, you have no idea what people can yell at that bridge.

Z- Do you play bridge?

Il- Tomorrow, yes.

Z- Oh that's right.

Il- But I learned later in life so I will never be a number 1 bridge player. Like I thought my father was bitter with my mother. My father had his mind on business and not on bridge so my mother yelled at him, and we thought my father yelled at her. [laughs] We could hear it upstairs.

Z- So then the war started, '39 . . .

Il- The war started. It started in May so I was still 13 years old. '45?

Z- No, '39 the war started.

Il- No, no in Holland we were invaded in '40.

Z- In '40 . . .

Il- Right. In '40 I was going to---

Z- 14

Il- 13. In '40 I was going to be . . . [. . .] I was 13 years old at the time. And yes, we spent five days in the cellar downstairs.

Z- In your house?

Il- In our house. Because we could hear the planes. They were bombarding Rotterdam, but they didn't touch Amsterdam for some reason. And . . . you know, I did write something somewhere, but I don't know where it is. I had to give a speech once.

Z- Oh, I would like to see it.

Il- We ended up in Temple Emanuel, 1972, I don't know if you remember it? When PQ came to power and they lost half our membership, so we couldn't keep up the building, and so we joined Temple Emanuel, but I didn't get particularly attached to it.

Z- Yeah. So the war started, you were four days in the basement . . .

Il- Not all day long.

Z- So then what happened after that?

Il- After that Holland capitulated, and life was pretty normal. But then all of a sudden in '41, Jews had to be registered. And the hats of the Jewish . . . We weren't a member of the orthodox synagogue, but we were registered in both places because the Dutch Jewish people did not accept liberal Judaism. So it was either nothing or we . . . And my mother knew liberal Judaism and the music that goes with it from spending time in [0:15:04], learning how to keep house. My grandmother was sick, she had asthma, and she was in no shape or form to teach her children anything.

Z- So what happened then, after you registered?

Il- We still went on, but '72 all of a sudden, then we had to wear the star.

Z- In '42?

Il- Z- '41. In general the Dutch were good people. First of all I looked like a [0:15:46], blue eyed, blond hair with braids. So I could have walked the streets without anything. I could have gone into to hiding and not even have to stay in.

Z- So why didn't you?

Il- Because I didn't want to go anywhere without my parents. My sister has beautiful, beautiful brown hair and olive skin. I guess on my father's side. I've never been able to find it, even though I was in to genealogy. But we both got our mother's . . . I don't know what would have happened. My father was killed in Bergen-Belsen. So . . . But my mother, my sister, and I came through.

Z- So you were sent to where?

Il- First to [0:16:31] in Holland for seven months. And my father's partner managed to keep us back. And then one day he came to my dad and said – I wasn't there but my sister heard the whole story – he said, "I have to fill up a train on Tuesday, and I kept you back as long as I could, I don't know how to do it anymore." So he said, "You have a choice, [0:16:55] or Bergen-Belsen." Now my mother was born in Germany, but had never heard of [same as 0:16:55], and she said, very strange, that's Czechoslovakia. Where is Bergen-Belsen? Near [0:17:09]. My mother was born near [same as 0:17:09]. So she said, "Let's go, it's closer to the Dutch boarder. My sister heard it, I wasn't there, I was working. So we ended up in Bergen-Belsen. Had we gone to [same as 0:16:55] we definitely would never have come back, because people from there were sent on to Auschwitz. Isn't life full of . . . possibilities?

Z- Yeah. So you were liberated by the British?

Il- No, we were sent out of Bergen-Belsen in a train, eastward. Now you can guess why. We didn't know. We hadn't even heard of Auschwitz. We had heard of [0:18:01], where Jewish people were killed, from Holland. But we had never heard of Auschwitz. So we didn't even know where it was. My father died on the 3rd of April, 1945. 10 days later we were sent into the . . . into a train eastwards. We didn't know where we were going. No food. Nothing.

Z- But the war was over then.

Il- No, the war was over in May.

Z- May. So there was two more weeks.

Il- 4 more weeks, because like I said, my father died on the 3rd of April. And the strange thing is my mother died on the 4th of April 20 years ago this year.

Z- So you were sent on the train and then what happened?

Il- Well the train stopped several times for people to go out and pee and poo, and whatever they had to do. There was no such thing as a period because we got something in our food in Bergen-Belsen that stopped us from having that.

Z- Actually what stops that is the weight. If your body gets beneath a certain weight—

Il- It happened almost immediately, and we were well fed. Not so much from [], but we had lot's of non-Jewish friends and they kept on sending us packages. They even tried to do that in Bergen-Belsen, but we never received them. Somebody else took them. So . . .

Z- So the train stopped, continued . . .

Il- The train took us . . . and sometimes we were able to run to a farm-house, and beg for food. And sometimes we got certain things, and my mother managed to make meals out of it.

Z- On the train?

Il- On the train. How, I don't know. When we stopped for a pee or something, somebody had a . . .put stuff together. From somebody I remember getting potatoes. So my mother put . . . made a fire somehow and boiled them. Somebody had a pan. I don't remember exactly how everything went, but she was able to – not everyday – but she was able to feed us, that we wouldn't be hungry. And so, like I said, it was a week after my father died that we were sent on this train. And the rabbi from our synagogue in Holland was also in this camp. And I see him lying on the . . . I said to my mother, "He can't walk anymore." "No" my mother said, "he's dead." I don't know what they did with them. I remember today, or a couple of years ago, I lied to my mother and I said, "Daddy was buried." And my mother said, "That's nice to know." And a couple of years before she died, she said, "You were lying to me weren't

you." And she said, "You meant well, but I knew better." So he must have been shoved in some kind of . . . I've been back to Bergen-Belsen, it was in '85. My husband was Dutch also, but he was born on the other side of the border, in Germany. And in 1985 they called back together all the people that were still alive. People that had escaped, that had left. And I didn't really want to ever step foot in Germany again, but in '85 my husband was already a sick man. So I said to myself, how can you do that, can't let him go by himself, that's selfish.

Z- So what happened? Where did the train end up?

Il- The train ended up being stopped by the Russians in [0:22:30]. That was called the last transport.

Z- And then what happened?

Il- They took care of us. We were all sick with typhoid fever. We were put on straw mattresses in a school there. And the Russian were extremely good to us. They had doctors that looked after us. I mean, I was . . . That was the first time I lost my hair, or my mother, or my sister. My sister was put right next to me, but my sister was affected a little bit with . . . she didn't think straight. This was funny, that was funny.

Z- She was hallucinating?

Il- Yeah. But she came over it. She's really normal today. I know I'm getting somebody else here in June who has interviewed my sister and wants to come here. So that's the next one.

Z- So, you began your physical recovery.

Il- Physical recovery. And I wanted to be a nurse.

Z- And you were 19 then?

Il- I was liberated, I was 18, and in September I turned 19.

Z- So that was the end of April?

Il- Yeah. We stayed there in [0;23:58] 'til June, and then the Americans came, soldiers, to put us in trucks. And we still had some clothing that belonged to us. We were never in the stripped ones. And they took us to Leipzig were we were handed from old

parachute nylon, they made blouses so that we had something descent to wear. The Americans did that. They were in Leipzig.

Z- So where did you stay?

Il- I have no idea where it was. It was probably a school.

Z- But it was set up as a . . .

Il- It was set up as some-- I don't know. My sister would get better answers. I should have asked her all those questions. I see myself but . . .yeah, that was Leipzig where we were liberated. And we didn't know where my mother was.

Z- She didn't go with you?

Il- Yes, she was with us, but my mother had had, during the trip, the trip was two weeks, she developed something in the back of her leg. And there was a fellow on the train, Dr. . . . I don't . . . it was either a Greek fellow . . . I don't remember his name. And . . . we ended up in [0:25:34], and what we did was walk through the town. We saw Russians there. And I said, "Where are we going to stay?' They said, "Well you throw the people out of the homes and you take the houses." We didn't know quite how, but we walked into a house and we told the woman . . . I remember her name, Mrs. [0:26:00], I said, "you have to leave the house, we have to move in." "I can't do that." I say, "You gotta, or the Russians outside will throw you out, so you better find another place" Of course I spoke German, so that was no problem.

Z- What other languages did you speak?

Il- I spoke Dutch first. My mother spoke Dutch within a year of her marriage. But in 1934 my grandfather in Germany died and my grandmother came to us in Holland and lived with us . . .

Z- So you learned German.

Il- Within a year my sister and I both spoke fluently German, because she never learned Dutch, and it's almost an identical language.

Z- Did you speak English?

Il- In school, we learned from school. The French was the first language I learned. I never managed it. I still don't speak French today. I can read it and understand most of it. I still can't speak it.

Z- But English you had better luck with?

Il- Well I learned British English. You know, I came here and I wasn't taking a bath, I was taking a baath. My mother sent me in '47 for three months to England to learn the language.

Z- In?

Il- In '47, after the war.

Z- So you were in Leipzig and then what happened?

Il- Well we spent about two months there. And I just asked my sister, "Where did we get our food from." You know, I don't remember how we got our food. I know we stole certain things. We walked in Leipzig . . . no in [0:27:36], which was near Leipzig, and we saw some Russians in house, and they had two or three chickens in a pot. And of course I didn't speak Ger-- First what I did was pick up our arms to see who we were. Because the SS had blood type in here . . . what this?

Z- Armpits?

Il- In their armpits, they had the blood A, or AB, or BB.

Z- That had . . .? Tattoos?

Il- They had . . . in case . . . in case they were hurt.

Z- Was it tattooed?

Il- Not really, but the German soldiers. So when we say the Russian, we knew we didn't speak Russian so we said . . . Dutch? No. German? No. We spoke some English and they didn't speak that either. And all of a sudden he said something, [0:28:55]. And that sounded kind of Hebrew, and we said, "Yes." And he said, [0:29:04]. "Go to the east, go to Russia, don't stay here." Of course we didn't and one of them gave us a knife, a folding knife, and my sister . . . my brother. . . my son has it now. No, my father got that, it wasn't us. My husband got it. He was liberated in [0:29:34] I think. I met my husband to be in [0:29:41], in Holland. We were both children.

Z- Before the war?

Il- No, during the war. We spent seven months in [same as 0:29:41]. He was sent to [0:29:51] because that's were his grandparents were. My husband was sent to Holland in 1937. His parents wanted him out of Germany, and his German parents, grandparent, had moved to Holland, they lived in [0:31:08]. So that's where he spent his time. And he had his Bar Mitzvah there in an old peoples home.

Z- In?

Il- In Holland, in [same as 0:31:08]. And a year later they were able to get the other boy, go visit your grandparents, it was '38 by then. And both boys didn't know that it was not meant . . . that they weren't meant to go back to Germany. So that was the last time they saw their parents.

Z- So after Leipzig, you said something about wanting to be a nurse?

Il- I wanted to be, so I had to be tested. And he said, "Come back in two years, you're not strong enough."

Z- Who said that?

Il- The doctor.

Z- In Leipzig?

Il- No, in Holland.

Z- When did you go back to Holland?

Il- In June.

Z- Of '45?

Il- June '45. The Americans came to Leipzig to pick up all kind of Dutch people. And I do remember, in ambulances, we were taken back to Holland in ambulances. And we came through a town called [0:31:14], which is very near to where my mother was born. And we looked out and we saw [same as 0:31:14] being bombed to piece. And we were yelling. We were kids too, kids didn't realize how bad it was for people and that not everybody was a Nazi, but

we were full of anger in those days. We had a Dutch nurse with us in that ambulance, and he said in Dutch to us, "How can you be happy something like that?" And so my sister said, "After what they did to us, there is no such thing as a good German." She was three years younger than me. She was smart, and she still is.

Z- So you got back to Amsterdam . . .

Il- We came back to Amsterdam, ended up in the little girls orphanage, because my mother wasn't with us. We didn't know what had happened to my mother. She had something very bad. My mother was kept back in [0:32:24] when we were taken out, and was sent – we found this out later – by train, or by a different ambulance to Belgium, to be taken care of—what had happened here. Because when we were in the house that we had taken over, there was a doctor who came to look at my mother's leg, no anesthetic, and he opened her up, and she screamed and she screamed. But eventually she stopped screaming because all of a sudden all the pain went away. She lost all the puss. But she had . . . then eventually they had to do it here to. By that time they had something extra, had some . . .

Z- Medication.

Il- Medication. And she had big . . . scars, yeah. But still, being a middle-aged woman in the camps, she lived 'til two days before her 93rd birthday, which is amazing.

Z- Yes. So you went back to an orphanage and then what happened?

Il- To an orphanage and then we tried to make phone calls to find out if there was anybody we knew. And . . . We found my father's partner. They took us out f there, my sister and me, out of the orphanage, and took us home with them and started feeding us. And I do remember the first time I saw rye bread. I must have eaten about 20 pieces of bread.

Z- Were you sick?

Il- She said to me, "Ilsa, you better stop eating. You're going to get very sick if you don't." And of course there was already some food in Holland, the Americans had supplied us with food. I don't think she had enough bread after my sister and I were through. We all got pieces of paper that we could only buy this much.

Z- Rations.

Il- Rations.

Z- So what happened in the next few months?

Il- The next few months, my mom came back, and she rented a place. Our house was not available. Other people lived in it. And we were somewhere on the third floor, we rented places, it didn't last all that long. And then my mother, with my father's partner who we called uncle, he helped us get a house. And he knew how to avoid the officialdom. So . . . And then my mother said, "Now girls, it's several months ago, time to go back to school." And the I said to her, If I go back to school I would have to start in grade one high school, and I'm going to be 19 years old, I don't think so mommy. At that time we talked back. And she said, "You have to learn something. What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know." And she said, "Well in that case, I suggest you become a secretary, so I'm going to send you to this place, and you're going to learn how to be a secretary." So as you're not going to argue with your mother, you did what you were told. So I got my typing diploma within four weeks, blind typing, I can't do it anymore. Now with four fingers and I look. Then I took stenography, which took about five . . . Then I started working as a secretary for the Dutch, Zionist Bund. Brothers of Bund Association.

Z- Association, yeah. Bund, yeah.

Il- Yeah. Hated every minute of being a secretary. Hated it. And then my mother went to South Africa in '47.

Z- How come?

Il- She had a sister there. She wanted to see her sister. That was the sister and brother in law and the child lived with us in Holland for three years. And they went to South Africa because they needed doctors there. And so my mother went to see her sister for six months. And my mother had taken in a cousin of my grandmother's who had lost her three children, her nine grandchildren, and everybody that she knew, and her sister. She was all alone and my mother took her in, so she took care of us, and she didn't know what I had done. I had . . . My mother was gone, I finished the course, and then I went to see my doctor and I said, Where can I take a course to become a doctor's assistant? It doesn't mean that you become a doctor, but you're more than a nurse. You do his paper work, you answer his telephone. I learned how to do

urine analysis, blood analysis, stool analysis. Of course not in the way that it's done today.

Z- Yeah.

Il- It was much more . . . what's the word?

Z- Primitive?

Il- Much more primitive. I'm talking about '45. So . . . '47 . . . '46 my mother left, and I used that time to become a doctor's assistant.

Z- And you did.

Il- And I did. And I worked for a doctor, was my doctor, who afterwards I was still working for him, I got married in '49.

Z- So when did you reconnect with your husband?

Il- By coincidence. By real coincidence. My mother had a cousin in Holland who was earning a living sewing for other people. She had a mother who had cancer. In Holland there was no cancer treatment available. So she asked me, Would I take aunty Emma to the Hague? She could be treated there on the weekend. And I said, sure I would. And I told you I met him in the camps in Holland. I said to my mother, Listen, I promised Hannah that I would take aunty Emma to The Hague, where am I going to stay? She said, I have a friend in Holland who has rented a couple of rooms from another lady. With her two sons she came back also as a widow. She will probably come pick you up. You can sleep on the sofa in the living-room. So I said, Okay. So then I said, So how do I get there from where I let aunty Emma off. She said, You asked somebody what tram to take. There was no buses in those days. [. .] So I ended up there and this friend of my mother's had rented those two rooms with her two sons. And this woman I think was hidden during the war. I'm not quite sure. So she got her property back right away. And her son was with my husband in Auschwitz. So she said to the two boys, "I'm getting a young lady here from Amsterdam, and you have to be very nice, she has hardly any hair." Because the Russians had shaved us because by that time we were full of lice. And I was wearing one of those things that you . . .

Z- Turbans.

Il- Tuban. And mother had bought me some fake curls for here. "You have to be very nice, the lady has no . . . ."

Z- So your hair was just short, short at that time?

Il- About this much, yeah. It was not enough to walk around. I have picture, but I don't remember where they are. So she said, I have here a young lady from Amsterdam. And he said, What's here name? Ilsa [0:41:32]. "Did her father have a cosmetic factory?" And she said, "Yes, how would you know?" He said, "I think I met the girl in [0:41:45]." I wasn't in love, I was 17 years old, what did I know about love?

Z- He was in love . . .

Il- He was crazy about me.

Z- Was he the same age?

Il- Same age, three months older.

Z- What's his name?

Il- Gunter Ludwig. Born in Germany. But it was very quickly changed in Holland. He was taken in by people who were his guardians. No, that's not what it's called. He was 19 years old . . . what happens to a child that becomes . . . what's the word? I can look it up in the dictionary.

Z- It's okay. That's fine.

Il- And . . ."Does her father have a cosmetic factory?" And she said, "Yes." And he blushed. "You know the girl?" He said, "I think so. Don't tell her anything. Don't tell her I'm here." So I walked in there, I took a bus to the place where I had to go after I had delivered aunty Emma. I was supposed to stay there until Monday . . . And in walked those two boys. And he looked at me and he said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "I think so, I don't know. Is your name Gunter?" He said, "Yes." Because he also had very little hair, coming out of Auschwitz, you know, on boys didn't show as bad. He fell in love with me immediately. I had no clue what love was, he was just a nice guy. Anyhow, he took me out that night and I still remember the movie we saw.

Z- What did you see?

Il- The Scarlet Pimpernel, for 35 cents. That was all we had. So . . .

Z- So when did you get married?

Il- No, listen to this. So, aunty Hannah asked me again, "My mother has to go back, would you do it again for me?" And I said, "Sure." So I said to my mom, "Hannah asked me to do this, take aunty Emma back for her cancer treatment, and I said yes." Anyhow, I said yes twice more. SO my mother said, "You're just liberated, haven't you go anything better than to schlep old people to The Hague?" And my sister knew about that I had met this boy. She said, "She met a young man there, a young boy there." "Oh, how old is he?" "A few months older than Ilsa." Oh said my mother, is that so. "Is that why you have been there for the last four weeks? I wasn't going to lie, so I said "yes". "Do you love him?" I said, "No, I like him." I didn't know what love was. So she said, "You're not going next week. He comes here." So, I didn't know what time he was coming in, and he found the train, and I told him which streetcar to take. [. . .] We lived on the second floor in rented places. I heard the bell ring, so I went downstairs. And he stands there with his arms full of red roses. And I said, "Boy they're very nice, Thank you." And he looked at me, he said, "They're not for you . . ."

Z- For your mother.

Il- They're for your mother. [laughter] He didn't realize that he was just . . . So after . . . I had to sleep in the attic because he slept in my bed, and my sister and I slept in the attic—

Z- Did your mother like him?

Il- From that moment on she kept on telling me, "He's the son I never had." They got along wonderful. Wonderful, wonderful. SO then we became engaged in '47. We got married in '49. You didn't married here, engaged, and half a year later . . . At least we got to know each other well. Now, my sister said, "That must have been very hard." Well first of all I didn't know what it felt [like] to want somebody. Second of all, in Catholic Holland, Holland was mostly Catholic, there was no condom to be found. And in these days you really didn't do this. You didn't go to bed with somebody. Yes, a lot of necking. And so, I was a virgin when we got married.

Z- You were 23.

Il- Huh?

Z- You were 23.

Il- Ah, just a moment. I got married at . . . in '49.

Z- You were 23.

Il- I was 22. Yeah, I was going to be 23. No that November, I was 23, right. No, it's impossible I wasn't 23. I got married at 22, so just a moment.

Z- So was it '48?

Il- I was 19 when I came back and I met him the same year. I was 19. No, I married at 22. My mother was married at 22, my grandmother married at 22 [...]

Z- So why did you wait so long?

Il- Because first of all in Holland, you need permission from your parents, in those days, until you're 30 years old.

Z- Really?

Il- You know why? Because Holland was manly Catholic. The top was Protestant, the Northern part of Holland. And the Catholics didn't want their children to marry Protestants, and the Protestants didn't want to marry their children Catholics. So that's why they had that law that you needed permission from your parents until you were 30 years old. Then you could do whatever you wanted. And of course my mother used that. So, "Get to know him first, and be very careful what you are doing." I had no choice but being careful. I was a virgin. My sister wasn't [laughs]. My sister lived in Israel. She was called . . . she was dark-haired and olive colored skin, and I was called a Dutch whore, because the Dutch people shaved all the children, all the girls, that had fooled around with the German soldiers. And I looked . . . I didn't look Jewish, so they thought I was one of those, so I was called a Dutch whore. And my sister lived next to me and they used to . . ."[0:49:29-34]." And so my sister said at that moment, I still see us walking there, "That's it, this is my country and I am being called with a anti-Semitic word, I'm going to [0:49:48] . . ." You know what [same] was? "And I'm going to Palestine."

Z- And she went.

Il- And she did.

Z- And she fell in love and got married?

Il- She was married. And the first time that she got there, the . . . it was still Palestine, and the British army was checking all the boats etc., and they were also to Palestine, because people were trying to get into Palestine, and she tried to . . . she was on a boat, on the Exodus, and the Exodus caught by the British soldiers . . .

Z- Yeah, and sent to Cyprus.

Il- And she and the three Dutch friends from [same as 0:49:48], three boys and she was the only girl, they jumped overboard, and of course the British went right after them and picked them out of the water. They thought they could swim to the coast. She has quite a story, my sister. And they picked them up, put them on Cyprus. And eventually from Cypress picked them up and took them . . . guess where they ended up? Bergen-Belsen. Which at that time was not a concentration camp.

Z- it was a DP camp.

Il- Was a DP camp. So my mother found out about it. My mother had forbidden my sister to do what she did. My mother went over the border to Bergen-Belsen and saw her and said, "I'm going try to do my best and see if I can get you back to Holland." And eventually she didn't, and there was another gang, the [0:51:50]. And they went to Bergen-Belsen and they took those four people out and smuggled them, and eventually they got them all the way to [0:52:07], where they got a real ship, paid for the ship etc.

Z- So you go married, you were 22 . . .

Il- I was married at 22, '49. My husband's birthday was July 5, we got married on the 6th. And my mother said, You married the best guy, you will never be divorced. My mother almost divorced, because my father had an affair. I hope [0:52:40]

Z- I will not use that.

Il- You're going to remove that?

Z- yeah.

Il- Yeah.

Z- This is not the first I've heard of this, about affairs of parents.

IL- Look, my mother was German and had a German temperament. […]

Z- So what did Gunter do?

Il- What did . . . ?

Z- What did he do? What did you do?

Il- What did I do? Well I was a secretary . . .

Z- You were a medical assistant.

Il- And I became a medical assistant for the doctor that eventually later on delivered my first child. And I enjoyed every moment of it. It wasn't work. It was something I enjoyed doing it.

Z- And what did he do?

Il- Gus?

Z- Gunter.

Il- Gunter or Gus.

Z- Oh you call him Gus?

Il- Well in Dutch he was called [0:53:49]. A Dutch girl gave him that name. [. . .] Officially it was still Gunter.

Z- So what did Gus do?

Il- Gus went back to school. What kind of a school was it? It had something to do with aviation. What do you call those people that are not pilots but . . .

Z- Navigator?

Il- Navigators. He wanted to be a navigator. And I was scared out of my wits, I said, Please don't. Because there were so many crashes. And so . . . he went to that school and learned all kinds of things that he was able to use here in Montreal.

Z- So how did you decide to come to Montreal?

Il- Because we lived through the Nazi and then the trouble with—even though I will always be grateful to the Russians—the communists, and it looked like they were going to overrun Europe. And so my husband still did not get deferral from the Dutch army. He had to serve three years in the . . . not in the army, they took him into the air-force, because we were at war with Indonesia. And so, we were married already and . . . he had to serve three years.

Z- So . . .

Il- And then he had learned . . . During the war he wanted to be a doctor when he grew up. And he lived with his grandparents, they had to move out of the city of The Hague. They moved to [0:55:46], which was small town in . . . you don't know the Dutch provinces, hey?

Z- No, not so much.

Il- And his grandfather said, "Honey, it's very nice, if we live through the war you can became a doctor, right now you're learning a trade." So they taught him welding. Welding and all kinds of stuff. And that's how he made his living here in the first couple of years. And then they realized, somebody said, You're better material than that. Now we knew that because when he went to the army . . . I got paid because I had my first child already. We didn't the first child the first two yaers. No such thing as condoms, no such thing as . . . how do you call that? What people take . . . ?

Z- Pills, birth control pills.

Il- Yeah pills.

Z- There was no birth control.

Il- No birth control. There was no such thing.

Z- So when was your first child born?

IL- She was born a week less than the first marriage. Because, like I said, we had no condoms, no birth control. And the expressions, and you remove that please, the expression we had in Holland, "[0:57:06]". "Before the singing starts you get out of the church." You can understand what I meant?

Z- Yeah.

Il- Okay, so you remove that please.

Z- yes.

Il- So I had my first child, and the city of Amsterdam paid for that because my husband was a military.

Z- What's her name?

Il- My Ruthie?

Z- Yeah.

IL- Ruth Covack. You ever heard of the Covack family?

Z- It sounds familiar.

Il- They had a big place here that the father started. They made medium range clothing. Covack Industries. My daughter lives two streets away.

Z- Ruth?

Il- Ruthie. Yeah, then I had another daughter, Judy, who lives in [0:58:01]. And my son lives in my old home in [0:58:04]. My son is my baby. Let's have a look.

Z- Okay, we'll look after. So Ruth was born in what year?

Il- In Holland. In 1950.

Z- So when did you come to M--?

Il- 16 months later.

Z- You moved to Canada?

Il- Yeah, the moment that Gus was out of the military, somebody helped us from HIAS.

Z- Yeah, JIAS.

Il- JIAS here and in Dutch is was called HIAS. [...] We knew somebody who worked there and we told him . . . what was his name? I don't remember.

Z- Did somebody sponsor you here?

Il- No, but he made sure that . . . Yeah, we were sponsored by somebody that . . . because Gus could tell them that he knew how to weld and do this, and he ended up with a place here, don't remember the name.

Z- So how did you come over?

Il- By boat.

Z- By boat. To Halifax or Quebec?

Il- No, to . . . Did we come to Halifax? No. I think we . . . No, to Montreal.

Z- You went by boat straight to Montreal?

Il- Straight to Montreal.

Z- And was your mother with you?

Il- No, my mother didn't want to go.

Z- So it was you, Gus and the baby. She was 16 months old.

IL- 16 months old. She learned to walk on the ship. [. . .]. She learned to walk. She was late. Everything else was quick. Yeah, she lives to streets away from me. [...]

Z- So you came to Montreal when? 1951?

Il- 1951.

Z- You were 25 years old.

Il- '51 I was 25 years old. I could have gotten a job and earned twice what my husband was earning. But it would have meant giving up the child and putting her in daycare . We didn't know enough about that. We didn't know enough people to do this. And so my husband said, "Absolutely not. We do with less. We buy bread a day old." That was fine, 7 cents.

Z- So let's hold on. This is fascinating. So you get off this ship, what happens?

Il- We were picked up by friends of ours who had emigrated three months earlier. And we stayed with them on Barclay for three weeks until we found a place to live.

Z- And where did you live?

Il- On [1:00:05], near Cote-St-Luc, on the third floor, with a baby carriage. No elevator.

Z- You had a whole flat?

Il- We had three rooms. A living room, bedroom, and we had the child in our bedroom. She was 16 months old in a crib.

Z- And so your husband immediately found work?

Il- He had work waiting for him. It was arranged from Holland. It was a factory on [1:01:22].

Z- And what did he do?

Il- Welding.

Z- And do you know how much he got paid?

Il- I think 45 dollars a week.

Z- Which wasn't bad then.

Il- Which was bad, but we paid $90 rent. I came with enough clothes for August, including for growing child. So we didn't need anything. I shopped at Steinberg's, and for $15 I had a weeks supplies. And for 15 dollars, they sent you home in a taxi for 15 cents, with your stuff. Can you imagine that? Steinberg's was where now there is Zellers. Corner of Queen Mary and . . .

Z- Trans [?] Island.

Il- Yeah.

Z- So why did you live there?

Il- 'Cause there was almost no place to be found here. That was the first one we went. And then I got pregnant again.

Z- Very soon?

Il- Just was born in '53.

Z- Okay. So what was your first impression of Montreal?

IL- Well the first impression was, there was no synagogue here. I needed to find Jewish people. But I found some Dutch people and they happened to be all Jewish.

Z- And were they immigrants too?

Il- All immigrants. And so we just became a clique. We entertained each other with tea and a cookie.

Z- And how did you find them?

Il- I heard somebody talk Dutch at Steinberg's, and she had a child in the carriage like I did. Or I don't remember, maybe they were already sitting in the seats then.

Z- Did you speak any English when you came?

Il- I spoke English, but basically at home we still spoke Dutch.

Z- Did Gus speak English?

Il- Not as much as I did, but he picked it up quickly. His school didn't give foreign languages as quick as mine did.

Z- So you got pregnant, what happened in the meantime? He stayed in his job?

Il- Huh?

Z- Gus, he stayed in his job?

Il- He stayed in his job, but they saw right away like they had said in Holland to him, You're not just a soldier, you're officer to material. That's what I started to tell you. He said, I don't want to be an officer. And the man said, Why? He said, Because I'm getting paid by the city of Montreal and an officer's income is not as much as

what I'm getting, and I have to pay for my wife and my child. So he said, I'd like you to take the course anyway and . . .

Z- This was in Amsterdam?

Il- No, somewhere in Holland. He said, I'll make you a solemn promise, I will not make you an officer, but I want to see if I'm right that you are officer material. And he was.

Z- So what happened here?

Il- He stayed and he did his job, but they gave him a different kind of job, they didn't want him to . . . what am I hearing here? I hear clicking.

Z- No . . .

Il- Something is clicking in my ears. Anyhow, so . . . where were we?

Z- So they quickly realized that he was . . . Here in Montreal.

Il- Oh yes, they made him the . . . Robinson Oil Burners was the second place he went to. First he was in a place on Upper [1:05:22] rd. They went for lunch, they took lunches with them, and . . . they come back after lunch and they said, All of you out of here. Six other people were just dismissed like that. No such thing as unions. But in the meantime my husband had met someone near where we lived, and we heard them talk about a synagogue. It was a Saturday afternoon; we were walking around somewhere. And he said, "I've seen you somewhere?" And Gus said, "Where?" He said, At Robinson Oil Burners. No, what the other place called? I forgot the name, it was where they all got thrown out. And he dealt with them for some reason or another. He said, "I have a job for you." And that's when he started with Robinson oil Burners.

Z- And they paid him more money?

Il- More money, and . . . not a lot. Salaries were little, but I think he got 55 or 60 dollars.

Z- That was a lot more.

Il- That was a lot of money in those days. And then within a half a year they made him manager, even though he didn't speak a word of French. But it wasn't necessary in those days.

Z- And then he made a lot more?

Il- I think it went up to 90 dollars. That was phenomenal. And we didn't spend it. We just kept it, and kept, and kept it, and eventually we were able to buy a place.

Z- So you would just take what you needed for rent, for food . . .

Il- And the rest was put in the bank.

Z- And you said you could have made more than he?

Il- Yeah, as a doctors assistant.

Z- But . . .?

Il- But husband said, "We have child and you look after the child, I don't want a stranger to look after . . .

Z- How did you feel about that?

Il- I understood him. I didn't think about it, but I understood. I thought I could maybe take my child with me, like today they can do that. He said, "The child needs a mommy."

Z- And how did you feel though?

Il- I understood. We never had an argument about it.

Z- Were you sad about it?

Il- No. I thought I could help bringing in money. No, we didn't get angry.

Z- Did you know anyone who had childcare or daycare?

Il- No, didn't have a clue. We didn't know what was going on here.

Z- Did anyone help you?

Il- Who?

Z- From the time you came. JIAS here or anybody?

Il- Did we get help from the JIAS, no. They helped us with the job.

Z- Finding the job?

Il- Yeah.

Z- And after that nothing?

Il- No, nothing. But that was okay, we were happy that we were self-sufficient. Maybe there were poor people here that needed it.

Z- Did you ever find that you needed anything, you know those first few weeks, months. You were always self-sufficient?

Il- We did with what we had. We . . . I don't know. Look, I tell you something, bread cost, if you bought a day old, bread was 7 cents. Potatoes were 19 cents for 10 pounds. How much money did I need? I didn't need the 15 dollars to . . . to service. Food we bought, we bought rice, you don't buy that every week. I had my own pots and pans from home, they came in the . . .

Z- You shipped them.

Il- We brought our own furniture. So as long as we lived with our friends, then we were informed that we could get now an apartment. Because the thing is . . . the big container is here. So, that was it.

Z- So what was your impression of Montreal.

Il- Well it was nice, there were nice people here.

Z- So you liked it from the beginning?

Il- Basically yes. Basically yes. I mean after we got this non-sense with [1:09:53] etc., we lost a lot of friends.

Z- yeah, but in the 50s

Il- In the 1950s it was wonderful. And then we started to look for . . . we had gone to Temple Emanuel.

Z- How did you find it?

Il- Terrible.

Z- No but, how did you find Temple Emanuel?

Il- Oh we looked in newspapers, we asked other friends of ours what the synagogues were here. We also, we lived on [1:10:21], I told you, and we went around the corner, me with a hat on, my husband [1:10:27] for Friday night services, because we were used to that in Holland, Friday night service. I went the next day, I was the only woman there, the next week. And I said, Honey that's not for us. And then we went to Temple Emanuel. That certainly wasn't like what we were used to. Very cold.

Z- Can you talk about what you mean by cold?

IL- No warmth in the service.

Z- Did people talk about survivors? Did people ask you anything?

Il- About?

Z- That you were a survivor, or what that meant?

Il- Oh . . . No, I tell you what happened at Temple Emanuel. What does your husband do for a living?

Z- He's a carpenter.

Il- That's not what I said. I said he's a welder.

Z- Oh, that's what they asked you.

Il- So they turned around and walked away.

Z- Because he wasn't . . .

Il- Because he wasn't a doctor or a lawyer.

Z- Is that what they did? And they knew you were immigrants, and they knew you survived the war?

Il- I don't know what they knew, but that was a snotty lot.

Z- So what did you do?

Il- Walk out. It was afterwards at the [1:11:50]. We walked out and said no more. So then we read, about a year later . . . I'm trying to remember if I got from somebody else the Canadian Jewish news or another Jewish . . . and my reading in English was pretty good. And

I also learned in the afternoon to improve my English by listening for 15 minutes on the radio to [1:12:22] and Our Girl Sunday. That's probably before your time. And then eventually it became the Guiding Light, and I became an absolute obsessed with the Guiding Light.

Z- That's how you improved your English.

Il- I was the first one of all 6 couples that spoke fluent English. Of course the accent will always be there. I mean if what's his name, Kissinger, was 14 years old when he came to this country and still has an accent . . . I was 26 when, 25 . . .

Z- So you read about another synagogue in the paper?

Il- I read about a synagogue that was being started by people who weren't very happy at Temple Emanuel. They didn't say it, but that's what I figured out. They had somewhere on Sherbrook, upstairs, I think downstairs was an ice-cream parlor. They had rented the premise, and I had a neighbor who had a child I took care of that she needed to go somewhere. She took of my child. I don't know if we brought the child to her, or if one of the parents sat in my place when we on [1:13:42], she took care of Ruthie. We went at evening to this place on Sherbrook and there was an organist, I don't know who he was, but the music was familiar to what I knew from Holland, and I started singing and Gus started singing. And the fellow that was, there was a [1:14:05], there was no Rabbi, [same as 1:14:05] Warse. [...] And he turned around after the service was over, he said, "you and you, you just joined my choir." And so, it meant I had to hire a babysitter every Friday night for 15 cents.

Z- Who babysat?

Il- A boy.

Z- Someone you knew?

Il- No, he was a friend of a girl that was babysitting, but she had another job.

Z- Were they immigrants too?

Il- His first name was [1:14:47], Jewish boy. And the other girl was Silverstone, Silverstone . . . she was about 16, she was about 10 years younger than me. She must be 76 by now.

Z- And they were immigrants too?

Il- No, no she was born here. I don't know about the parents. They lived near us. By that time we were living on [1:15:14], yeah, because by that time I had Judy.

Z- And how did your life change after Judy?

Il- How did my life change? It went on like normal. I took her everywhere with me, everywhere I want. We had those six couples, and when it wasn't my time to entertain I used their bedroom and I nursed her. I mean I took the kids with me, they went to sleep there.

Z- Did you have anything to do with the established Jewish community?

Il- Here? No they were kind of snotty too.

Z- How were they snotty?

Il- They didn't bother with immigrants.

Z- Why not? Why do you think not?

Il- They heard the accent. There was a lot of wealthy people here.

Z- Did that bother you?

Il- I had other things on my mind than let other people's behavior bother me. Not it didn't. Today it would bother me.

Z- So why do you think things have changed? Or have they changed?

Il- I think the other generation that was like that isn't there anymore. The younger generation is much easier going. That's what I think.

Z- And in your new synagogue . . .?

Il- The synagogue? Well once we ended up in the choir, we were a gift to God, you know. We had a temporary rabbi. How did that work out? . . . We were there and we got our first rabbi who didn't last long, lasted a year.

Z- Was this a conservative synagogue?

Il- No

Z- It was a reform?

Il- Reform. Like I said, reform at Temple Emanuel bothered me. I found it cold. The music was cold. It was all of it. The prayers books were in English. I read fluent Hebrew, the only thing is I don't know what I'm reading. I don't know what it means. And . . . I was uncomfortable and so was Gus. Gus came from an orthodox background. But Gus didn't want to believe in God anymore, with me that started much later. For me it was, I held on to it after loosing my whole family. I mean my father and my aunts, my uncles, my little cousins. It was hard. I don't know we just lived, you know, as best as we could.

Z- So in Temple Beth Shalom were they—

Il- It was a whole different group. It was people that were not happy at Temple Emanuel.

Z- And were they interested in you and your story from the war?

Il- I don't know. We were charter members like they were, so we were all on even keel.

Z- But did they ask you about the war? Did they talk about it?

Il- No, not really, nobody did. They figured out maybe we didn't want to talk and . . . Today, like I said, my very best friend I met at Temple Beth Shalom. And she left Temple and became member of the re-constructionist when in '72 we all ended up in Temple Emanuel. It took a long time to get used to it.

Z- So why do you think the synagogues had so little interest in talking or thinking about the Holocaust.

Il- Synagogues have.

Z- Not in the past.

Il- Not the people. Not the people. I do remember that we had a Holocaust memorial service about 10 years ago, I was still a member, and the rabbit said, You're one of the survivors. [...] He

just left, and there is now a woman there. But as I don't drive anymore at night, and I'd had a problem with the rabbi who had lied to me once or twice, and I don't . . . Everybody lies, even I do, and maybe you do too, I don't know. "You like my dress?" "Yes, looks lovely." You know? This kind of lie. But he lied to me about something important. I told, I said, "Rabbi, Holocaust memorial, six people are called up to light a candle, you say Kaddish, end of story. I said, Doesn't touch me emotionally. You should come some day where I go every year [1:20:24], I keep on forgetting the name, it's a long, long name. I call it [same as 1:20:24]. I was there. And he said, "I've been there twice, I didn't like it." And I knew he lied because I'd never seen him there, and I'd gone there for many years. Since I've lived here that's the place I go to. My daughter picks me up and we go. So that was one lie and there was another one. That's when I left, because a lot my friends had left and gone to Toronto, or the children had had a bar mitzvah, that's why they joined in the first place. I wasn't happy there anymore, so what's the use. On top of that I didn't drive at night. And basically, honestly, I'm not religious anymore. I lost my . . . I don't believe there's a God. You can remove that too.

Z- You're not the only one who has said that.

Il- I can't believe it because if there were one can he have allowed this to happen?

Z- That was my . . . since I was four or five, I would stay up at night . . .

Il- Your parents are survivors?

Z- Yeah, my mom was religious, my father wasn't, and I couldn't understand my mom, right.

Il- You know sometimes I cry about that fact, that I lost something that I don't believe anymore.

Z- So you came here, your husband got a job that paid okay and then he became a manager, and then what happened? When did things really change?

Il- When did things change? Oh, he got an offer from Al Cohen and Sons. You remember the name? To become the service manager. And that meant he didn't have to get up so crazy early anymore. He had to work on Christmas and other Christian holidays because he

was supposed to take off all the Jewish holidays, so he said, I don't mind. He worked the New Years day. You know . . .

Z- And he got paid well?

Il- Did he get paid well? I don't know. I don't what other people . . . We were able to live. Salaries weren't very high, but apartments were high. We had to . . . After I got pregnant when I was living on [1:23:21], we had to find a place. But it was very difficult in those days to find a place. Ended up on Vanhorn, right across from . . . what's that hospital there?

Z- St. Justine?

Il- No.

Z- Jewish General? No, that's Cote-St-Catherine.

Il- 3020. We were near Hudson.

Z- The Children's –

Il- No. Today I think it was for veterans of something.

Z- oh, okay.

Il- We lived there and then . . . what happened? We lived there for three years, where did we go from there? Oh, there was something became available, and it was good because it was near a school where Ruthie was supposed to go to.

Z- Where was that?

Il- On Mclean, right at the end where there's a playground. Mclean, between [1:24:18] and what was is end of it? . . . 6704.

Z- That's okay. So what school was there?

Il- Royal Vale.

Z- Okay.

Il- She was ready to go to school. As a matter of fact, let me tell you another story. I had gone to find out, figuring out that this was a French province, that she needed French too, and English she

would learn anyway. I wanted to see if I could get her into a French school. Maybe a little bit crazily ahead of my time, but . . .

Z- It wasn't possible?

Il- There was one Protestant school all the way in the East End, that was a no no because I had another child. I couldn't take her there and pick her up there, that was crazy. Then I went to the Catholic school, to a French school, and I said, "My child is going to be 5 and will go to kindergarten and then school." So she said to me, "Are you Catholic?" And I said, "No I'm not." "You must be Protestant?" I said, "No." "What are you?" I said, "I'm Jewish." "Oh, you belong to the Protestants." That was the answer. So . . . Protestant. That's why we moved to Mclean because there was a thing there, a school there at the end.

Z- And you felt your English was good enough to—

Il- By that time I was the first one that spoke fluent because I listened everyday to two soap opera's on the radio while the babies were sleeping. Yeah, and my daughter is a city counselor here in Cote-St-Luc.

Z- Who? Ruthie?

Il- Ruthie. Ruth Kovak. And the other one is Judy Cohen. [...] Anyhow, so . . .

Z- Did you ever work?

Il- Did I work? Yes. I worked for a long time. When Ricky was 17 I started work.

Z- Ricky is your third?

Il- Ricky is my baby.

Z- And when was he born?

Il- He was born 19th of January, '61. And you turn it around and it's still 1961. And the woman in my room was Barbara Rogosinski [SP?]. Every heard of Empire Industries? The auction house? That's them. And we became friends. And so, when Ricky was 17 and ready for CEGEP, and I had help out beforehand at night, Gus was already dead. Basically Ricky was not a baby, he could be left alone, and I helped out when they had auctions. So five days every

month, I worked at night from 6-1 o'clock in the morning. But I didn't live that far and I was driving at night.

Z- When did Gus die?

Il- Gus died in June it's 25 years ago. 26 years ago, it was 25 year last year.

Z- So he was young.

Il- Very young, 60. Just missed his 61st birthday. I knew he was dying and I made a big party for him when he was 60, when he turned 60. I knew he had less than a year to live.

Z- So did he work always from L. Cohen?

Il- I'll show you his picture, it's right there. He's a good looker. That's my sweetheart. Is he a good looker or not?

Z- Yeah. Yeah.

Il- That was actually the official photo taken for saying that [1:29:14]. Yeah, like I said, he started with L. Cohen and they had made promises to each other that, I never finished that story, promises to each other that they would never raid each other's company. And then we were expecting Ricky and Gus said to the fellow there, "I need a raise, you have not given me a raise in two years, everything is more expensive, my wife is expecting." And he said, "We can't give any raise, we aren't doing all that well." Which was a blatant lie. And at that time he told a friend of his who worked for [1:2959], Jack P. Maybe you know the Ps? No? We're still friends. And Jack said, "You don't have to stick to this thing anymore, you can come to us." He worked for S. Albert. And within a year Jack was in charge of the oil and Gus was in charge of the service department. They hired him actually as a service manager because he had been that at the other place. And then got . . . He was always . . . And Norman Specter? You don't know anybody? [….] They were the two bosses.

Z- So did Gus always feel sad about not becoming a doctor, going back to school?

Il- He never talked about it. I mean he was a little boy, [1:31:04]. You don't speak German hey?

Z- I speak Yiddish, so yeah I understand.

Il- [1:31:09] Dr. Zilversmit. I mean they called themselves Zilversmit in Germany until his father got hit by the Nazis for [1:31:21], because he signed his name Zilversmit, and he was Dutch. He went to Germany to make a better living.

Z- So were those days hard, the 1950s?

Il- was what hard?

Z- Life, difficult.

Il- Yeah, but everybody had it difficult. Everybody had to be careful what they did. But I'm proud of the fact that his family never, never, never got into debt.

Z- And how do you think that happened?

Il- Because not buying what you couldn't have, or what you didn't have the money for, or what you didn't save up for before.

Z- Did you control the money?

Il- Did I? Yes, because Gus didn't want to. He handed me the checks. That gave me 10 dollars for pocket money and for, he was smoking, so for cigarettes. And, no, I handled everything.

Z- So you did the bookings, you took care of all the household?

Il- I took care of everything. Gus said, "I knew I did the right thing, I would have made a mess of it." I said, No you wouldn't have." "Yes I would have." You don't argue.

Z- Did you like doing that?

Il- It came normal to me. I was always careful with the penny. Like I said, we were good middle-class, but we weren't treated like that. The Dutch people are strange that way. You don't show what you have.

Z- And that's how you lived here?

Il- That's engrained in you. At least I think it is.

Z- So you controlled the household finances.

Il- Yeah.

Z- And when did you decide it was time to buy a house?

Il- I tell you, when I was sick and my husband did the shopping, and I gave him a list, he always came back with more than I had written down. I said, "No more shopping sweetheart, I'll ask my neighbor to shop." I said, " You buy things that I didn't ask for. You went over the budget." But like I said, it was all done with a smile. I tell you, the fights that we had I can count on the fingers of one hand, and I don't use all the fingers. And it's usually when one the kids was smart, Daddy can I have this? Mommy can I have this? I said, "What for?" "Well she has it too." Not because I can't afford it, but it's not a reason for you to want something. And I also never, like my mother hit, my mother had a loose hand. I never hit my kids. When Ruthie was naughty I put her in the corner with her hands on her back and said, "Now you think about what you just said or what you did and then you can tell me mommy I'm sorry." It took two minutes and then she said, Mommy I'm sorry. And we talked about it. She said, "You know, Lisa next door her mother hit her in the face and on the tooshie. You don't hit me." I hated hitting kids. A lot of people still do.

Z- So how did you divide things in the house? You took care of the whole house?

Il- My husband took care of everything that was . . . I learned a lot from him because I don't have to call somebody for everything that needs to be done. But he took care of everything and I took care of the house. If there was something wrong or something broken, he was a very handy guy. And I watched him . . . And the other day Ricky came to the house, I said, "Ricky bring your tool chest." "What's wrong?" He said, Well something is broken there and something is broken here, things break when they get older." He fixed it, I said, "Where did you learn it?" He said, "Mommy what kind of question? I didn't watch Daddy?"

Z- What does Ricky do?

Il- Ricky is a salesman, three years in a row toping Canada for ADT. The . . . how to you call it? You know what that is. You see them . . . what's that called? The company that makes sure that you don't get broken into?

Z- Security.

Il- Security. Security. Yeah, three times in a row. They've sent him twice already to Los Vegas. I said, "Did you earn any money?" He said, "No, I lost. I took 50 dollars a part with me." He said, "Whatever happens to it, happens to it. That's my fun. No more."

Z- Budgeting.

Il- Huh?

Z- Budgeting.

Il- Budgeting. That was my mom.

Z- Oh. I didn't . . . that's not you . . . [discussing photograph]

Z- And what does Judy do?

Il- Judy? Judy does nothing, her husband earns. That's all I can say. Judy was trained . . . She used to work at one time on St. Catherine, what the hell did she do there? I don't remember. Judy has nothing to do with the family. She had a fight with Ricky and she wanted me to get into that and figure it out. I said, "You're an adult, Ricky is an adult, your mother does not get involved." I said, "I want to keep you both as friends."

Z- They're beautiful—

Il- And then she started yelling at me, I said, "Judy, I'm not yelling at you, why are you yelling at me?" "Well it's not right what you're answering." I said, "Yes it is." […]

Z- These are your grandkids? [discussing grandchildren] And do you have other grandchild?

Il- Judy has two children and Ricky.

Z- What about Ruthie?

Il- Ruthie has three children and four grandchildren. Judy has one grandchild.

Z- So, I have one question. Do you have regrets that you didn't go back to school?

Il- No, because I would have not been comfortable there. First of all, I was very good in certain subjects, languages, except French,

languages, history, geography–my favorite. I was at the Montessori, I was good at . . . what is it called? With triangles and . . .

Z- Geometry.

Il- Geometry, but I was terrible in algebra. My father sat with me every night explaining, explaining, explaining, I understood and the next morning it was gone. I absolutely hated algebra and I could never understand why we had to learn it. What was the object? What do you learn algebra for? Teach the children how to spend a dollar wisely. And most subject, no, I got a good average, but algebra was . . .

Z- Yeah. Do you feel bad about no being able to work here?

Il- I could have worked here as a doctor's assistant. I had children. No, today I couldn't take a blood test anymore. In the 50s it was so much more . . . what's the word? Not as complicated as today.

Z- So you never regretted not working?

Il- No I never regretted it. I worked as a volunteer at Mount Sinai Hospital, but then there came I time when I said, "Listen you can't count on me regularly anymore, because if there is a snowstorm I don't drive, and I can't walk through it." It's not that far away from here. But I helped out whenever I could, but that was usually office work that they wanted me to do. I really didn't want to come close to people that had something, because I had grandchildren already, that had a disease that I could catch.

Z- So when did you buy your first house?

Il- The first place we bought was . . . Was this one. No, the first one I bought was the one in [1:40:56]. 59,000 dollars.

Z- And when was that?

Il- 19 . . . I bought it together with Gus, the same year he was sick. 1980.

Z- So you didn't buy a house until 1980?

Il- 1980, yeah. AS a matter of fact we cancelled a second thing that we had in order to make a bigger down payment. And then I said to Gus two years later, I said, you know what? It's 13 . . . It went down from 19 to 13 cents for the mortgage. Let's cancel this particular

thing, we can start saving again. Let's pay off the house. And that's what we did. And then . . . '80, '93 I wanted to be off the highway and Ricky was getting married, yeah. Last year, Ricky got married and I knew they were going to have children right away because they were both 30 years old. And I said, Ricky, the house is worth 220 . . . [phone rings] . . .

Z- Did your children go to University?

Il- The oldest one did. Judy went to CEGEP and had enough and went to work. And Ricky wanted to make a living, went to finish CEGEP and I said, "Ricky you're smart, do something else, I'll pay for it. Take something at night that can help you for yourself. Then you know you never get screwed if you being your car into a garage." "No, I'm fine mommy." I didn't want to argue with him. He's doing well so what more can I do.

Z- Did you talk to the kids about the war?

Il- Yeah, I remember that Ruthie was about three years old when she said, "Daddy what's that?" He had a number. And he and I used to make fun of it, I said, "You know you can never run away from me sweetheart, I will have you called back." B18603 . . .608 . . .806 . . . I forgot. It's written down somewhere. Yeah, my husband wrote his memoirs, I didn't.

Z- Why didn't you?

Il- Why? Because I said to Ruthie, There's too many things I've forgotten. If you sit down with me for a whole week and interview me and write down what I'm telling you, then maybe, but I need your help. I can't to this. I always had a problem . . . I was too busy with other things.

Z- Did you talk to friends about the war?

Il- If they asked questions, yes.

Z- Did people ask?

Il- Yeah, some of them. My very best friend, she knows everything. She was a professor at McGill, she's retired. Leila Wolf.

Z- Was she a survivor too?

Il- Leila? No, Leila was born here. Her father I think was born in Austria. Her mother was born here. Yeah, she's my best friend. People ask me, what is a best friend? I say, A best friend is the one you tell everything to, because you know it doesn't go any further. […]

Z- And you never wanted to get remarried?

Il- I didn't want to get married because I was afraid that I wouldn't be fair to somebody.

Z- How so?

Il- I was so happy with my husband that I would always be comparing. And there were people that were after me, but I saw right away through it. This one wanted a cook and the other one wanted somebody in bed. And that just wasn't my idea of a marriage.

Z- No, it wasn't a partnership.

Il- Sometimes I'm lonely, sometimes that happens, but you can be lonely if you're married too you know.

Z- Yeah. Okay, I think that's it.

[…]

Il- I don't think we had many troubles with settling in, it was a good thing that we had friends here that came here three months before us.

Z- And they helped you?

Il- yeah, but they ended up . . . no in '72 we lost track of each other.

Z- How did they help you?

Il- By being there for us with answers and questions, and taking us in for a couple of weeks to stay with them until we found a place to live.

Z- So it was all done through networking of friends?

Il- These were friends in Holland.

Z- Yeah, just one more question. Were you friends with the Polish or Hungarian Jews at all? I

Il- have a Hungarian son-in-law here. Does that tell you anything? His mother, I will never forgive this witch, she's dead. She treated my daughter like a piece of shit.

Z- Which daughter?

Il- Ruthie. I call her Ruthie.

Z- The Kovaks?

Il- Kovak, yeah. She was a miserable human being. I certainly did not shed a tear when she died.

Z- And when did they come over?

Il- They went form Hungary I think to Israel. I think Peter was 5 years old when they came to Canada. He probably couldn't make a living in Israel, I don't know. He was a good guy. Ernie was not a bad person. And . . . But she had indoctrinated her two other daughters in law, what a bad person I was. Because I didn't like her and she noticed it. She didn't like me either.

Z- So I interviewed a lot of people that came from Poland and some from Hungary and some from Czech and a lot of their life happened down on Mt Royal, Park Ave. Did you ever go to the Jewish Y or the Jewish public library or Fletcher's field.

Il- No.

Z- You never went there?

Il- No, I never remember. Because I'm not a big swimmer and here I can swim, and I never do.

Z- And on Sunday did you ever go to the mountain with the kids?

Il- Oh yes. We did. We went for walks with the kids. And we took them out, we went to upper Canada village. We took them all over the place. We took our children with us on holidays. We didn't go away and leave the kids at home. We went to Virginia Beach twice. And the first time that both my girls were at camp, we used that time to bring our son all alone to Florida. We ended up on the West Coast, it was wonderful. […]