

Interviewee: Sydney Zoltag

Date:

Z- I just begin with a little bit before the war just to get context, I'm more interested about what you remember, you know, from the time you came onto the earth so to speak and a little bit of background about family, your parents, where you were born, where you are from.

S- I was born in a small town in eastern Poland between the large cities of Bialystok and Warsaw, practically in the middle of them, but it was on the eastern side of the river Bug that became the border in 1939 between the German occupying forces and the Soviet occupying forces of Poland. I lived in a town of about 14,000 inhabitants where at times the Jewish community numbered more than 50%. Towards when the war broke out it was about 50/50. We had two churches, one catholic and the other one was a Russian orthodox because there were Russians that were part of the Christian community in our town. We had one or two major synagogues and the rest of them were little houses of worship. My parents had a . . . I was the only child, and my parents had. . .

Z- When were you born?

S- I was in 1931, although the date is not exact, I keep my birthday as the 15th of July. My mother kept on reminding that I was born on the day of Tisha B'Av, the nine days, the day that is sort of a very sad day in Jewish history that Jews, observant Jews, normally fast around [0:02:20]. I went to a private Jewish school. I could call that a secular school, religion was not the main subject, the love for the land of Israel was.

Z- So Zionist?

S- It was a Zionist . . . It was sort of leaning toward labor Zionism.

Z- Does it have a name?

S- The name of that school was the [0:03:08] school and the general name of that kind of a school was a Tarbut school. There were other schools in my town that some religious children went to. And some that were from the extreme left, from the [0:03:32], that did not really follow any kind of religion at all and they were taught Yiddish primarily. So, the school that I went to was geared to educate the kids that when they became adult to join organizations that would eventually take them to the land of Israel. One of my father's siblings, his sister, went [0:05:03] in the late 20s after she attended this school, the Tarbut school and joined the organization of [0:05:11], the Zionist socialist organization. She eventually immigrated to, at that time, Palestine and married a man from our town and they established themselves in the land of Israel.

Z- Were your parents religious?

S- Well in our town you had the choice either to be totally an atheist against religion and you went and bought your meat at a non-Kosher butcher shop and you were called a [0:05:59], somehow who eats pig, and the others whether they were religious or not religious they had to be observant. My father went to Shul every Saturday and I went with him. He did not go to Shul every morning, he was not really that religious and he did not wear any kind of . . . what we call a little prayer shawl, a small one, a [0:06:34], and that was only for the ones that were really religious ones. But we were observant and we had a Kosher house because my parent bought food at . . . the meat from a butcher shop that was Kosher, and certainly we didn't have any automobiles and the distance wasn't really that far from one to another, so there was no driving or riding or whatever during [0:07:14] and you just went to visit or went for a walk, and we kids used to play. WE used to play all kinds of things, and not necessarily being disrespectful to the religion but we were allowed to do that.

Z- What did your parents do?

S- My parents had a clothing store, men's and ladies'. We lived in the centre of town in a very fashionable area right facing a building that housed some stores, and also some residences. We had family in our town. My father was born there and we lived in the house with my paternal grandmother who was a widow. My grandfather, her husband, died before I was born and I'm actually named after him. Also, in that house, that I can remember just slightly, there when I was there very very young, was my father's youngest brother who lived with us for a little while and then he went on his own.

Z- What did you speak at home?

S- The language of communication was Yiddish. In school I learned some Hebrew, also some Polish, but my Polish was very limited. As a matter of fact I speak better Polish now than when I used to live in my hometown. All my friends were Yiddish speaking so we communicated only in Yiddish. Hebrew I have a knowledge of it and because in our school they did not teach us how to pray, they did not teach us the religious part of . . . I guess to worship, my parents sent me to a teacher, special teacher, we called [0:09:44] and I used to go to his house after my regular school days and he would teach us how to pray. At the same time he would teach us the [0:10:01], the bible, and the translation in Yiddish. And so this was for anybody who did not go to a religious school. If you went to a religious school the curriculum was that you did not need any kind of additional instructions. In my case I had to, and my parents did want me to learn how to pray 'cause otherwise I would be an anarchist or . . .

Z- So your parents were they middle class or . . .? I mean it's hard to translate . . .

S- I don't think that there was such an expression as middle class at that time, but what we did have was we had a nice house, we had enough for food, and there was enough that my parents, from the business that they had, that they could buy clothing and everything else that I needed. It wasn't kind of an in thing to take trips outside, like going on cruises, but if they had to go to another city to travel, they had enough money for that.

Z- And your mother worked in the store as well?

S- Well actually my father was a trades person, he was a tailor originally, and then when he went into the selling of it he was still the person that knew what to buy, what would sell, quality of the material, and workmanship and all that kind of thing. My mother was the sales person, and because my mother was born in a village about 20km away from my hometown, her Polish was perfect, the same as . . . She spoke with a kind of a lingo that the rest of the people that used to come into our store to buy, most of them were from outside of the city, were from the farms, and this is what we really catered to. The business was readymade clothing, not made to measure. My mother was the sales person and she communicated with everybody, it was very easy for her.

I had my friends. I had some relatives. My father had two brothers. My mother had first an older brother that married a woman from our town; they had two daughters. My father's side of the family, the older brother also was married and he had two children. And we were very very close and for me the biggest thrill was until 1936 to go visit my grandparents who still lived in the village 20km away. I would be able to go and see the animals and to sometimes hold the reins of the horse and go to the chicken coop and see how to collect eggs. That was for me an outing away from the city. It was very enjoyable and I had a very good relationship with my grandparents, particularly my grandfather since at I was at that time the only male grandchild of that family.

Z- So you felt special . . .

S- Yeah, I was spoiled. I got whatever I asked for, if it was reasonable. And, I had a good life.

Z- So the war starts in Poland in 1939 right, pretty much right away, and you were 8 years old?

S- I was 8 years old, and the war broke out, as we all know, September 1, 1939. Our town wasn't a strategic place, so there wasn't very much that the Germans had to destroy, however, occasionally they were sending planes that would fly by and drop a few bombs here and there. Once I was away because of the environment and I saw the city, there was fire out there, I thought it was my house. I remember being very very upset and my grandmother sort of calmed me down to say that it's not our house, don't worry about, you'll still be able to come back. When the war broke out about 10 days later or 12 days later, the German army came in. As soon as they came in they made their presence felt.

----meeting Mr. Zoltag's son-----

Z- So the Germans came and took over . . .

S- The German came about 10 or 12 days later, and they stayed in our town about 10 days. We were very happy to see them leave when the Soviets took over that part of Poland.

And we were under Soviet occupation and being only 7km away from the border which was the River Bug. When the Soviets came in, and by the way during the time when the war broke out school was suspended, when the Germans came in certainly school was not open. But when the Soviets came in they turned that Tarbut school, Jewish, Hebrew, Zionist school, into a Soviet, Yiddish, Communist school. However, at the age of 8 I had all my friends and whether I sang one song in Yiddish or in Hebrew or I sang one in Russian and there kind of indoctrinated nationalistic, communist tone or mood, to use children it didn't really make a difference.

Z- It was fun.

S- I felt that I continued to have a normal life. My parents though had a different kind of experience, because the stores were confiscated. My father had to go work in a cooperative, and the Russian family was living in our house and they occupied more than half of the places that we occupied ourselves. We got along with them and my parents got along with them and one time when my mother complained about something that happened between the ladies of the house, they were doing something to abuse the cooperative or whatever, and my mother sort of pointed out that that's not the way we do that. So the husband said to my mother at the time, to say that "hey, listen, you should say thank you that we allow you to live in a government owned". So it wasn't our house anymore it was a government owned house. So for them it was a little bit different and psychologically and economically it changed. However, they were not abused, they were not sent to any forced labor. They worked, made a lot less than they did before, but still enough to go on living.

Z- So when did things change?

S- Well it all changed the 22nd of June, 1941 when the German armies invaded the Soviet occupied part of Poland and being only seven kms away from them, they were in our town immediately and they didn't have to use any airplanes, bombardment. What they did was use artillery, they destroyed the centre of town totally. We ran away.

Z- You were ten?

S- Just about. I was actually a little bit less than 10 years old. And we ran away, with the artillery fire and everything else and when we came back we found our house was not destroyed, was not damaged or anything like that. The centre of the town was, but we lived in the perimeter around. We were able to enter our house, and when we got into our house we were in our room and we stayed there until the German administration began to enforce the racial laws that were on their books. I mean they had it all planned. They knew exactly what the rights of the Jew were going to be under their occupation and they did it. Now, they also had the help of some Poles who are very happy to see the Soviets leave and the Germans come back in. It is very strange to understand that a country that invaded their country—the German invaded Poland in 1939—in 1941 were treated at times like liberals. And my mother repeated very often how she saw women standing on the street with flowers for the incoming German automobiles and motorcycles . . .

Z- Polish women?

S- Polish women, holding flowers. But it was the reality and the Poles were . . . actually the ones . . . the popular thing for the time was to see what they can do in order to make it even more difficult for the Jewish community. So they did a lot of things on their own, without the German approval, nor the assistance. Because the Germans left only a few to administer or to oversee the police station and the rest of the administration. The rest were Poles who were hired or some volunteered. And the extremists, the anti-Semites came of from wherever they were and they were the bosses, they were the ones that were doing it. What I forgot to tell you also, and it's significant, is that when I used to go to my grandparents place in the [0:26:04] until 1936, and from . . . and in 1936 something happened in Poland at the time because of the death of Marshall [0:26:22] who was a liberal and someone that did not tolerate anti-Semitism or extremism, and Jews lived quite well. After his death, with the new leader that took over, anti-Semites became very active, and so, in the village were there was only my grandparents with maybe another couple of families that were there, but my grandparents owned the general store, and they had tickets from their neighbors and friends, the children, although the older ones apologized to my grandparents but the children had to do what their friends were doing. So they ticketed the store and my grandparents decided, "that's it", they would leave everything in the village and move to the city of Warsaw where my grandfather had a sister. So, during the summer I used to go instead of to the farm, to the city of Warsaw to visits. But they were out of there and when the war broke out in 1939 they came in to live with us. And they lived with us right until the end.

Now, during the time between June 1941 and August 1942 we still lived in our house. We had a curfew, schools were closed, although occasionally some of the old teachers would come and tutor us, but that was forbidden and punishable by death or whatever the Germans felt like at that time.

Z- So what happened in August '42?

S- In August 1942 they created a ghetto in our town in a very poor area of our city. And they cornered us into that ghetto, including some Jews from villages and other small town near by, and we were about between 6 and 7 thousand. We lived in, they weren't really houses, more like huts, with four or five families in one of those huts. We lived with the other families near the fence, the wire fence that was the enclosure of the ghetto. My father was given the job to do the repairs it needed it. So we had all kinds of tools, including wire cutters. I occasionally would carry all these tools for him when he had to go out to do some work. Before going into the ghetto my father was also taken to do some very dirty work cleaning out some bunkers of Russian soldiers who were burned inside, and when he came home he carried a mask, that's the mask that he did his work with because he could not go into that place without a mask. When he would come home he would be very quiet and he speak to my mother and sort of [0:31:05], but I saw how much he suffered. In the ghetto the work was outside, and he was able to move around freely without the interference of the Germans because the Germans would have to come through the gate before getting into the ghetto. Most of the time no Germans were inside

the ghetto. So his work was a little bit different and he felt a little bit free. Now we children we also felt a little bit more free because we were able to go and play outside as long as we wanted, we didn't have a curfew because the whole ghetto was a circle and we had nowhere to go. On November 1st in the afternoon there was lot's of rumors that something was going to happen the next day, because they had asked some farmers to prepare some horse and buggies, and that meant that there's going to be some sort of movement. And this was a sign because we heard from [0:32:36] that that's exactly what happened there when they asked the farmers to prepare some of their wagons and horses, that a day after or two days after they would take those Jews and transport them to places were they were never seen again. And so on November 1st the adults played cards all night and we children—at that time I was 11 years old and my cousin was 7 years younger, she was 4 years old, that lived with me and there was two other children in that house from the other family—they put us to sleep with our clothes on, and in the middle of night, at 2 o'clock, they woke us up because there was an order that the president of the [0:33:45] who lived with us was wanted at the gate, and that was a sign that this is it. So my father was asked to take his tools, go to the fence, and begin to cut open holes, and he started running from one house to the other knocking on doors and telling people that it's a sign and if they wanted to do something about it maybe they could escape. So my parents, my mother was waiting for her parents, my father was waiting for my mother, but I was at the barbwire fence and they opened up a hole and they told me to run and I started running alone. I found my aunt and cousin later on and eventually ended up in the forest to take shelter and wait until it gets light. And as I was running the rumors were flying all over the place, and my father I found in the same forest, he came there a little bit later during the day and we were reunited with him, and my aunt and uncle and my cousin and there were a few other people there as well.

Z- And your mother?

S- Not my mother. Not my mother and not my grandparents. What happened to my mother was she was waiting for her parents and my grandfather went to go get a coat for another aunt and being at the age of 60 plus they were a little bit slow. By that time the guards were right near the fence, and so they didn't really have a chance to . . . my mother started running once somebody started yelling. She ran and she ran in a different direction, and my grandparents walked and they came to a ravine and they lied down with other people, other Jews who escaped. There was also a young baby, a young child around a year or 2 or 3 who started to cry. So the guards came, they shot everybody execution style and my grandmother who was wounded, her arm was bleeding they thought that she was also shot and then they didn't shoot her again. After an hour or so she realized that everybody else there was gone, including my grandfather. She picked herself up and she started walking toward the area were she lived before she went to Warsaw. There she met my mother and then a week later when we started moving from that forest, we found out that my mother was alive, my grandmother was alive, and my mother's oldest brother was also. And this is how we met up with each other and started wandering around to try and find a place where we could hide from the Germans. The ghetto, in the meantime, took about a week before everybody was put on the cattle cars and were all taken to the death camp [0:38:22], which was about 70 or 80km away.

Z- So were you in the woods the whole time?

S- Well, we found shelter wherever we could. Sometimes in the forest, sometimes on a farm with the farmers permission, sometimes without, but the last 14 months of our hiding we were hidden by one family. A Polish Catholic family, very religious Catholic family, that the youngest son took us out from . . . found us in the forest, he went to get his sister after my father asked him to help us, and the sister recognized my mother because she was treated well in the store that my parents had, and she was given clothes without having to pay the whole thing. My mother was kind to her and she remembered that, she said, "let me see what I can do". She went to her parents and they agreed to hide us, they began with the three us, my parents and I, and eventually they hid seven of us, including my uncle, my mother's oldest brother and his three companions. We stayed there for 14 months. We had five different hiding places.

Z- In the house?

S- In the barns. In a stall in the barn, and the last place was outside the barn because as the Russian army was getting closer and we used to see it only at night when the sky became brighter, there was a danger to be in the barn, so we dug a hole outside so we can all be, and maybe also a place where the farmer and his family could get in there for shelter against any kind of artillery fire or bombardment or whatever it was. And the last place was like we were in a hole. Sometimes in the beginning we were outside, but we were able to see daylight through the cracks of the barn, but the last 7 months we were underground where we didn't see daylight and we went out occasionally in the evening, at night, when it was quiet so you can go out for some air. And inside it was damp, wet, in the spring and in the fall we had water, and sometimes we had to get on our knees, it's not a place that you can stand up, so we crawled, we would have to empty some of the water with pails so it wouldn't get full and we wouldn't be able to remain there. In the summer of 1944 the war wasn't finished and yet and the Soviets liberated our area, and we got out and we ran away from the fighting, from the front, and eventually a week later came to our hometown where we found less than 70 from a community of 7,000 survived . . .

Z- That was in '44?

S- Summer of '44.

Z- And that was Russian liberated?

S- Yeah, Soviets.

Z- So you stayed there until?

S- Well we stayed in our town, including the . . . my mother insisted that I go to school in September, when it opened, of 1944 and there was no Tarbut school, it was a general public school.

Z- Polish.

S- Yeah, and I went to school and so did my cousin, but my aunt took her out almost immediately. I was older so I stayed in the school a few months, but I was abused, I was bullied, I was called all kinds of names. Sometimes I got a physical beating. The teachers sometimes sympathized with me, but they couldn't do very much about it. I began to say to my mother "I'm staying, I'm not going". So, I got out of school I stayed out. I didn't want to have anything to do with them. Anti-Semitism did not disappear with the disappearance of the Germans.

Z- So what happened then? '45 war ended in all of Europe and . . .

S- Well things in our town as well as in many other towns in Poland was not a very . . . did not see a bright future there. Anti-Semitism was very high and many survivors were killed, including in our town, after we were liberated and they were killed by Poles who still had that hate in their hearts, and because the war wasn't over yet it was very easy to go around. They had guns, they had all kinds of armaments to do that. And we in our city also had some protection, we acquired some guns to protect ourselves. But there was no future for us to remain there, so the decision was made by everybody to start moving westward. So we started wandering from one place to the other.

Z- When was this the end of '45?

S- April '45, the war wasn't finished yet. It was before the end of the war. We went to Ludwin, a city in Poland. We stayed there a very very short time and then we started moving across borders, to Czechoslovakia, to Hungary, to Romania, back to Hungary, Austria. And in the summer of 1945 my parents and I, including my aunt and uncle and my cousin, ended up in Italy, and there we were taken by an organized . . . leaders of [0:42:56] at that time from Palestine that worked with refugees that wanted to eventually go to Palestine.

Z- And that's what you wanted, or your family wanted?

S- Yeah, yeah, well I wanted it badly. My mother had a sister and brother here in Montreal, so she wanted here. And my father had a sister in Israel, and I wanted to go to Israel. But we have made the decision to go to Israel, Palestine at that time it was not a state yet. But my father died in 1945. He was weak and sick, eventually '45 he died.

Z- Was it heart failure?

S- A heart failure.

Z- How old was he?

S- 42. On December 1945, he died at the age of 42 and at that time my mother sort of tried to pressure me that I should agree to go to Canada.

Z- And you were 14?

S- I was 14.

Z- And was she also 42?

S- She was younger. She wasn't 40 yet when my father died, she was 39. '45 yeah, 38. In Italy I went to an educational children's home that was run by [0:45:04]. It was an educational centre preparing us to go to Israel, and I was there on and off for about 9 months, and all my friends, I would say 99% of them, went to Israel. And I and a few others, with their own personal reasons, went to other places, like the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa.

Z- So how come you decided not to go to Palestine?

S- I did not make the decision.

Z- Your mother?

S- Yeah, I would never leave my mother. I would never go on my own. And there was a lot of pressure from my aunt and uncle here in Montreal that the best place for her would be to be with her family. And I realized that, that would be the proper thing to do, but for me my dreams were . . .

Z- Shattered . . . So your mother started the process of immigration to Canada?

S- Yeah, we got the papers and we had to go through immigration.

J- And what time is this now? 1946?

S- It was a little bit later, it was probably was in 1947, because there was a while that we can only think about going to Canada, but Canada wasn't really receptive to take in immigrants, particularly Jews. They would rather take in some Nazi war criminals, and so they did for a long time. Nazi war criminals had a better chance of immigrating to Canada than Jews. But eventually . . . and we were sponsored by our family so it was a little bit different than the general refugee population. And I know that they let in some orphans, and I have some of my friends that came at Montreal. I also know of some trades people that were taken in afterwards. But for a while the doors were shut, and so I was still hoping until the last minute to go to Israel.

Z- And you lived in Italy?

S- I lived in Italy.

Z- So you speak Italian?

S- Yes, I speak Italian. I am actually fluent in Italian. I . . . not only that, I had friends that were Jewish, but I also acquired one or two friends that were Italian and with them I picked up the language quite well.

Z- Where were you in Italy?

S- Where? I was in a DP camp of . . . first of all we started out, we were in different transit camps, I was in [0:48:46], I was in Bologna, I was in Modena, and then my parents got to Cremona, and Cremona is know for the creators of the famous violins, Stradivari was a master and he lived and created violins in Cremona. And it's still known as a centre for producing fine stringed instruments.

Z- Did you play?

S- No, I don't, but I was told a few times that, in particular when I visit Cremona again, I went to the museum that they have in the city hall, and since I spoke fluent Italian I was given like the royal treatment, and they told me that every now and then they take out four violins from that museum, there is also Amati that was working there and [0:50:11], and they take out four violins and in one of the theatres, they perform the Four Seasons.

Z- Lovely. So that was a good time.

S- Yeah, Italy for me . . . I guess I get emotional when I think about it. Italy was the first country, I guess ever—because before the war I played only with Jewish kids, and after I was liberated the Polish kids treated me not with kindness—Italy was the first country that I had friends that were not Jewish that treated me with respect. The Italian people in general were very sympathetic, certainly, and treated us and . . . when I go to Italy, I feel at home. And also, my father is buried in the Milano cemetery.

Z- In Milan?

S- So Cremona is not far from Milan, and there's a Jewish part of the cemetery in Milan, and he was buried there. So every time that I am near there, in Europe anywhere, I stop in there.

Z- Did your mom work in Italy? Or you were in DP camps . . .

S- Yeah, she worked in the kitchen as a cook. In the DP camp she worked. She always tried to be independent, not to stand in the line for handouts. So she was working and when I came back to the camp after I stayed in the children's home, because I wanted to visit my mother and they didn't. . . the children's home was a place where most of the children were orphans, and most of them had no parents at all, some had one parent. So they had to keep a certain discipline, that if they left some kids wander out then it wouldn't look good for

the others. So I couldn't go to visit my mother after my father died, and my mother was lonely. I decided, okay, I will go and stay at the DP camp. I kept in touch with my friends from the children home when I left. And the ones that are still alive today I am in touch with. When I go to Israel I see them. And they are there, I mean they established settlements in all parts of the country as a group, and they live like a family, they don't have any other.

Z- So when did you leave for Canada?

S- I landed in Halifax harbor on the 2nd of May, 1948. On pier 21.

Z- So you were almost 17, you were 16.

S- I was 16, and I . . . although I finished a [0:54:13] school in Italy as an electric technician. I was encouraged by the Italian engineers who examined me, that I had to pass the exams, that I should continue and become electrical engineer. When I came here my mother started to work . .

Z- So you went from Halifax...

S- To Montreal.

Z- Were you greeted? Do you remember what happened when you got off the boat in Halifax?

S- Yeah, sure. I remember we were greeted by I guess community leaders or volunteers from the Jewish community. Whether they were from the Maritimes or . . . I think some of them were even from Montreal or Toronto, and they gave us things, including I remember getting a pack of players cigarettes and at that time I was already smoking without the knowledge of my mother. They wanted to give me a pack of cigarettes, I always used to get one or a piece, so now I was almost a grownup. I don't know what else they gave us, but I remember the cigarettes, and then we went on the train.

Z- Did your mom have any money?

S- No, no, only a little bit maybe. We used to . . . we naturally kept American dollars, whatever she was working, she was making, she was getting paid when she worked in the kitchen, so she had a little bit.

Z- What was your mother's name?

S- My mother's name was Henia. But she was very independent. As little as she had, she managed. When we first came here we lived with my aunt, my mother's sister.

Z- And where did they live?

S- On Park Avenue in an apartment, and that was my mother's twin.

Z- And when did they come over?

S- In the 20s. She came alone as a young girl in the 20s and met her husband to be and got married and they had a daughter?

Z- And he was Canadian? Jewish?

S- Yeah, yeah, Jewish, that came over from . . . Then they came and they established themselves They worked and she was working. So we stayed with them for a little while and then we rented a room, my mother and I, until a year later. My mother met a man.

Z- So did your mother get work right away here?

S- Yeah, almost immediately. She became a finisher in a fur factory.

Z- So she went to the factory, she didn't take work at home?

S- No, no.

Z- Do you know how much she made, would you know that?

S- I know that she worked piecework.

J- Did she find that work?

S- No, it was through a relative. Actually my uncle was working in that place, so he spoke to the owner and she was given a job as a finisher there. She was handy, she was a fast learner, and she learned, and she did that.

Z- Did you go to school or did you have to look for work too?

S- Well I had to go to work. My mother could not support me, and after she married her husband was also a worker and it was not a situation where I could rely on them to support me. My mother . . .

Z- Let's just go back. So it was a year later your mother met the guy, but that first year you went to work living with your aunt and uncle . . .

S- Yeah, I went to work immediately.

Z- What did you do?

S- I went to a dress factory and became a sweeper, and then a piler, and then eventually I became a cutter. But I was in the needle trade from one place to the other I would go.

Z- But you were laid off?

S- No, I was not. I always had a job, and I think I was making something like 12 or 15 dollars a week.

Z- And how did you get your job?

S- I got it through somebody who knew somebody who knew somebody.

Z- And how often would you change in that first year?

S- I had a few jobs in a period of two years, and . . . but a year later I . . . I mean, the first thing that I did was enroll in English, to learn English in classes.

Z- And that was at the JPL?

S- Well it was at . . . actually was a son of the principle of the Jewish Peoples School that was teaching English to immigrants.

Z- For free?

S- Yeah, it was all for free. So I enrolled there and went to other ones. I went to a few of them. I wanted to learn very very fast, and I did. And then somebody, an acquaintance of my, came over to me and he said—you know I started going out and I started going to dances and all that, and I was amusing myself after work—and he came over and he said “well, I think you’re wasting a lot of time with all these things and you’re forgetting that it’s important to have an education”. My formal education was practically nil. I went a little bit here and a little bit there.

Z- Who said this to you?

S- An acquaintance, also an immigrant.

J- Was he older?

S- Yeah, yeah, he was older, about three or four years older. As a matter of fact he ended up in the Maritimes as a teacher. He said to me, “why are you wasting your time?”. So I say, “what do I do?”. He says, “I’ll tell you where to go”. He told me to go to Sir George Williams College at the time.

J- Is this 1949, 1950?

S- Right in 1949.

Z- You were here two years at that point? How long were you in Montreal?

S- Maybe less than a year.

Z- Okay. You went to Sir George . . .

S- I went Sir George, and they said “yeah, we have a high school program, you have to go five years and you’re going to get your high school diploma”. “Wonderful”. So I worked at that time and as soon as I finished work I went to Sir George William, and they had [1:01:40-1:02:43], and they had all like that, and sometimes after school I would go out, meet my friends, and go dancing.

Z- And they were all survivors?

S- Yeah, yeah they were all survivors. I did go five years to Sir George and I graduated. I was very happy about that, and I learned English fast and French.

Z- How long did it take you to learn English? Were you able to . . .

S- Converse, less than 6 months.

Z- And what did you talk to your friends? Yiddish?

S- My Yiddish is good, my Yiddish is as a matter of fact very good, because I continued even being here to use Yiddish.

Z- With your mother?

S- Not only with my mother, but I also was a member of the Yiddish theatre here in Montreal for 20 odd years. 25 years. So the question that you asked me, were my friends refugees or newcomers, or whatever you would want to call it. There were other names that we were called, and you know that.

Z- Greneh.

S- No, in addition to that we were also called Mahkees (spelling?).

Z- Oh, I didn’t know that.

S- Well when I found out we were called mahkees . . .and it was not in a friendly tone, it was derogatory. I never found out exactly what it really meant, but it was a very . . .like dirt, you are maybe or something like that. We were called like that.

Z- Who called you that?

S- Youngsters my age.

Z- Canadians?

S- Yeah, Canadian born.

Z- Jews?

S- Yeah. I did not have in the beginning any kind of contact with non-Jews. It was only with Jews. And I think maybe it's interesting for you to know—and I'm sure if you are going to interview some others my age who came to Montreal, you will find the same story—I learned how to dance in Italy and I loved dancing, and I continued here and I used to go to the YWHA for dances.

Z- On Mont Royal?

S- No, it was on St. Urbain, YWHA, the other one was on Mont Royal, and they had socials and all that. And local Jewish girls . . . wouldn't say they did me a favor if they danced with me, but it wasn't very popular for them to dance with a refugee, or to go out with a refugee?

Z- Why was that? What was your understanding then as an 18 year old?

S- Well, I was angry how they treated me until one day somebody came over to me, also an acquaintance not a very close friend, because we close friends did the same thing as I did, but somebody sort of outside of that little group that we were came over to me, he says, "You're crazy to over there, they're doing you a favor to dance with you? You're such a good dancer, you're such a fantastic dancer. I'll take you to a place". He took me to a dance hall on Stanley St. called Palais D'Or, where most of the girls were French Canadians, and English Canadians, and ethnics, Polish Canadians, all kinds of other things except Jewish Canadians. No Jewish girl ever went there. It was not a nice place to go for a Jewish girl. It was a dance hall where most of the guys used to go there for pickups, but there were some who went there only for dancing. I wasn't really interested in . . . I was interested in the dancing. So, at first when I used to go there until I proved myself to them, yeah, I had lot's of rejection and all that, but after that I wouldn't have to ask a girl for a dance, they would come over to ask me. I was in contests and in exhibitions, I became very popular. Here I am, and Jewish girls, Canadian Jewish girls were embarrassed to be seen with somebody who came. I did have one that I met, she was very poor. Her father died when he was very young. Very very poor family, and we sort of got a liking for each other. But then I wasn't comfortable in her company, so I stopped.

Z- How come?

S- I was a refugee, and I always used to think like "why?". First of all we came out of the . . . we survived the most horrible experience, at the age that really is very damaging. We were kids that became adults almost immediately.

Z- You lost your childhood.

S- A little compassion, a little understanding, listen to a story like that. First of all, we couldn't even say anything. They thought that we came from . . . I lived in Italy for over two and a half years. I used to go to cinema over there, and in Italy at that time they were making better cinema than they were making in Hollywood. I remember first a Canadian Jewish boy that my aunt asked to take me to a movie, my age. And before we went into the movie he was telling what we were going to do in the movie, and where we are going to see it is going to be on a white . . .

Z- Screen . . .

J- With the lights . . .

S- And I said 'oh my god'. I didn't say anything, this is how we were treated. Was my English so bad that it was embarrassing for them to be with me? I don't think so either. In Italy I wasn't treated that way.

Z- So why do you think the Jewish girls didn't want to dance with you?

S- It wasn't popular. As a matter of fact, my mother had a large family here in Montreal. My maternal grandparents had brothers and sisters here, large family. And on Sundays as a youngster I would go with my mother to visit one of the aunts—one of my mother's aunts. She had a grandson my age who went to Baron Byng high school, and his mother one Sunday asked him, she said to him, "You're going to Baron Byng, there's a basket ball game on now, yeah?". "Yes, mom". "Why don't you take Sydney with you? He would enjoy watching that". And I was sitting with adults, bored. I'm visiting my aunt and that was something that was a tradition, it was something that we did. And he hummed and he hawed and he did all kinds of things and then he left on his own. Did he dislike me? No, he didn't dislike me, but he would be embarrassed to be seen with me among his friends. Until today I do not understand what they were thinking, because I wasn't in their shoes and not in their skin, so I could not understand how. This was someone that really knew me and didn't dislike me.

Z- So you very quickly learned that you had to stay among the immigrants?

S- We felt most comfortable among our own.

Z- Did you talk about the war?

S- Well . . . No, we young . . . the ones that were children during the war, even by our own adults many times we were told "you don't remember, you were too young, you didn't suffer the way we adults did". So we children kept quiet for a long, long time. Amongst ourselves we used to tell our stories. Among us young people we would tell each other of how. And some had very difficult times, more so than I, because I was sheltered by my parents, I did not make any decisions. There were some my age that had to make their own decisions. They were shepherd boys, they were in the forest, they were wandering

around. Some of them were runners in partisan groups, and some ended up in concentration camps. So we all had different experiences but we were all grown up, grown up because we were among suffering, right through. And I guess when I . . . what I did, I asked my grandchildren if they have any friends of immigrants in the school that they are. There are some immigrants that come from, not quite the same experience that we came from, but they came from Argentine, from France, from other parts of the world. And I asked them. They don't have too many immigrant friends as such, but they know about them, they know what happened to their parents, they know their life story, they know that they had to leave because of anti-Semitism, they had to go away because of something else, economic reasons, whatever it is. Our children, I don't think that even the teacher in the school, for instance like at Baron Byng at that time where the percentage of Jewish children were at 90 odd percent, were ever ever taught, of giving them the kind of education and preparing them "hey, when you see a kid that comes over from the other side, be friendly to him because he went through hell".

Z- So you and your mother lived on Park Avenue for a couple of months and then you got your own room?

S- More than a couple of months, maybe four or five months.

J- And where was that? When you moved away from your aunt?

S- We came towards the end of 1948 and we got a room a few buildings away from there.

Z- Park and ?

S- It's just below Van Horne, between Bernard and Van Horne. We stayed in the room until my mother met this man.

Z- So your mother rented a room? So you and her were in one room with access to a kitchen?

S- We had privileges to the kitchen, but we really kept to the room. We didn't keep anything in the kitchen except maybe in the icebox at the time.

Z- How come?

S- These were the arrangements at the time. There was a woman living there, a widow.

Z- Jewish?

S- Yeah, Jewish woman. She was nice, can't complain of that. And when they decided to get married, they thought of getting a house.

Z- So how did your mother meet . . .

S- Introduced by some friends or relatives

Z- Also a survivor?

S- Yeah.

Z- So you were both working. Did you get any help from JIAS or anybody with . . . ?

S- No.

Z- How come?

S- We came to family. We were sponsored by family. We were not immigrants that were brought in by the community or the government, we were brought in sponsored by family. We didn't ask for anything and we didn't get anything, and all that. We got maybe a privilege of being a member at the Y at the time for free for a year or so.

Z- So there was no generosity of spirit?

S- I don't think that I felt the deprived or anything, that I wanted more than that. What we new comers, or immigrants, or youngsters that came over here . . . and I was privileges that I had a mother and family. My family was very good to me, very warm to be, kind, anything at all. But there were others that were all alone, nobody. Orphans. And they got the same treatment as I did. They must have felt a lot worse than I did, 'cause I could always go to my aunt, who hugged my and kissed me. They didn't have that.

Z- We talked to someone and they said that once and a while at the Y there would be a tea, and they said "I didn't need tea, I needed emotional support".

S- That's right. We needed a hug, a smile, a friendly kind of thing. We didn't have it.

Z- What about religion right after? Your mother, you. . . ?

S- My mother was even observant, if you can call that word, while we were hiding when she was hungary. She wouldn't eat pork.

Z- But she let you?

S- Oh, of course. I mean food, whatever it was. My father would, but my mother no. My mother was very traditional and naturally when she married, she married a man . . .

Z- What's his name?

S- Sam Brighton [spelling?]. She married a man who had a son living in the US, who also was a refugee that was brought in by the US as an orphan. But he was brought into the US.

He could not go to the US because of the quota. So he came here as a craftsman to Montreal.

Z- What did he do?

S- Tailor. Very good custom made suits. It was a real good craftsman that helped him to survive in Auschwitz. He was taken to Auschwitz very very early when they took some other political prisoners from his town, and he did a lot of clothing, like . . .

Z- Uniforms.

S- Uniforms for the Germans, and they gave him an extra piece of bread, and he was okay, he was even able to help others. He had a wife and two other kids that were sent to Treblinka and murdered. So he was angry, bitter, and after marrying my mother he would not go to the synagogue, my mother did during the holidays. My mother kept a kosher house all the time, right in the beginning even if she had to pay more for the same food, but it had to be kosher because her tradition was to keep kosher. And I remember, I told it to my stepbrother who lives in the US and we are very close, I told him recently and it just came to my mind. We talked about religion and we talked about holidays and all that. I said, "Do you know what your father used to do on Yom Kippur when my mother and I used to go to the synagogue?". "No I don't know what he did". 'Cause he lived in the US. "Your father used to go shopping on Yom Kippur". A protest. A kind of showing defiance.

Z- In your face.

S- That was his way.

Z- Did he love your mother?

S- Yeah I think they had a good marriage. They argued many times, but I didn't stay with them that long, because in 1954 I got married. I got married to also somebody who survived the war.

Z- So one second. They met, they got married quickly. Where did they move?

S- They moved to Stewart Ave. in Outremont.

Z- They bought a house?

S- No, they paid the people that were moving out of there for a few broken down pieces of furniture, including an out of tune piano, I think 1100 dollars at the time, it was a fortune.

Z- Schlitzl gild?

S- Yeah, exactly what it was, because you couldn't at that time get a house that easily, so they got it that way.

Z- So he worked as a tailor making suits/

S- Yeah, he did very well.

Z- So he came over at the time? He came over with the tailor program?

S- Yeah, yeah, about the same time more or less, maybe a month or two different.

Z- Was he Polish as well?

S- Yeah.

Z- So was this a two bedroom house?

S- Where, on Stewart?

Z- Yeah.

S- Oh, it was a flat. It was a lot of rooms. As a matter of fact my stepfather had a nephew who also survived Auschwitz all alone from the rest of his family that lived with us. And then a friend of mine that needed a room where to stay, so he got a room in my mother's house. I think she even used to give him food as well. It's a friend of mine from Italy that we have known a long long time, also was an orphan, didn't have anybody. So we had a big house.

Z- So did your mother continue to work?

S- Oh yeah.

Z- She had to?

S- Yeah, yeah. She worked right through, and as soon as she came to Montreal she began to correspond with the family that hid us the last 14 months for our survival, and she sent them some clothing parcels, then some pharmaceuticals—not prescription drugs but just .

..

S- Like Tylenol . . .

Z- All that kind of stuff so they could exchange it for whatever. And then when it was possible she sent money, and when she got sort of a little frail I took over. Although I don't write Polish, I understand Polish. I don't speak it fluently, I didn't at that time, now I'm more fluent. And I began correspondence with that last surviving member of the family who still lived on the farm. When my mother died in 1996 I got letters from the last surviving member, Sigmond, that he wanted to see me because he wasn't well and he wanted to see me. After we were liberated in Poland we could not go to the farm to visit

that family personally to thank them, because the parents really did not travel, the children would come. Because they did not want their neighbors to find out that they did such a terrible thing like hiding Jews during the war. So we never went back to the farm, we couldn't. My mother wrote to them because they were the ones who really saved our lives. Without them we wouldn't have been alive. She appreciated and she did everything she possibly could. She wanted to honor them at the Yad Vashem, one of the righteous of the world, of the nations, and they said "no, we are still afraid". That was in 1980 she wrote the letter, she never sent it away to Yad Vashem, but she kept a copy of the letter and she gave me the copy. And when my mother died in '96 I decided in '97 to go to visit that family. I was going alone, if I had to, but then I had other volunteers that sort of said okay they want to go to. MY stepbrother said "if you go to my town I'll go to your town". So we went. Him and his wife, my wife and I, my cousin who was in Israel said absolutely no at first, said "okay I'll go with you". So her and her husband and their son, and another cousin, and my son decided also. And we got there in '97, 10 of us. And it's hard to describe the emotional event because we all did different things. Some ate, some drank, and some talked, and others cried, but we all did that. A number of times subsequently to that I went back to Poland for a number of reasons, with a number of other people including my family from Israel that wanted to see where their parents and grandparents lived and grew up. I was sort of like a tour guide. I never gave up my mother's mission of wanting to honor them as righteous. And finally in 2010 I convinced the son of the last surviving member that if don't do it know, or that we don't do it know, tomorrow might be too late. He went to speak to his parents, came back to me, and he said "they said okay, except that it's got to be in secrecy, private affair". I said "okay, let me see how we can arrange it". So I arranged with the Israeli embassy in Warsaw on September the 12, 2011. I went to Warsaw just for a couple of days. We had a ceremony at the Israeli embassy, the ambassador and his wife were there, the secretary was there, the one that I was writing back and forth. There was a person from the Polish, Jewish child survivors, and they allowed her sort of under conditions that she would not publicize that. There was one woman who was a righteous from another. And the Canadian ambassador to Poland was there, ambassador Costello that I was sitting next to and we became very friendly, and the last surviving member, his son, and his granddaughter. They did not want any publicity. They didn't want any members of the press. They didn't want anybody from the community of where they came from. They didn't want anyone at all, and this was really strictly private where they were awarded the righteous. Now, when you go on the website of the Israeli embassy in Warsaw and you see some of the things about the programs that they had honoring the righteous in Warsaw at the Israeli Embassy, you will see that a number were done there and their full name is there on that little story. My family had only their initials, they still don't want their full name, and now we are talking about 2011, I don't think its changed since, we are in 2012.

Z- Let's go back to 1950 for a second. So what did you do? You worked factories, you were going to night school and . . .

S- I met a Jewish refugee girl.

Z- What was her name?

S- [1:35:18]

Z- How old was she?

S- When I met her she was 16.

Z- And you were 18?

S- No, I was four and a half years older.

Z- How did you meet her?

S- I was fixed up on a blind date. She needed an escort for the sweet 16 of her friend.

Z- And where was she from?

S- From the Ukraine.

Z- And she was also a survivor?

Z- Yeah, her it was a different experience. She survived with her parents and she survived all the time in the forest. No shelter. Branches of the trees for her hiding place. So that's another . . .and we were married for 53 years, and she died 4 years ago.

Z- She was young.

S- Yeah, 72 at that time.

Z- She was at school when you met her?

S- Yeah she was going to school, but working in a bakery.

Z- Part-time?

S- Yeah.

Z- What did you speak? English to one another?

S- Yeah at that time.

Z- So you spoke English to her, and to her parents?

S- To her parents Yiddish.

Z- The Romanian Jews spoke Yiddish?

S- No not Romania, they were from the Ukraine. Yeah, they spoke Yiddish.

Z- And what were you doing?

S- I moved from the needle trade. I remember going to my boss and telling him that "I'm giving you notice". He says, "Why? I'm going to give you more money, I'm going to give this". At that time I was a union person and it was such politics that the union had to approve that the boss wanted to give you an increase. Without their approval you couldn't get an increase. Politics, that kind of a system turned me off in such a way I said, "I'm getting out of this trade". I got out of it and when I told him that I wanted to leave the trade, "oh" he says "my blessing", and shook my hand. He was very happy because he knew that I didn't fit in. So, I did a number of things including [1:38:21] insurance about 50 years ago give or take.

Z- Just around the time you were married, what did you do?

S- I was managing a company that imported giftware from Israel, and I worked for a while.

Z- It paid ok?

S- Well yes, but not to raise a family. When I first married it was okay, but then it was not really progressive to a point where it could grow into something. I was the only employee really in Canada. I was traveling to Toronto and Quebec City to sell giftware, Israeli giftware, to gift stores. I liked that because I was close to the land of Israel, the State of Israel, so it gave me a little bit of Zionism in my life, but the pay was not . . . so I started to look for something else. Eventually I started in insurance, and I started working on my own.

Z- And did Annie work at first?

S- Oh yeah, she worked as a bookkeeper, and she worked for a number of places. She worked as a bookkeeper, she did very well.

Z- Where did when you first got married . . . did you rent a flat or did you rent a room?

S- Yeah, we first lived one year with my in-laws and then we rented an apartment.

Z- Where did your in-laws live?

S- They lived on Esplanade near Villeneuve, in what they call the Plateau.

Z- And you were there for a year?

S- We were there for a year and then we moved into [1:40:19] place, and then we started to raise a family.

Z- When was your first child born?

S- On [same as 1:40:19] place.

Z- What year?

S- In 1957, and actually it wasn't Larry, it was Irwin, he died.

Z- As a baby?

S- No, he was 16 years old. He caught a virus that was an ordinary kind of thing, everybody though it was, the doctors thought so. It developed into a more serious thing, what they call Reye's syndrome, and . . .so that is what sometimes . . . but we managed, we moved forward.

Z- So two children.

S- Yeah, I had two sons. Now I have three grandchildren, they always put a smile on my face. So that's about . . .

Z- So did Ann continue working after the child was . . .

S- No, she did not work for a while, not before they went to school.

Z- You had a good position at that time it wasn't necessary . . .

S- We lived in the [same as 1:40:19] place and then we bough a house in New Bordeaux, a duplex and we got some help from our parents' assistance. We had a mortgage and we paid it out, and then after Irwin died we sold the house and we went to live in [1:42:45].

Z- So were all your friends survivors?

S- Well, in the beginning definitely. I remember looking through some old stuff that I had, and I belonged to a club or a lodge from the Zionist organization of Canada, SC. We had a club called the Theodor Herzl Lodge, and I looked at the photos and for one reason or another I don't think that there was anyone who wasn't born outside of Canada. We felt most comfortable among our own, because . . .maybe later on when we got a little bit older, that we were maybe more accepted and maybe they understood a little bit, maybe they became a little but more mature. But at the time when we were young and we needed that warmth the most, didn't get it, and I guess it was written about.

Z- The question I have, and the question I struggle with is, what changed? Why all of a sudden such an incredible . . . the Canadian Jewish community, why all of sudden such an incredible embracing of the Holocaust as part of the collective identity, 'cause that was certainly not the case, as you describe, in the 40s and 50s. What changed?

S- Do you really think it changed that much?

Z- I'm wondering that as I'm hearing stories.

S- Let me tell you, I'm probably one of the few . . . first of all, I was a member of the Yiddish theatre for many years and I love the Yiddish language, and I always did a little bit something, even in the DP camp I performed a little bit. I like to sing, I like to act, I like to dance, so I did it here too. I did it in Yiddish only, although I got offers to do it in English. It was not for me an achievement to go outside the Yiddish language, it was more honoring the Yiddish language itself, and trying to preserve it and trying to give it the respect that it deserves, the culture and everything else. I still believe the same thing, although I love English theatre and everything else. But to perform myself, I like to sing Yiddish. So I was involved and there, [1:46:32] we were like a family, because our director made it a family kind of unit. And at that time it was no difference where you were born except that our Yiddish was better than theirs. We were sort of stars, rather than "the other ones". Now, there's another part of it. I became very active in the survivor community and organizations. I always joined the old activist survivors that were out spoken and sometime yelled and screamed, didn't help them very much. They wanted from the community a little more than they were given. I was their friend, and most of them are gone now. I became very active in the city of Montreal and the Montreal city Holocaust memorial centre. Before they were building the museum I was on the executive, I was on the fundraising committee, I was on the content committee, I was the steering committee. You name it, I was on every committee that there was. I was really doing it and trying to work with the community on that. After that I chairman of the remembrance committee and 14 years I was a co-chair of organizing the [1:48:11] here, in Montreal. I do go to child survivors' conferences. I'm also a board member of the claims conference, one of two in Canada. I'm a co-president of Canadian Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Descendants. I'm active. I see the community, or the community's behavior towards Holocaust survivors even now, very clearly.

Z- And what do you see?

S- Do you think that it has changed that much?

Z- I don't know. I hear not. I hear there is a public . . .

S- There's a public perception and then there's a reality, and the reality is, that I can tell you that. . . what do they want again? All they want is a little bit, as we call it in Yiddish, [1:49:16], respect. A little bit of understanding that "hey", and besides that, I do work the claims conference that our community is getting funds, and also Halifax getting funds and Vancouver is getting funds, from money that is being negotiated by Holocaust survivors from governments that are giving them money and distributing all that kind of thing. And when we need something, when we want something, it's with difficulty. And at this point I don't really care.

Z- I care.

S- Yes, this is why we made our organization at first when we started, Canadian Jewish Holocaust Survivors, now we added Descendents. Because we are very concerned about what is going to happen after. We want descendents to take over, not only to be our caregivers, but also to be the carriers of the torch for remembering and doing the job. I was encouraged by the conference that I was at in Cleveland, a lot of young people were there, second generation, third generation. It was wonderful to be with the youngsters and get that feeling of understanding and compassion, and they wanted to absorb more and more. Privately they wanted to hear. And I go out to speak to groups. Wednesday I went to a French high school in Mirabel. I spoke to 100 kids, a French school. The teacher was English, I spoke partially in French, partially in English. They received me, and after I finished, I said to somebody "I was treated like a rock star". They were overwhelmed, and I was overwhelmed with their acceptance, with their reaction, with their . . . and this is the rewards that I get. I feel good when I do that, and this is why, Zelda, I did not say no to you, because I cannot say no to anything that has to do with something that maybe somebody is going to learn the inside of a time, of a people, and whatever else.

Z- So why do you think the Jewish community now is so . . . well on surface right, the Holocaust was important, we must not forget, but when it comes to the individual lives of people . . .

S- Many words have been used of how popular the Shoah is. I don't want to go into that because some of it is insulting, and maybe hurtful. I think because of other genocides in the world, that somehow the Jewish community woke up and said "hey, we have something that we can teach the world, about what happened to us, and for others to learn". And I have spoken to the Rwandan community and when I speak I always say "the world didn't really change that much, there are still atrocities taking place all over, and nations or superpowers, if it's not in their interest, close their eyes and don't say a word". And this is what it is, but I think maybe the Jewish community, not that they woke up . . . I think that because of the perception of others . . . I get a lot of . . . I have some friends, non-Jewish, that are very very much interested in my story and other stories like it. "Call me and tell me something that happened about it Sydney". I wrote a my personal experience and observation during my trip to the March of the Living last year, only in Poland, 'cause that part . . . and I wrote it and I thought it was going to be like two pages, it ended up being more than seven pages. And I sent it to a friend of mine who works at an insurance. She's an English French Canadian, because one parent is French and the other one is English. So I sent it to her, and she was like "wow", and I talk to her very often, she wants . . . and by the way I am finished writing my memoir, not published yet, but I am working with an editor, that is going to be done soon, she's waiting for it and all that. But when I wrote this part she said "can I share it with a colleague of mine who is very much interested in it". So other people are interested in it more so maybe, definitely more so, than Jewish Canadians at that age at the time when I came here, were at that time. Why? I think because people were concerned of what the world is like, and what it is going to be for their children and grandchildren. I talk to much.

Z- No. Did you like Montreal when you first came or were you disappointed?

S- I was very disappointed because, first of all, I missed my friends. They all went to Israel, my close friends, they all went there. And then, I was treated by the locals. Then I started playing soccer here, I played for a team.

Z- Maccabees?

S- No. I played for [1:57:48] Junior.

Z- Where did you play?

S- Fletcher's Field, where everybody else did. And I played with some of the kids from Baron Byng. Now our relationship with them, after the game, we went our separate ways. Was I invited to their houses? No. Should they have invited me to their house? I don't know, but they didn't.

Z- What about the synagogues?

S- Now, this is a very general questions. There are all kinds of synagogues.

Z- When you first came.

S- I can tell you about synagogues where I felt comfortable, and I can tell you synagogues where I felt not comfortable. And I don't think that it had to do anything with me being an immigrant, I had to do with maybe how much money I had, that kind of thing. Synagogues mainly treated people, what they can get of them. Organizations still, federations still are only looking at what you can give them.

Z- So they had no policy to help the immigrants?

S- Well, they do help. Our Jewish community is helping the people from the community who live below the poverty line, they help them. All Jewish communities throughout the country, in Toronto, here, and I know I work with social assistance agencies . . .

Z- I know that is now, but what about when you came in the 50s?

S- Well I didn't really need anything from them, so . . . I suppose there were some who were given assistance. I didn't need any assistance, didn't ask for any. I went to work.

Z- I ask this question because of all the people I've interviewed, I've gone through a lot of JIAS case files, we've gone through congress memos, and there's just nothing, nothing, nothing. Repeatedly nothing from the synagogues, so I've started asking this question.

S- Well the synagogue was collecting funds, they were not distributing.

Z- And I heard that people were kicked out during the high holidays because they had no money.

S- Yeah, some synagogues wouldn't give you a seat, wouldn't let you in if did not have the ticket. But what I was talking about, the organization, I did not work with JIAS, but I did work with CJC and they always had an open door for survivors, CJC did. Unfortunately they are no longer in existence here.

Z- Congress worked hard. They absolutely did work hard.

S- They brought in the orphans and they did an awful lot of other things.

Z- Yeah, and I sense a frustration because they couldn't find homes for the orphans and they kept, you know, mobilizing and . . .

S- And if you speak to some orphans that came over here that were taken into some Jewish homes, as I have spoken to them, primarily girls that had to do domestic work, they were not treated nice.