



# Seeking Refuge:

*Immigration to Canada Before, During  
and After the Holocaust*



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# SUSAN GARFIELD

Wartime Diary Excerpts

# 1944

June 2, 1944

The reason I'm writing a diary is so that many, many years from now, when my smooth face will be furrowed by a thousand wrinkles, I will be able to show it to my children and grandchildren. I will write about the many hard struggles of life during the war, the occupation and many other heart-wrenching things. Now it's time for me to introduce myself.

I'm going to be eleven years old tomorrow. I can honestly say that I'm very fond of my looks. My hair is still completely blonde at the bottom, and somewhat brownish at the top. When I was younger, I wore a white dress at my aunt's wedding (her name is Ibi). When they were taking the pictures, I was standing in front of Ibi with my head slightly bowed. You could hardly see me, because my aunt wore a white wedding dress and my head was the colour of her gown. It seems I have strayed from the subject, but I will get back to describing myself. My forehead is average height. My eyebrows are thick and brown, but not shapeless. I have big blue eyes, my upper eyelashes are dark but the lower ones are fair, and they are all long. In other words, pretty. My nose is very shapely and turned up. (I really like turned-up noses.) My mouth is a nice shape and rather small. My chin is pointed, which is prettier than a round chin. My face is oval. I am a young girl of medium height, and somewhat on the skinny side. I'm going to have a good figure; my ankles are slender already. By the way, my name is Zsuzsanna Veronika Löffler, but at home everyone calls me Zsuzsi [Susie].

I have just finished the first year of public school, and what I want more than anything is to be accepted into the *gimnázium*.<sup>1</sup> I don't have much of a chance because I had a low mark in Hungarian, despite the fact that my essays were graded excellent for grammar and excellent for composition, with a low mark only for penmanship. It only happened once that I had a low mark for grammar. My marks for the oral portion were not bad either. I think that the Hungarian teacher has it in for me.

The war is in its sixth year. I was five when it started.<sup>2</sup> All I can remember is war, war. The Germans are now occupying Hungary, and it is very bad for the Jews. These days we often have to hide in the cellar from Russian, American or English bombs. At night we even have to leave our nice soft beds and head for the cellar.

My father has been conscripted into the Labour Service, and it's more than a year since he disappeared on the Russian front.

Now I'm ready to start my diary.

...

June 3

The Jews have to wear a star, a ten-centimetre-wide yellow star in the shape of a Star of David. Maja has some for sale. I took a few to sell. She charges 150 pengős each and I will charge 170. I got home at 9:45. Mother was already in bed. She was very angry at me. I will pacify her later.

...

<sup>1</sup> Susan would have just finished the equivalent of Grade 5 in Canada. The *gimnázium* was the high school for ten- to eighteen-year-olds.

<sup>2</sup> Susan was born on June 3, 1933. In September 1939, at the start of World War II, she was six years old.

#### June 4

When I got home, I met Maja on the staircase. She was coming from our place. We played with my dolls and had a game of Monopoly. She left at 7:00. Then I brought Robika upstairs to play with him. Then Zsuzsi Löwy came home from her aunt's. We played Monopoly until 10:00 p.m. It is 10:30 now, and the air-raid warning has just sounded. I have no idea what's going to happen. The last we heard on the radio was that there were bombers flying over Bácska, Baja and Szeged.<sup>3</sup>

#### June 16

Jewish houses are being set up.<sup>4</sup> Thank God we can stay in our building. I do not know who is going to come here to live with us. I went to see the Rónas, but they had already found a place to move to. Grandmother's family is staying put as well. But not my aunt Malvin. She and her family will come either to Grandmother's place or to our place. They have until the 21st to move.

...

#### June 18

Auntie Szidi [Zsuzsi Löwy's aunt] was here and she said that Zsuzsi was going to her grandfather's and that she'd found an apartment. Which is to say that a few buildings were designated as Jewish houses and all the Jews were supposed to move into them. At least six people are supposed to share one room. No one will have their own apartment. Thank heavens our building was one of the designated ones.

...

#### June 21

Two people have moved in [to our apartment] already, a mother and her daughter.

#### June 22

Tomorrow, in the afternoon, I'm going with the Székelys to visit a relative of theirs. They have a home with a garden that's going to be taken away. Let us enjoy it while we can. They [Mari and Ági] were here this afternoon and we had fun playing. When they left, I brought up Robika, a beautiful sweet little two-year-old boy. After I took him back, I started writing in my diary, and now I'm going to bed.

...

#### June 25

We are only allowed to be out on the street between 2:00 and 5:00 p.m.

#### June 26

Thank God. We are allowed to be out on the street from 11:00 to 5:00 as of today.

#### June 27

As we are not allowed to go to the park or to the playground, the superintendent gave us permission to play ball in the courtyard between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. That is really nice of him.

<sup>3</sup> A region and cities that are between two hundred and three hundred kilometres from Budapest, where Susan lived.

<sup>4</sup> Designated buildings that Jews were forced to move into three months after the Nazis occupied Hungary.

June 29

I play Monopoly every night with Ilonka Weisz.

...

July 1

These days we spend a lot of time in the cellar [because of the constant air raids]. The air is so bad you feel like you're suffocating.

July 2

This morning the air-raid sirens sounded again. They don't even let you have your breakfast in peace.

July 3

I couldn't fall asleep until midnight. The adults were whispering until 11:00 p.m. When they finally stopped, Peti called out, "You can't sleep with Grandma around, she snores so much!" Then there was an air raid. Bombers over Budapest. Then I get up and they [the adults] are having a loud argument.

October 3

I haven't written for ages, my dear diary, but I will make up for it. I am going to make up for what I missed. But now inspiration has struck and I'm going to write short stories for young people.

...

October 10

We are living through very important times. I will take you step by step through the happenings of the last few days. Three days ago, Mom and I went to my school to find out if I would be admitted to the *gimnázium*. They told us to apply on the 12th. From there I went to my [paternal] grandma's place on Király Street. Mother accompanied me. We met an acquaintance. He told us that Jews should avoid walking in front of a certain building. German soldiers are stationed in that building. I went to see Grandma. [Aunt] Bözsi said that the Hungarians had asked [the Soviets] for an armistice<sup>5</sup> and they were granted it, but they don't dare to announce it publicly yet because of the Germans. (That would be great, I thought.) Afterwards I went to Malvin's for lunch. [Cousin] Éva was there. I had promised to go and see her on Tuesday. Today is Tuesday.

## 1947

January

Each time I happen upon this diary I seriously contemplate tearing it or burning it, for I find it embarrassing to read, even to myself. On second thought, though, I give it reprieve because I believe it's the truth; that's the way I was and I described my true feelings. What's more, I end up adding to it.

I won't even try to write down how much has happened since the last time I wrote. Such things can never, ever be forgotten anyway. I have come across this notebook by pure chance. God only knows where it has been hiding all these years, and the reason for its surfacing now, I have

<sup>5</sup> An agreement made by two parties that are at war with each other to stop fighting.

no idea. It is tough to read my old diary, the diary of an eleven-year-old girl. It's almost incredible how conceited I used to be back then. But I am not anymore. I have changed some since I described myself. My hair is darker, my face rounder. Now I am chubby rather than slender. That's all. People consider me pretty. Yes, pretty. But I have changed tremendously since the time I wrote the diary.

The gap that exists in time is best left unfilled, as it contains neither joy nor beauty, but death, fear of death and fathomless pain. My dear Father, my dear Mother, you are no more. No one on earth will ever know my feelings about this. I may appear callous to others. I once overheard a relative tell my mother, "This child never mentions her father; she probably never thinks of him." Now it is the same with both [parents]. But I don't care what people think. I hate, abhor, despise people. I may be wicked but it is their fault. I didn't want not to care. I became selfish, an egotist. Only "I" exists for me. Nothing else exists, nothing I care about.

I will probably be leaving for Canada sometime soon. I will be adopted through the Joint.<sup>6</sup>

Why do I want to go to Canada? Only sad memories bind me to Hungary. It will be painful to leave my relatives, aunts, grandparents and cousins who love me and who don't dare detain me for fear of reproach in the future. My utmost desire is to leave, and I would consider myself unfortunate if I would not be successful in this. I do not wish to live in a place where everything I see awakens memories and tears at healing wounds. Here everything drags me backwards — the past, the people. Only in a new environment, far from here, can I look forward to the future.



Susan's passport from Budapest, 1948, before leaving for Canada.

<sup>6</sup> The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

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# **WAR ORPHANS PROJECT**

## **EXCERPTS**



War Orphans Project Excerpts

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# POLAND



# MOLLY APPLEBAUM

Molly (in the back, on the right) with her family in Krakow, 1939.

Poland is a country in Central Europe, located between Germany and Russia, that had a large Jewish population before World War II. Jews faced antisemitism and discrimination in Poland, but many also participated in Polish culture and society. In September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded the western part of Poland, and the Soviet Union invaded the eastern part. The German occupiers persecuted Jews immediately, ordering them to wear the Star of David on their clothing and subjecting them to violence and forced labour. Eventually, Jews were forced into ghettos, from where they were deported to Nazi camps. In 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet-occupied areas of Poland and took control over the whole Polish territory, increasing the persecution of Jews in both the eastern and western parts of the country. Approximately 3,000,000 Polish Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Molly Applebaum was born in Krakow, Poland, in 1930. She describes her life before the war as simple, although times were rough for Jews in Poland. In 1940, her family moved to a small town, but in 1942, roundups of Jews led twelve-year-old Molly and her older cousin Helen to flee and find refuge on a nearby farm, where their only hope for survival was to be hidden away underground — in a box. After the war, Molly and Helen left Poland and travelled to Austria and Germany, where they lived in displaced persons camps. In 1948, Molly immigrated to Canada as a war orphan. She settled in Toronto.

# MOLLY APPLEBAUM

Author of *Buried Words: The Diary of Molly Applebaum*

## *A New World of Wonders*

It was now the beginning of 1948, and I felt kind of lost. Somehow Uncle Josef found out that registrations were being held in Munich for orphaned children and youth, and he pushed me to go and register for eventual immigration to America, so I did. He always joked with me because I hated to get up at dawn to catch the train to Munich, and when I complained, he said, "All right, tomorrow you will have to get up early, and then again when you travel to America, and then you won't have to get up early anymore." After I registered to immigrate and was accepted, I was asked where I wanted to go and I said America, but the interviewers told me that the quota was full. However, I could register for Canada, so I agreed.

I was then sent to a temporary holding camp, a so-called children's camp, which was really two old hotels converted for our use. I lived there for about six months before my group was shipped to Canada. The camp was in the little town of Prien. We went to school there, on the premises, and the classes were geared to our level. We made lasting friendships, and in 1998 we had our fiftieth reunion there. By then we were scattered throughout the US and Canada.

Here's the story of our coming to Canada: at that time, the Canadian government was very much against admitting Jews in general, but after a lot of pressure from the Canadian Jewish community, particularly the Canadian Jewish Congress, a government act was passed and they relented to admit about 1,000 Jewish orphans, survivors from war-torn Europe, on condition that the Jewish community would not allow them to become burdens on the country, that they be relatively healthy, especially free of tuberculosis and eye disease, and that they be under eighteen years

of age. There was a scramble of how to get us to Canada in time – the urgency was that so many of us were approaching our eighteenth birthday, and ships were not easily available. Doctors were assigned to examine us and X-rays had to be taken, as well as urine samples; the doctors were not in a particular rush, but we were. Some administrators connected with our eventual departure had to be bribed. Nothing was on the straight and narrow – birthdates were changed and documents falsified. Everything was still in turmoil.

There were a few social workers trying to prepare us for what was forthcoming, but in retrospect I think we took little notice. We were street smart, and we learned how to lie smoothly to suit our purposes. But the friendships we made were the genuine article. To overcome the difficulties the examining doctors presented some of us with, we resorted to our cunning ways. One of our group, a young girl, was being held back because the doctor reported finding a spot on her lungs, which made her ineligible to travel. So her friend went to another examining doctor in her friend's place, had her X-rays taken, and was passed. Now both were admitted. We were supposed to be "fully orphaned," but some of us were only partly orphaned – the surviving parent wanted their child to have a better chance to emigrate, since the future was as yet uncertain for the grownups. We shared our confidences with each other, without any fear of being betrayed.

The Jewish families who signed up for taking in a young boy or girl had an image in their minds of getting a young child whom they could care for and send to school. What they got instead was a group of sad-faced adolescents with whom they could not even converse, and who had their own ideas and demands. We were all a troublesome bunch.

In my transport group were approximately one hundred young people, and while en route to Canada we were divided into smaller groups. If anyone had a relative in Canada and knew their address, they were to be located in that city. If we had no one, they just divided us all across Canada, wherever there were Jewish families who agreed to take in a youngster. I was to travel to Sydney, Nova Scotia, for no particular reason. I had no quarrel with it, especially since my best friend, Betty, was also assigned to travel to Sydney. I was so happy that we had not been split up.

While on the ship, we were served food three times a day that was foreign to us – cornflakes, oatmeal, juices and generous portions of meat that we had no experience with in our memories. In the centre of the table there was a bowl of apples, enough for each person at the table. We eyed those apples, making sure that no one took more than one. This was a real delicacy.

In June 1948, we arrived in Halifax, where social workers were to pick us up. Since a number of us were assigned to Sydney, we spent a few days as temporary guests in private homes awaiting the arrival of social workers who were to escort us there. Betty and I ventured out around the neighbourhood, and the grocery stores amazed us. We could not figure out why oranges and cabbages were displayed side by side. Also, the sight of so much food available for purchase was remarkable. We each had five dollars, given to us on leaving the ship, and we certainly were not ready to spend it at that time. (I also had twenty dollars sewn into the shoulder pad of my dress, which was to be used for emergencies only.) The chocolate bars were pretty enticing, but we resisted.

During the next days we travelled by train with our social workers to Sydney and were delivered to our respective assigned families. The family whose home I was to share, Mr. and Mrs. E. Newman, had four teenage children, and they doubled up the two boys so that I could have a room to myself. The whole thing was a puzzle to me. I was under the impression that I was being

adopted into this family, but I could not comprehend why they would want another teenager when they already had two girls and two boys. The social workers failed to explain to us the meaning of a foster home, and neither did the family whose home I was sharing. I felt lost in this new world, full of wonders. I was told when to come down for meals, but I didn't have much interaction with the other children in the family or with their parents. I don't remember being asked many questions; it is possible that they were waiting for me to open up, but this was not my nature, and so we just existed side by side. I was asked to help with some household chores, which I did obediently. A bright point of my day was getting together with the others from my group, exchanging our feelings and other information. None of us knew what to do or what to expect next.

Our local social worker, Mrs. Nina Cohen, was a wonderful person. Mrs. Cohen sensed our loneliness and managed to invite the whole bunch of us to their home for dinners, and even to their summer cottage. She was one in a million and is fondly remembered by all of us to this day.

The local Jewish shopkeepers offered to outfit us with one new set of clothes, and I was allowed to pick out one dress and a winter coat. That summer, I got my first job in a ladies' wear store. It was late summer and sales were in progress to move the summer merchandise. My job was to watch for shoplifters. Whether I did a good job of it or for my employers' own reasons, they offered me a job in one of the departments selling underwear, girdles, bras and stockings. I was thrilled with my first pay packet. When I came home I was in a quandary as to whether to offer part of my pay to my hosts, and after consulting with Betty, I did. The Newmans suggested I save the money, telling me that I was not a boarder, another strange expression I was not familiar with. What was I? Total confusion. They helped me to open a bank account.

My employers, Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson, were quite kind to me. One day Mr. Jacobson took me aside and told me he'd pay me a few extra dollars on

the side every week, which he did not want the other employees to know about. I was now sending a dollar or two in a letter to Helen in Germany. Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson even sent me to Halifax for a short course about selling underwear and it was all expenses paid, even the hotel. I felt like I belonged.

...

One Sunday, my social worker, Mrs. Cohen, called me and said she wanted to take me out for lunch, just by myself. I was puzzled, because we were used to doing things in groups. She took me out for lunch and then just drove around for a while before bringing me back. Before I had a chance to thank her and get out of the car, she informed me that I was no longer welcome to stay with the Newmans. Apparently, Mrs. Newman had complained that it was too much for her to have another person in the house. I was not to worry, another home would be located for me. I was quite shaken and I felt abandoned once again. When I returned "home" not a word was mentioned by the Newmans, or for that matter by me. It was as if my conversation with Mrs. Cohen had never happened.

A few days later I was told to pack my things, and Mrs. Cohen took me to another home. I was told by the Newmans not to be a stranger, and even now when I hear these words it brings back the pain and the hurt of being told I was no longer welcome.

Luckily for me, the next home was warm and truly welcoming. The couple themselves knew firsthand the experience of not being wanted. The McPhails were fine people; Mr. McPhail, a Polish gentile, was an auto mechanic, his wife, Becky, was Jewish, and upon their marriage neither of their families wanted to have anything to do with them. Becky's parents had disowned her. The McPhails confided in me that they married for love and knew it would be a tough road, but they had not realized just how tough. They were music lovers and that's what had brought them together; they told me they were stared at even at a concert. They had two school-aged children and we all got along quite well.

I was to pay them part of my room and board, and the Canadian Jewish Congress picked up the balance. That arrangement suited us all very well. For many years later I corresponded with them, and they even visited me once in Toronto. They restored my faith in the goodness of people. My friend Betty had a similar experience; her second home was a good place to be. I don't recall the reason why Betty decided to travel to Toronto, but she did, and her second family, the Blonders, even funded her ticket, which was quite an expense. When she left, I felt very lonely. I was always a one-friend person, and I decided to follow her to Toronto, especially after she wrote me how much happier she was there, and that so many of our friends from the children's home were there. Betty described to me in glowing terms how they were all getting together and comparing notes about jobs and living accommodations.

By 1949, more of my friends in Sydney had started to leave. They claimed there was no future there. Some left for Montreal, others for Toronto. That's when I found out how far and expensive it would be to travel to Toronto. The only option was train travel, and it would take two days and two nights, and a berth had to be bought together with the ticket. When I had enough saved up, I approached Mrs. Cohen and asked how to go about travelling to Toronto. She contacted the Jewish Child and Family Service in Toronto, and they promised to find me a room when I arrived.

In Toronto I was on my own and, as arranged, a room was found for me with a Jewish family, the Richmans, on Palmerston Avenue. Living with the Richmans was a good experience for me. They treated me better than just a paying boarder. As in Sydney, the Canadian Jewish Congress subsidized part of my room and board because I did not earn enough at that time to cover my expenses.

An appointment was soon set up for me with a company engaged in manufacturing girdles and brassieres. However, they claimed I did not have enough experience in the field, which wasn't true. I sensed that antisemitism was the reason

they wouldn't hire me. I eventually found a job on College Street in a dry goods store and worked there for quite a while. At night I attended night school, taking up shorthand and English. I wanted an office job, so I also took a typing course.

Meanwhile, I had a good time. I was reunited with my friend Betty and my friends from the children's home. Our entertainment was meeting on College Street and walking around, sometimes going to the movies. Everyone would tell stories of their

progress and how they were adjusting to life in Canada. They seemed as happy to see me as I was to see them. They were like part of my family; we only had each other.



# JOHNNY JABLON

Johnny (far right) with friends on the ship *General Langfitt* on their way to Canada, 1948.

Poland is a country in Central Europe, located between Germany and Russia, that had a large Jewish population before World War II. Jews faced antisemitism and discrimination in Poland, but many also participated in Polish culture and society. In September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded the western part of Poland, and the Soviet Union invaded the eastern part. The German occupiers persecuted Jews immediately, ordering them to wear the Star of David on their clothing and subjecting them to violence and forced labour. Eventually, Jews were forced into ghettos, from where they were deported to Nazi camps. In 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet-occupied areas of Poland and took control over the whole Polish territory, increasing the persecution of Jews in both the eastern and western parts of the country. Approximately 3,000,000 Polish Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Johnny Jablon was born in Krakow, Poland, in 1926. He grew up with his parents and two brothers, and in 1939, he was getting ready to go to high school. In 1941, he and his family were forced into the Krakow ghetto. In 1942, his family was violently rounded up and deported while Johnny remained in the ghetto, working as a forced labourer. In 1943, Johnny was deported to Plaszow, a Nazi camp; in 1944, he was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was selected to work. In January 1945, the camp was evacuated and Johnny was forced on a death march. He was liberated in May. Johnny lived in displaced persons camps after the war and immigrated to Canada as a war orphan in 1948. He settled in Montreal.

# JOHNNY JABLON

Author of *A Lasting Legacy*

In early 1948, a representative from the Canadian Jewish Congress came to Linz to register and help Jewish orphans immigrate to Canada. Joe Luden and I found out about it and immediately put our names down. Canada! When I was in the concentration camps, we called all the best items Canadian: We called the best blankets “Canadian” blankets, working in “Canada” was what we called the best job, and on and on. My dream was that if I survived, I would be lucky enough to go to the best country in the world, Canada.

## *Canada and the Road to Happiness*

Finally, in August 1948, we received our visas and started to make preparations for departure. I was the happiest person in the world. It was the beginning of a new life.

On August 12, 1948, I left the DP camp in Linz, Austria. We were a large group of war orphans under the sponsorship of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) and the watchful eye of Mr. Reimer, who had been sent by the CJC to assist us right through our journey. Our whole class came to the railway station to say goodbye, and we were finally on our way. My dream was coming true.

A few days later, we arrived in Hamburg, Germany, where we waited for the ship that would carry us to Canada. That group of orphans became my family. We were all teenagers, the youngest being thirteen years old and the oldest not more than eighteen. Yes, I was really twenty-two, but to be able to immigrate, I changed my name to Ephroim Jablon and gave my birthdate as July 31, 1931.

We were so young but at the same time very mature. We ate together, sang together, played together, took walks together — like one big family. All these years later, some of those kids are still my best friends.

Finally, our ship arrived, and on September 18, 1948, we left Germany. I promised myself I would never go back there.

The ship was the *General Langfitt*, a very old military transport.

But who cared? We were the happiest bunch of kids in the world. The fun started after we’d crossed the English Channel and arrived on the open Atlantic, after the first day when everybody was seasick. A sailor took pity on us, brought us oranges and took us on deck for fresh air. He said, “Sing, walk, be busy, but do not sit inside. You will be okay.” We took his advice, and for a couple of days we had a ball, exploring the ship, drawing pictures, eating well.

...

On October 1, 1948, we arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. My dream had come true. “I am in Canada!”

Well, not yet. First I had to go through an immigration process, where I was asked many, many questions, and then I remember the officer asking me, “Why did you come to Canada?”

Without thinking twice, I answered, “Because this is the best country in the world.” He gave me a strange look, and that was the end of his questions. The next moment I walked through the gate and I was really in Canada.

Mr. Reimer, the representative from the Canadian Jewish Congress, was waiting for us on the other side and continued to be our guide and adviser for some time into our lives in Canada, but on that Halifax pier we had so many questions for him: “How are we going to our destination?” “Where are we going to get some food?”

He had a little smile on his face as he said, "Please stop worrying, because everything is taken care of." And he was right.

We boarded the luxury train that would take us to Montreal. I could not believe my eyes; it was a sleeper. My friend Joe Luden and I had two whole seats to ourselves, and at night, the porter came and made them into beds. But before we went to bed, we were served food in the dining room. What a life!

All day and most of the night, I looked through the window, watching the big country unfold before my eyes, and the next morning we arrived in Montreal. Some kids from our group went on to Toronto and Winnipeg, but for us, Montreal was to be home.

Trains enter Montreal's CN rail station underground, so when we arrived it took quite a few minutes to get out and actually see the city, but what a beautiful sight it was. The first thing I saw was the Sun Life Building, a very tall and grand building, the largest building by square footage in the British Empire when it was built. Hundreds of cars and hundreds of peoples moved in every direction. I could see the city vibrating with life and knew I had made the right decision choosing Montreal as the place to start my own new life.

We boarded buses that were waiting for us near the train station and took a short ride to the Herzl Health Centre, originally called the Herzl Hospital and Dispensary, located on Jeanne Mance Street, at the corner of Mount Royal Avenue. The Herzl Health Centre was adapted to accommodate the influx of orphaned Holocaust survivors. It could house a total of fifty people in a few large rooms, and also had a reception room, kitchen and dining room downstairs.

When we arrived at the centre, we were greeted by quite a few people who'd all come to see us, most likely with the intention of adopting some of us. They were a bit disappointed, as some of them had been expecting young children, rather than

"old" teenagers like us (I was really in my twenties, after all). But those people were wonderful, and the next morning some of them came with their cars to show us around the city.

Mr. Reimer continued as our counsellor and guide and was the person who introduced us to the activities of Jewish life in Montreal. Right around the corner from the centre, on Mount Royal Avenue between Jeanne Mance and Park Avenue, was the YMHA<sup>1</sup>. Next to it was the famous Dunn's delicatessen, where, at that time, a smoked meat sandwich cost fifty-five cents. I couldn't afford to go there for a while, but it was the gathering place after movies. Not far from us, on Esplanade Street, was the Jewish Public Library, where the famous Jewish writer Melech Ravitch gave a lecture once a week. And I shouldn't forget the beautiful Mount Royal Park and Fletcher's Field, right around the corner (now called Jeanne-Mance Park).

...

We arrived at the centre just a few days before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and on the first night of the holidays, we were all invited to different homes. Joe Luden and I found ourselves at the home of the Gordon family in Outremont. We hadn't been very happy about the invitation, as we'd rather have spent the holiday with our friends at the centre, but as was explained to us, it's good to make connections. Looking back, those people were very kind to us, but we felt so strange there, completely out of place in their lovely home.

...

A few days later, everyone from the centre was sent to live with different families. I was chosen to live on Old Orchard Avenue in the Montreal neighbourhood Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG), with relatives of the owners of the big Steinberg's supermarkets.

...

I lasted one day on Old Orchard Avenue. Shortly after I arrived, the gentleman of the house showed me around their very nice home. It had a number of bedrooms upstairs, with a living room, dining

<sup>1</sup> Young Men's Hebrew Association

room and kitchen downstairs, and even a finished playroom in the basement. Then he took me to the bathroom. "Here," he exclaimed, "is a bathroom! In this house, the water comes from the wall." I was speechless. What was he going to show me next? I asked myself. He then bent over the bathtub and turned on the water.

I immediately flipped the lever for the shower, saying, "And what is this?" Of course, water poured down all over the poor gentleman. I must say, he wasn't mad, but that was the end of the sightseeing. I don't know why he thought I'd never seen running water. Perhaps he'd come to Canada at the beginning of the century from a small village, where the only source of water was a well in the middle of the village. In any case, the next day I was back at the centre and promised myself I'd never be a charity guest again; I would find myself a job and pay my own way.

...

The CJC assigned us a social worker, Miss Fisher, an understanding person who took care of our needs. When she heard about my adventure with the Steinberg relatives, she laughed and said, "Good for you." It was the first time I'd heard that expression.

Miss Fisher took us to Eaton's department store, where we purchased necessary things like underwear, socks and pajamas. Then she gave us vouchers to purchase a suit and a winter coat at Schreter's, a store on Saint Laurent Boulevard near Saint Catherine Street.

Joe and I looked around the store and found more or less what we wanted, but when we showed the suits to the owner, he got mad and shouted, "You're not supposed to choose from this section! There's where you're going to choose from." And he pointed to a different area of the store. "Those rags, you can wear," said Joe.

The owner (or perhaps he was a salesperson) got so red in the face I was afraid he was going to have a stroke. He screamed, "Get out of the store and

never come back!" Then he tried to physically throw Joe out.

Joe looked at him very coolly and said, "You just try to lay hands on me and you will be very sorry."

I think the man was afraid of Joe, because he just walked away without saying another word. Years later, Joe became a very successful sportswear manufacturer, and the Schreter's store was one of his best clients.

Back at the centre, Miss Fisher was waiting for us. She said she'd received a complaint from the Schreter store about our behaviour and wanted to hear our explanation. She listened to our story and didn't say a word. Later on, we had a long talk with her and explained that we didn't want to be a burden to the Jewish Congress or community anymore, that we wanted to get jobs, find a place to live and continue our education at night.

...

In the meantime, the problem of where to live was solved. Joe's sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Lanail, and their seven-year-old daughter, Mirele, immigrated to Canada. They rented a small apartment on Clark Street near Mount Royal Avenue, next to the ice factory, and they gave us one room for fifteen dollars a week each.

It was a very small, old apartment with two bedrooms, one of which I shared with Joe while Mr. and Mrs. Lanail and Mirele shared the other. There was only a tiny bathroom without a shower, just a bathtub that was always full of dirty laundry, so I was happy the YMHA was only a few blocks away, and I went there every night to swim and shower. In spite of the limited space and inconvenience, I was very happy in that apartment. The Lanails were like parents to me; they went out of their way to make me comfortable. Every morning, Mrs. Lanail asked me what I'd like for supper, and what kind of a cake I'd like. Mr. Lanail was well educated, played the violin and painted beautiful pictures. He also spoke perfect French and English, so he had no trouble finding a job.

The CJC paid our first two weeks' rent, so I had to find a job quickly, since in two weeks I had to start paying for my own room and board. Miss Fisher suggested I go to the Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), but they were not much help. I was trying to get a job in my field, in electronics, but there wasn't any work in that area, as it would still be a few years before it was common for people to have televisions in their homes. I was told to forget about electronics and get a job in the garment industry, where there was plenty of work.

"What do I know about the *shmatte* business?" I asked the person at JVS.

"Don't worry," they replied, "you will be trained to be a cutter and will make a good living."

JVS sent me to a place on Ontario Street, near Bleury. It was an old, dilapidated building without an elevator, and the factory, Monarch Garment, was on the third floor. As I walked in, I was struck by the noise, heat and lack of fresh air. In the front there was a small office area, where the receptionist asked me what I wanted. I said I'd been sent by Jewish Vocational Services to work, to which she looked me up and down and gave a yell into an intercom: "Benny, somebody to see you for a job!"

"Let him wait! I am busy now!" This blared through the intercom. I waited about fifteen minutes before Benny, who was apparently the boss, showed up. "So, you are the *greeneh* who wants to be a cutter?"

"I beg your pardon, my name is Johnny Jablon, not Green, and yes, I came here to get a job." I didn't know *greeneh* meant newcomer; I thought he'd made a mistake with my name, which I had Anglicized.

"The pay will be fourteen dollars a week, and if you work very hard, in a few weeks you will get a raise."

"Sir," I said very politely, "I have to pay fifteen dollars a week for my room and board and I will need some money for the bus, so for me fourteen dollars

a week will be impossible to get along on."

"Okay, I will give you seventeen dollars and you can start work tomorrow. Do you have scissors?"

"No."

"Murray! Mr. Green is here for a job!" Later I learned Benny loved to insult people; it made him feel superior. Murray, the head cutter, came in, and I liked him immediately. He introduced himself and said, "Don't worry, I have an extra pair of scissors you can use until you can afford to buy your own." The next day I walked to work, since I couldn't afford the bus. It took me about forty-five minutes, but I arrived before eight o'clock and had to wait a few minutes before the receptionist, who was also the bookkeeper, came in. She gave me my punch card and told me as I punched in that if I was even one minute late, she'd be obliged to take fifteen minutes out of my pay. I quickly calculated that would be about twenty cents, a bus ride one way. ...

Friday. Payday! I would receive the first money I'd earned myself in Canada. At five o'clock I received my pay envelope. When I opened it, there was eighteen dollars inside instead of the seventeen I'd agreed to. I didn't complain and decided to take the bus home. I went to the City and District Bank at the corner of Mount Royal Avenue and Saint Laurent Boulevard and opened a savings account with ten dollars. After that, I made sure that every Friday I deposited something into my account.

Saturday night was a movie night. My friends and I went to a double feature at the Regent Theatre on Park Avenue, paying thirty-five cents, and afterward we walked on Park, where we met lots of people taking advantage of the few nice days left in autumn.

As the days became shorter and colder, winter was fast approaching. We now had a large group of friends, and with the help of Mr. Reimer, we organized a club at the YHMA, where we spent most of our free time. Once in a while we had a

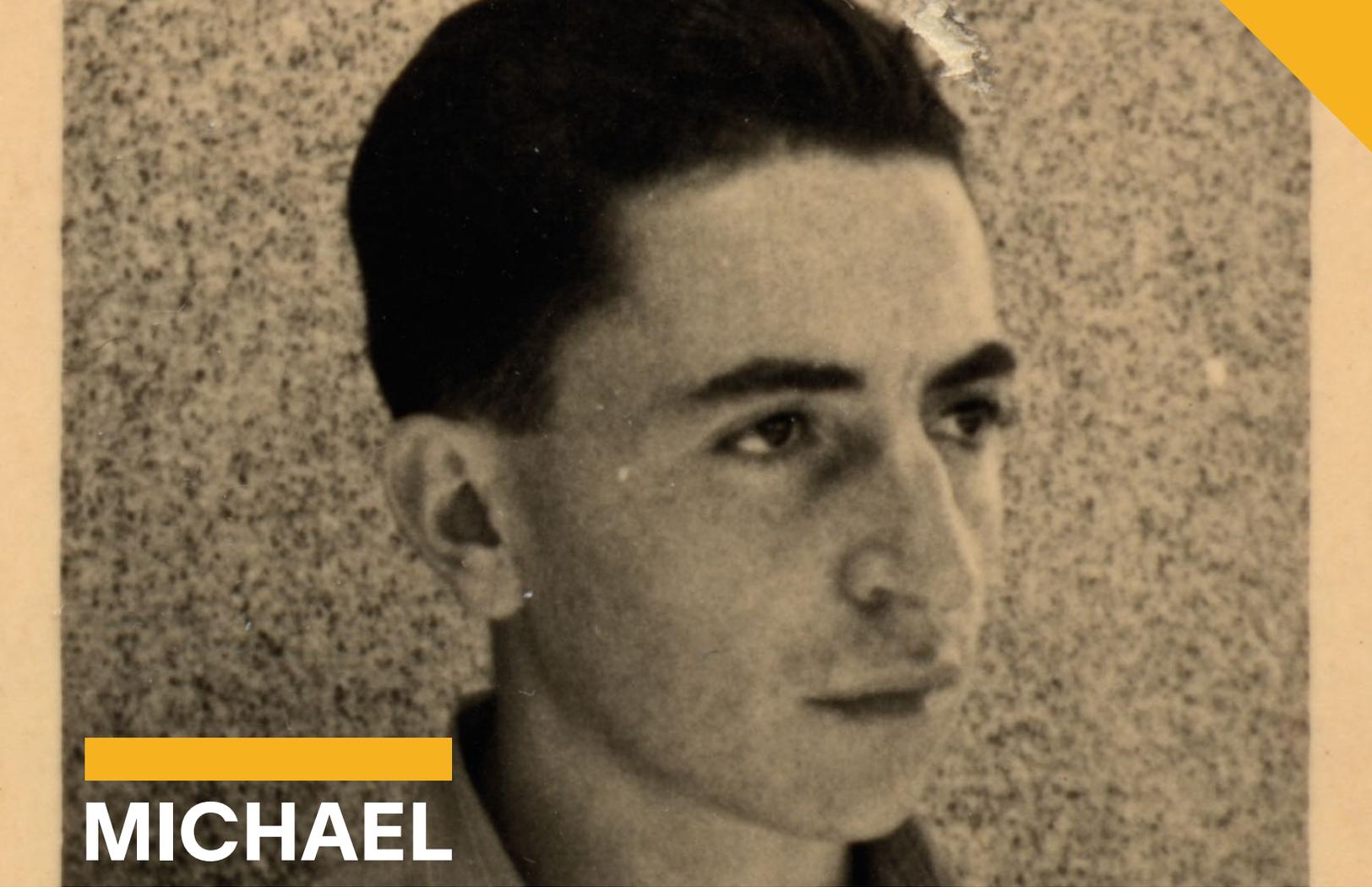
guest speaker, a book review or other presentation, and our volleyball team was performing very well, competing with different teams all over the city. We were wonderfully busy.

...

It started to snow at the beginning of December and didn't let up for two weeks. I'd never seen so much snow in my life and I loved it. We were living on the ground floor and every morning we had to shovel the snow that almost completely covered the front door just to get out of the house. I got hold of some old skis and ski boots and on weekends

I spent both days skiing on nearby Mount Royal.

In the weeks before Christmas, the city looked beautiful, especially Saint Catherine Street, downtown. The windows of the department stores were beautifully done up, and many evenings we took long walks just admiring the decorations. For me it was a wonderful novelty — my first winter far from war-ravaged Europe and the horrors of the concentration camps, free to experience joy.

A black and white portrait of a young man, Michael Kutz, looking slightly to the right. He has dark hair and is wearing a dark shirt. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. A yellow triangle is in the top right corner of the page.

# MICHAEL KUTZ

Michael in Italy, 1947.

Poland is a country in Central Europe, located between Germany and Russia, that had a large Jewish population before World War II. Jews faced antisemitism and discrimination in Poland, but many also participated in Polish culture and society. In September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded the western part of Poland, and the Soviet Union invaded the eastern part. The German occupiers persecuted Jews immediately, ordering them to wear the Star of David on their clothing and subjecting them to violence and forced labour. Eventually, Jews were forced into ghettos, from where they were deported to Nazi camps. In 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet-occupied areas of Poland and took control over the whole Polish territory, increasing the persecution of Jews in both the eastern and western parts of the country. Approximately 3,000,000 Polish Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Michael Kutz was born in the town of Nieśwież, Poland (now Niasviž, Belarus), in 1930. He remembers his hometown as a tolerant community that rejected the antisemitism prevalent in other parts of Poland. Michael witnessed two invasions of his hometown – first by the Soviet Union, and then by Nazi Germany. After his family was killed in 1941, ten-year-old Michael joined a resistance group in the forests of Belorussia. After the war, Michael travelled through Czechoslovakia, Austria and Italy, living in displaced persons camps. In 1948, he immigrated to Canada as a war orphan. Michael lived in Winnipeg and then Montreal.

# MICHAEL KUTZ

Author of *If, By Miracle*

At the beginning of 1948, rumours were circulating in the Grugliasco camp that the Dominion of Canada, in conjunction with the Canadian Jewish Congress, would bring five hundred Jewish children and youths to Canada from Italy. My name was on a list of young people who were told to contact Dr. Adam, the northern Italy representative of the Joint in Milan. Dr. Adam was originally from Lemberg, now the Ukrainian city of Lviv, and his job was to collect the young people from all the DP camps. He helped us all obtain the necessary documentation and Displaced Persons Certificates of Identity from the UNRRA<sup>2</sup>. The Canadian consul in Rome then sent us to doctors for medical examinations. Only then did we get permission to legally immigrate to Canada. I would soon take the train to Genoa, where I would sail on the Greek ship *Nea Hellas* to Canada.

I began making preparations for the journey. Like a lot of my friends, I found myself in the dreadful situation of having to sever contact with people I had worked with and who I now considered close friends. I went to say goodbye to all my friends and acquaintances, knowing that this would be the last time that we would see each other. Since 1945, many of us young people had been as close as brothers and sisters, having made the long journey to Italy together.

...

We left from Genoa on March 10, 1948. On board the ship, I met more people I knew from Rome and I was also reunited with the Lorberg brothers, my friends from Cremona. By chance, I also met up with my friend David Gurevich and his girlfriend, Gitele, with whom I had made long and difficult journeys through the various DP camps in Italy. Thelma Tessler, a social worker for the Jewish Family and Children's Service in Winnipeg, Manitoba, accompanied us on our voyage and on March 21, 1948,

we docked in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

## *Finding a New Home*

Upon our arrival in Halifax, we were greeted by members of the Jewish community, along with the press and representatives of the Nova Scotia government. They all made speeches welcoming us to Canada. That evening was Purim<sup>3</sup> and the Jewish community had arranged a reception for us at the Young Men's Hebrew Association, the YMHA, where we received presents from Jewish youth. For the next two days we stayed with various Jewish families – I stayed with the Morrisons, who had helped many Jewish refugees settle in Halifax. Next, we were divided into groups according to whether we were moving to Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg or Vancouver. I was on the list to go to Winnipeg, as were some of my friends. On the third day, we left Halifax by train accompanied by Alistair Stewart, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) Member of Parliament for Winnipeg. The CCF later became the New Democratic Party. Alistair Stewart was a kind, warm person who treated us as a father would.

When we arrived at the Winnipeg train station, we were met by a delegation from the Canadian Jewish Congress that included its chairman, Mr. Solomon; the mayor of Winnipeg, Mr. George Sharpe; and representatives from the Joint. Representatives of the Manitoba government made speeches and all the newspapers, most notably the *Winnipeg Free Press*, printed articles with our photos. The articles wished us well in our newly adopted country and maintained that, in time, we would contribute to making the province a better place for the entire population.

In the train station we waited once again to

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish holiday that celebrates the Jews' escape from annihilation in Persia. During the Purim festivities, people dress up in costumes, feast, read the story of Purim and send gifts of food and money to those in need.

be assigned to Jewish homes. It was not long before a young social worker named Rose Parker approached me with a middle-aged Jewish couple who introduced themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Glassman. Mr. Glassman invited me to go with them and when he asked me where I was from, I recognized his Yiddish dialect as being from Volhynia. We drove to their home at 379 Scotia Street and they told me I could stay in their daughter Miriam's room until the end of June. She was away studying at Columbia University in New York and when she returned home, they would decide where to move me.

It was very hard at first for me to adjust to a normal life, to having a room of my own, a bed with clean sheets, and all the comforts of home after seven difficult years of wandering, with seldom anyplace to rest. I had always been on the move. But I was still really young, and my will to live and the memory of my mother's last words to me helped me overcome all these hardships and go on.

The Glassmans treated me as my own parents would have and the Jewish community in Winnipeg did whatever they could to help us get settled, find work and begin our new lives. We attended English classes at the YMHA on Albert Street and some of the young people in our group started to learn trades. I got a job working for Manny and Alan Nozick at the Nozick Commission Company, which was also on Albert Street. I quickly learned to take care of their stock of very exclusive ladies' clothing, which they exported all over Canada.

I also joined Winnipeg's amateur Yiddish theatre group housed in the building belonging to the Hebrew Sick Benefit Association on Selkirk Street.

Under the guidance of its director, Hyman Roller, I performed in a play about early nineteenth-century Jewish humourist Hershele Ostropoler in the Playhouse Theatre on March 21, 1949. The production was very successful and the money from ticket sales went to the Zionist Farband organization of She'erit Hapletah (surviving remnants) to help new immigrants come to Winnipeg. For the most part, I think that Jewish immigrants adjusted very quickly to normal life. It helped to become members of Jewish and community organizations; we grew quite close to one another, often feeling like brothers and sisters. I worked with Jewish youth from Winnipeg on various projects for the welfare of our community and was very grateful to them for their understanding, loyalty and friendship.

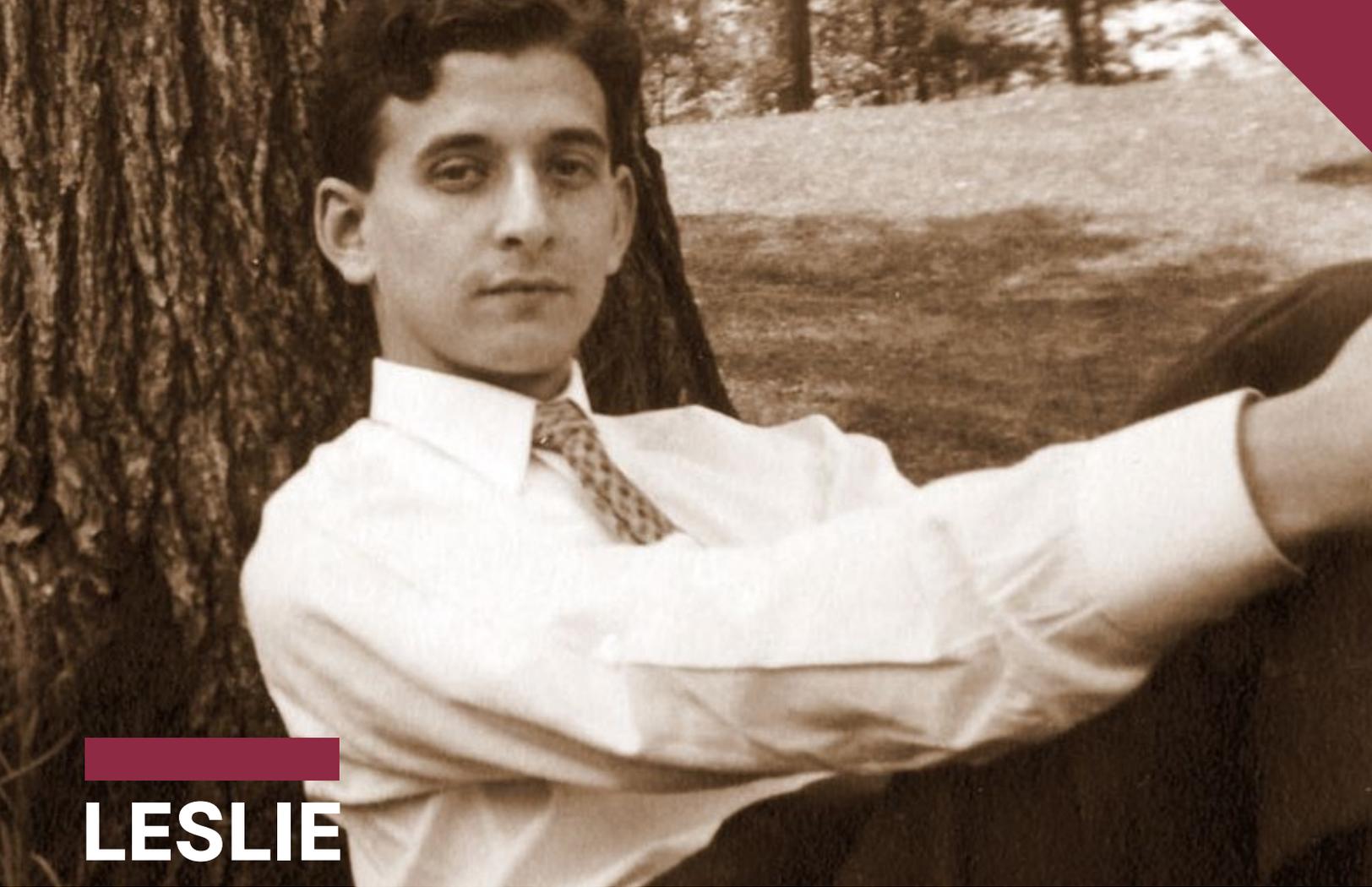
Eventually, near the end of 1949, I contacted friends who had settled in Montreal and they suggested that I join them there. It was very hard for me to make the decision to leave my devoted family – the Glassmans had given me a home filled with love and comfort. They had even offered to pay for my education. Since childhood, however, I had always been independent, so I refused their offer. I was not a yeshiva student who needed to be supported and, even if I couldn't support myself, I didn't want to accept their generosity. In the end, I decided to leave Winnipeg. Saying goodbye to them and the friends who had come with me from Italy was very emotional. I told them all that I would never forget them because they had all become part of my family. I have kept my word to each and every one of them all these years. When the Glassmans drove me to the train station, they even gave me back all the rent money I had insisted on paying while I lived with them.



War Orphans Project Excerpts

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# HUNGARY



# LESLIE MEZEI

Leslie in Montreal, 1949.

Hungary is a country in Central Europe located southeast of Germany. Hungary had a large Jewish population before World War II. In the years leading up to World War II and the Holocaust, Jews in Hungary experienced rising discrimination from the Hungarian government. Hungary was allied with Germany, but the Hungarian government did not deport its Jewish citizens. In March 1944, the German army occupied Hungary. The persecution of Hungarian Jews increased immediately, and in every area outside of the capital city of Budapest, Jews were forced into ghettos and deported to Nazi camps with the collaboration of Hungarian authorities. In Budapest, Jews faced increasing persecution; they were confined in a ghetto in December, and thousands were forced on death marches or killed by members of the Arrow Cross regime. Approximately 550,000 Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Leslie was born in Gödöllő, Hungary, in 1931 and was the youngest of his four siblings. When the German army occupied Hungary in 1944, the Mezei family fled to Budapest. Some of the family managed to stay together in Budapest, where they were forced by the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators to wear a yellow star and live in houses designated for Jews. In December 1944, Leslie and some of his family members managed to escape being held in the ghetto by posing as non-Jewish Hungarian refugees. Following liberation in early 1945, Leslie's family decided to leave Hungary. Leslie came to Canada in January 1948 with the help of the War Orphans Project. He settled in Toronto.

# LESLIE MEZEI

Co-author of *A Tapestry of Survival*

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## *Immigration*

The Canadian Jewish Congress sent a social worker to our DP camp to find Jewish child survivors they could bring to Canada, and Lali<sup>1</sup> and I left Europe on the USS *General Sturgis*, an American military transport ship that made many trips to bring displaced persons from Europe to the United States, Canada, Argentina and Australia. The cavernous hold of the ship had lots of room for the comfortable hammocks we slept in. I ended up assisting the American officer in charge of the stockroom, which was at the very bottom of the ship and accessible only by an elevator. He gave me lemons, oranges and bananas, which I hadn't even seen before, never mind eaten. I don't know how I managed to get these jobs! In January 1948 Lali and I arrived at the famous Pier 21 in Halifax — now the site of the Canadian Museum of Immigration — where over a million immigrants and refugees have landed.

After a long train ride, we were taken to some houses in a run-down Jewish area of Montreal, around Saint Urbain Street — which was made famous by Mordecai Richler's novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. We spent lots of time at the YMHA<sup>2</sup> gym at the foot of Mount Royal. I met a couple who had lost a son in the war, and they invited me to stay for a weekend. I ended up staying with the Winklers, whom I called Uncle and Auntie, for five years, until I graduated from university. We didn't go to synagogue, but on the Jewish holidays we went to the Winklers' in-laws for holiday meals. As the youngest at the Passover seder, I used to ask the Four Questions, starting with "Why is this night different than other nights?" I would play touch football on the street with other teenage boys, and I became a serious student for the first time. I am very grateful to the Winklers for giving me such a good start in Canada.

After four years of no education, I spent only one week in Grade 8 and then finished the second half of Grade 10 at the Strathcona Academy in Outremont, which was under the authority of the Protestant School Board. The Lord's Prayer was said every morning even though most of the students were Jewish. I learned English on my own by listening and reading.

When I was eighteen, after a full year of attending Grade 11, I wrote the provincial high school examinations. Because I had been in the province of Quebec for fewer than three years, I was allowed to write my language exams in German rather than French. There was a newspaper article written about me in the September 30, 1949, edition of the *Montreal Daily Star* — "D.P. Also Means Deft Pupil. Youth Earns Top Ten Scholastic Ranking," which was quoted in Ben Lappin's book, *The Redeemed Children*. I was quoted in the article as saying: "For the first few months I just listened, but after that I began to talk, a little at first, then more and more." I did so well in school mainly because of my high marks in mathematics and science, though my lowest mark of 87 per cent in English composition turned out to be the top mark in that subject in the province! But we paid little attention to the humanities then — everyone told us that the future was in science. I got a four-year scholarship to McGill University, and by my third year I didn't just study but also joined some clubs, learned to play cards and went to parties. I graduated in 1953 at the age of twenty-two with first-class honours in mathematics and physics. I worked every summer, first at a religious Jewish Mizrahi camp as a cook's helper. I would be in the kitchen from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and then partying with the camp counsellors till late at night. At the end of the summer, I slept for three days straight!

<sup>1</sup> Leslie's brother

<sup>2</sup> Young Men's Hebrew Association

In the last year of university, a friend invited me to his girlfriend's cottage for a weekend. A young woman named Annie Wasserman was also there. She was one year younger than I was and also a Holocaust survivor, and we found that we could talk to each other easily. I started seeing her almost every day, but even after we were married, we never talked about our Holocaust experiences.



# KITTY SALSBERG

Kitty in Toronto, 1949.

Hungary is a country in Central Europe located southeast of Germany. Hungary had a large Jewish population before World War II. In the years leading up to World War II and the Holocaust, Jews in Hungary experienced rising discrimination from the Hungarian government. Hungary was allied with Germany, but the Hungarian government did not deport its Jewish citizens. In March 1944, the German army occupied Hungary. The persecution of Hungarian Jews increased immediately, and in every area outside of the capital city of Budapest, Jews were forced into ghettos and deported to Nazi camps with the collaboration of Hungarian authorities. In Budapest, Jews faced increasing persecution; they were confined in a ghetto in December, and thousands were forced on death marches or killed by members of the Arrow Cross regime. Approximately 550,000 Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Kitty (Kati) was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1932. After their parents were deported, Kitty and her younger sister, Ellen (Ilonka), survived alone in the Budapest ghetto, where they almost starved to death in a bomb shelter. When Kitty and her sister were liberated, they reunited with extended family and then spent time in a Zionist orphanage. In 1948, Kitty and Ellen came to Canada as part of the War Orphans Project. Kitty settled in Toronto.

# KITTY SALSBERG

Co-author of *Never Far Apart*

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During the last part of Grade 7, I spent the afternoons not only wandering around my neighbourhood, but also exploring the city. I heard about a place where you could get special treats like canned fruit and chocolates if you were Jewish. This magical place was in an office building in the heart of Budapest and it was called the "Joint." When I went in and told the staff that my parents had not come back after the war, I was received as a most welcome lost child. They showered me with canned peaches and pineapple, along with lots of Hershey chocolate bars, and told me to come back soon. I went home carrying these gifts, eating my share of chocolates on the way and saving enough to give Ilonka.

The Joint, I now know, refers to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a worldwide Jewish relief organization. Set up in 1914 to assist Jews affected by World War I, after the Holocaust it provided assistance to the remaining Jewish communities of Europe. I suppose it was the same idea as the welfare programs of our cities in Canada, but unlike those programs, its ways and spirit were far different. At the Joint I did not need to prove that I was needy, nor did people there show that they were sorry for me. They actually made me feel that I was doing them a favour by visiting and accepting their gifts. Of course, I was not aware that I really was special in their eyes because a million and a half children had been murdered in the Holocaust, and I represented a small fraction of those who had survived.

...

I kept going to see the friendly staff at the Joint. There, I found a way to escape from all my sorrows. They told me that if I wanted, I could leave Hungary and be adopted by a family in another country, and my sister could, too. This offer was part of a program sponsored worldwide by Jewish

organizations that ought to find and help the children who had survived. Jews in many countries were asked to, or offered to, take in these orphans and bring them up as their own children.

This opportunity appeared to answer my prayer to my mother for help. I would not have to live among people who did not accept me and whose polite indifference I did not trust. I could have a chance to become an artist in a faraway country where no one would ever call me a "dirty Jew." I told the staff at the Joint that I wanted to leave. They said I had a choice: I could go to Australia, South Africa or Canada.

I decided on Canada. My decision was based on knowing that both South Africa and Australia had strong racial policies regarding their black and aboriginal populations. I thought that was wrong. Discrimination against anyone was still discrimination, and I didn't want to be any place where such a thing still happened. My knowledge of Canada was quite limited, since my interest in reading did not include social geography. I knew that Canada was a very large country, it was very cold, hardly any people lived in it and they spoke English. It seemed to me the perfect place to get away from everyone.

## *Kati: Not So Fast*

Once it was decided that Ilonka and I would leave Hungary and go to Canada to be adopted, I was ready to leave immediately. But Canada took its time processing our papers, and as the months dragged on, I had to go to school. I now attended Grade 8 in body, but I no longer cared to prove anything by standing first. Most of the time I went to my classes, but every so often, when the weather was good, I skipped them and went around the city all by myself, imagining I was a tourist who

was seeing beautiful Budapest for the first – and probably the last – time. I tried to etch the sights in my mind so I would remember them when I was far away.

...

It was eleven o'clock in the morning on an August day in 1948 when Aunt Margaret closed up my suitcase and Ilonka's in the hallway. Aunt Gizi, eyes all red, kept saying, "Take good care of yourselves and behave respectably. Kati, don't go out in the street without a scarf, and make sure that your sister also dresses warmly in Canada." Aunt Margaret kept hugging us, and after that we put on our coats, even though it was summertime, because in Canada it would be cold. She then put a small parcel of food into our hands so we'd have something to eat on the train.

...

Aunt Margaret's eyes were watery, even though she kept a smile on her face. She kept talking about all sorts of comical things in a weird sort of way, yet the whole time, her talk did not feel funny to me, just sad. Finally, the porter picked up our luggage and we had to get into the train. Just before we climbed the steps, she told me once more, "Take care of the little one." I promised her that she need not worry. Indeed, I took those words into my heart, and they have guided me throughout my life, not only in looking after my sister but later, when I became an adult, in looking after other children in need as well.

...

After about three long weeks, our papers arrived and along with a group of Hungarian- and French-speaking young people, we were taken across the English Channel to London, where we were to stay in a public shelter overnight before being transported to Southampton to sail across the Atlantic. That day we saw nothing of London except for the building we were housed in for the night.

...

England never seemed terribly attractive to me again. I was now looking forward to leaving it the

next morning to get on an ocean liner and head for new adventures in Canada.

### *Kati: Arrival to a New Life*

The air in Halifax on August 23, 1948, was extremely hot and humid, not at all like what I had expected from my readings about the Land of Ice and Snow. That should have given me a clue that life in Canada for Ilonka and me might not turn out to be all that we had been led to believe.

Our group was met by a lady who I thought would accompany us to our various destinations. I was struck by her unnatural appearance. She was slim, like a young person my age, with shiny, youthful-looking hair, but her face was sunken and full of wrinkles. In spite of her effort to appear young by putting on rouge and lipstick and wearing pretty clothes, to me she still looked like a shrivelled-up old woman, just the opposite of my beautiful, roly-poly aunt Margaret. I believe she was there to make sure that we had all our landing papers properly filled out, processed and stamped, and that we would all be put safely on the train that was to go across Canada to all its major cities.

So again, we were on a train, travelling toward unknown places and new experiences. Our lengthy trip on this train taught me that I was not wrong about Canada being enormous. As the train sped across the land for hours and hours and the day turned into night, I could tell that we were still in the middle of nowhere, with nothing in sight when I looked out the window but unpopulated fields. Once it got dark, the porters pulled down some beds from the ceiling for us to sleep in, and when we woke up in the morning, we were still travelling. By now, we could have crossed all of Europe! Finally, the train stopped in Montreal, and all those who spoke French got off. The rest of us stayed on and continued to Toronto, after which the train was bound for Winnipeg and Vancouver.

In Toronto we were met by yet another lady, who took us to a large house in the middle of the city, on the corner of Harbord and Markham streets. It

was the property of the Jewish community and at times had been used as a Jewish library, but now it was housing the newly arrived survivors of the Holocaust. I learned from some Hungarian-speaking young people that, just like those who were already housed here, we would be staying in this residence temporarily, only until our social workers found us a place to live. I noticed that there was only one child, a boy younger than Ilonka, and he had an older brother and sister along with him. I also noticed, with some concern, that while we were treated very well by the adults who prepared our meals, nobody talked about adopting any of us.

After a few days at this reception centre, our English education started. Our group was walked to a nearby school, where a pleasant-looking teacher gave us some picture books and proceeded to teach us some simple but important verb forms in the language. I parroted them – “I am, you are, he is, she is, we are, you are, they are” – and eagerly copied down everything in sight. Then, in the wisdom of the Jewish Family and Child Service, after this crash course in English, a social worker came for my sister but not for me. We were told that Ilonka – whom the social worker now called Ellen – would be placed in a permanent home with a family and would be their daughter. So after all those terrible years when I so fiercely protected her and she clung to me for love and security, those “wise” social workers separated us, leaving us each to manage on our own in a strange environment.

To reassure me, I was shown her new home in a two-storey, three-bedroom house near Bathurst Street and Ava Road, in a very clean neighbourhood. There I was introduced to a woman, a man and their two sons, one of them about my age and the other a bit younger. I was assured that I could visit Ellen any time I wanted. Although I had never thought that we would be apart, I felt sure that my sister would be well cared for by this nice family. And so she was – for a little while.

It seems that the Joint’s staff members in Hungary

were unaware of what would happen to the orphans in the various countries they were sent to. I am sure that the Joint officials, who were caring and sincere, did not mislead my mother’s sister on purpose. However, they had no idea that the prospective adoptive parents in other countries were under the misconception that the children who had survived the Holocaust would be adoptable babies and young children. People in Canada, even after the horrific conditions during the Nazi persecutions became known, did not quite comprehend that most young children could not have survived without a parent, unless they were hidden. A small chance of survival was more likely for older children, who could possibly fend for themselves without adults. Thus, the children who survived and came to Canada were not lovable little boys and girls but troubled youngsters with memories of their lost families as well as of the circumstances surrounding their survival. Three years had passed since the end of the war, and having lived as orphans since then, they were now entering their teenage years. This stage of life is turbulent for most adolescents, let alone those who had experiences as traumatic as the ones of some of the people in my group.

Not surprisingly, not many families in Toronto were ready to adopt a distrustful, independent and rebellious teenager who could not even speak English. Many of the orphans were not at all concerned about being adopted. Most – as old as seventeen, even older – were happy just to be supported while they got a chance at free education that would enable them to make a living. Indeed, after being on their own for years, many preferred to live independently without close supervision by adults who would tell them what to do. At the ages of fifteen and thirteen, my sister and I were not among them. In spite of thinking that I was a capable, independent person, I had never truly been on my own. I, who was more curious than rebellious, and my sister, who loved to be with people and was eager to please, wished very much to be part of a family and to have parents again, just as was promised to us and to Aunt Margaret.

The social worker assigned to my case was named Miss Spivak. She was a pretty young woman with a wide smile, and based on how she saw to the needs of a fifteen-year-old girl who knew nothing about the ways of the city and couldn't even speak the language, I now think she had probably just graduated from a school of social work. Her job was to find a place for me to live. Miss Spivak showed me several rooms for rent, and I came to understand that she was trying to get me to be a tenant in one of these places, with the understanding that the Jewish Family and Child Service would be responsible for the rent while I attended school. There would be no family for me, just a rented room. I strongly objected to this arrangement, and I said no to each place. I do not remember how I communicated this to Miss Spivak, but I finally got her to understand that my aunt let my sister and me come to Canada only because the Joint's people in Hungary had promised her – and Ilonka and me as well – that we would not be on our own but part of a family. The next time Miss Spivak came to see me at the reception centre, she informed me that she had found a family for me.

When I first arrived in Toronto, I was impressed by how different it appeared from Budapest. Having come from a heavily populated part of Budapest, where people generally lived in large apartment buildings and green vegetation was confined to parks, I was amazed to see, on all the streets, row after row of small houses, each with a front yard and backyard that had green grass and bushes and flowers growing. Toronto seemed like an overgrown version of the village that I stayed in for a short while after the war in Hungary, even though I knew that it was a large city with thousands and thousands of people.

My new family lived on the first floor of one of those small houses, while the second floor was occupied by my foster mother's brother and his family. Although this was not an apartment but a house, the living space was actually much smaller than that of Aunt Margaret's luxury apartment. The living and dining rooms, kitchen and two

bedrooms were all half the size of my aunt's, but they were well furnished by the lady of the house. Mrs. Feingold, my foster mother, belonged to an organization called Pioneer Women. These ladies were supportive of Jewish causes and wanted to help those in other countries who had suffered persecution because of their faith. They were aware of the need to provide homes for the surviving children of the Holocaust. Many of the members of this idealistic group, with the agreement of their husbands, offered to share their homes with such children and provide them with all the necessities as if the children were their own, without expecting any compensation from the Jewish community. I had the good fortune to be the recipient of such generosity.

Mr. and Mrs. Feingold were a childless Jewish couple in their late fifties. They originally emigrated from Russia, and at home they conversed with each other in Yiddish, which originated as a form of German going back to the Middle Ages when German was the language of commerce in Europe. Once the Jewish population became dispersed, and often dispossessed, Jews in various countries continued speaking to each other in Yiddish, along with learning the language of the people among whom they now lived. They came to believe that Yiddish was the language of the Jews and Hebrew was too holy for everyday conversation.

My foster parents were unaware of my highly assimilated background and were surprised that I did not speak Yiddish, which in their eyes was a must for a Jewish girl. They immediately enrolled me in a Folks Shule, an elementary school with an after-school heritage program for Jewish children to learn Yiddish. I was surprised that I was to learn Yiddish, since I had presumed that in an English-speaking country, people would speak English. In addition, I felt quite insulted in the Folks Shule when they placed me in the beginner's class with six-year-olds. I soon decided that Yiddish was nothing more than a German dialect. I refused to go on the basis that I already knew German and that I was a grown person who shouldn't be in class with babies. My foster parents were upset

that I said that their precious Yiddish was really German. However, they gave in when I started to talk to them in German, with a Yiddish accent, and they could understand me.

In some ways, both the Feingolds and I experienced culture shock, along with the many other problems of adjustment related to our differences in religious practices – or in my case the lack of them. For example, shortly after I moved in, it was the Jewish High Holy Days, one of which is Yom Kippur, a day when observant Jews fast and pray. I could not understand why these people would starve themselves when there was all that food in the house! The practice of keeping separate dishes for meat and dairy also made no sense to me. And I was not used to dressing and behaving like a lady, and preferred wearing slacks – a throw-back to after the Soviets occupied Budapest, when it was safer for me to walk around looking like a boy than to be dressed as a girl.

I was also not much help in the kitchen, neither by training nor by inclination, as was expected of girls of my age. Even though Mrs. Feingold knew that I had not been brought up by my mother and had not been properly socialized in behaving like a lady, she was still critical of my independent behaviour and thought that I was uncouth. I, on the other hand, thought that dressing up in fancy clothes was a waste of time. But I kept my opinions to myself, partly because I did not have the language with which to express them, but mostly because I tried to please those nice people and not upset them again.

...

Mr. Feingold was a sincerely good, deeply religious man. He worked very hard during the week – I think in the St. Lawrence fruit market. And although he was not a wealthy man, I found out after he died – from a black rabbi from New York who came to honour him at his funeral – that this good man had donated to the rabbi's Harlem synagogue a Torah that had been too expensive for their congregation to buy. There was never any mention of expenses when Mrs. Feingold went

shopping with me to outfit me from head to toe in clothes similar to those the other young girls wore to school. When I asked for a bicycle for my sixteenth birthday – to their surprise, since to them it was a toy for children (though for me it was a way to right the wrong of that bicycle my cousin Rudi had stolen from me) – I got one without any questions asked! Mr. Feingold, whom I called "Daddy," gave me pocket money every week, and later, whenever my sister visited our home, he always slipped her some money, too. He and his wife, whom I called "Mommy," never had a cross word between them, although Mrs. Feingold had no trouble finding fault with most other people, including me.

### *Kitty: Lucky Accident*

I did not mind calling the Feingolds "Mom" and "Dad" and did not think I was dishonouring my parents or forgetting them, since they would remain in my heart forever.

Bloor Collegiate was located near our house. I was first taken there by my foster mother, and was interviewed by the principal himself, Mr. Noble. I understood when he asked me my name and how old I was. I answered carefully, supplying the version of my name that had been newly given to me by the immigration authorities: "My name is Catherine Mozes-Nagy and I am fifteen years old." He responded, "You are?" And I answered, "I are." ...

Going to high school was an interesting experience. First of all, there were boys and girls in the school – and in the same classroom! What made me feel even more aware that this was a very different kind of school from the one I was used to was that the teachers called us by our first names. I was to be called Catherine – I could hardly spell it, let alone pronounce it – but I immediately corrected anyone who called me that and said, "My name is Kati." People smiled and called me Kitty. I did not realize that this was what people here called baby cats. I didn't mind – I was happy that I was no longer addressed as Mozes. Being called by my first name also signified to me that

the teachers were my friends. As I later found out, the staff at this school felt sympathetic toward the young people who had arrived from Europe and tried their best to help them through the initial adjustment.

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The other young Hungarians who had come to Canada with me had adjustment problems

as well, and to find support, we turned to each other for friendship. So for the first time in my life, I experienced popularity by default. Mr. and Mrs. Feingold, besides giving me a bicycle as a birthday present, said that I could have a birthday party and invite anybody I wished. This birthday party, too, was a first in my life.



# SUSAN GARFIELD

Susan (centre) with friends in Calgary, circa 1949.

Hungary is a country in Central Europe located southeast of Germany. Hungary had a large Jewish population before World War II. In the years leading up to World War II and the Holocaust, Jews in Hungary experienced rising discrimination from the Hungarian government. Hungary was allied with Germany, but the Hungarian government did not deport its Jewish citizens. In March 1944, the German army occupied Hungary. The persecution of Hungarian Jews increased immediately, and in every area outside of the capital city of Budapest, Jews were forced into ghettos and deported to Nazi camps with the collaboration of Hungarian authorities. In Budapest, Jews faced increasing persecution; they were confined in a ghetto in December, and thousands were forced on death marches or killed by members of the Arrow Cross regime. Approximately 550,000 Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Susan Garfield (Zsuzsanna Löffler) was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1933. Susan survived the war in protected Red Cross houses, escaped the ghetto before it was closed off, and hid with relatives and acquaintances until the end of the war. After liberation, Susan decided to leave Hungary. She immigrated to Canada as a war orphan in 1948 and lived in the small town of Vegreville, Alberta, before moving to Winnipeg.

# SUSAN GARFIELD

Author of *Too Many Goodbyes: The Diaries of Susan Garfield*

One day I went to the Jewish organization we called the Joint to get my school books (I was getting them free because I was an orphan), and somebody approached me and asked me if I wanted to go to America. I said no. I felt that I couldn't tell my aunt Malvin that I wanted to leave. When I went to see my grandparents, my aunt Bözsi was there and I told them what happened. Bözsi said, why not? So that got me thinking about it.

Another day, someone who I think was a social worker came to our apartment and asked if I wanted to go to Canada. At that point, having considered it, I said yes. I was told that I would be adopted and would be able to go to school, and was given the impression that I would live the life of a princess. I was still sick, recovering from paratyphoid, which had caused me to be out of school for three months, and I had to go get a passport photograph taken. My face in that photo looks very drawn and thin, not at all like my usual self.

Eventually I recovered and went back to school, finishing the fifth year of *gimnázium*, which is approximately Grade 9 in North America. During the summer of 1948, when I was fifteen, I went for a holiday with Aunt Malvin and my maternal grandparents in Hajdúszoboszló, a very nice resort. While there, I received a telegram to return home immediately because I was to leave for Canada very shortly.

My aunts Malvin and Ilus did not want me to leave. Ilus tried to bribe me by promising me things if I stayed. They had a piano, and Marika, my younger cousin, had been getting lessons. My uncle Lajos had paid for me to get lessons as well, and I had been practising piano, which I loved. My aunt Ilus said she would buy me a piano if I stayed. But what was a piano in comparison to the princess-like life

I was promised in Canada? What could my aunt get me to equal that?

I felt like I actually blackmailed them to let me leave by saying that I did not want to stay in the rotten country where such horrible things had been allowed to happen to us. To this, they had no comeback.

And so I left. My grandparents did not even know I was leaving. I had three grandparents still, at that time. I claimed I wanted to spare them the painful goodbyes, but probably I wanted to spare myself. I was only fifteen years old. After I left Budapest for Canada, I received letters from them often, even though at that time, during the Communist regime, it was dangerous to keep ties with "the West." They apologized for their letters not being interesting, as they led very simple lives. They were also poor. Later on, when we could, my husband and I sent money regularly to help them out. Probably not enough.

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When my train was leaving, my aunt Malvin ran after it, crying inconsolably. This I was told much later, by my cousin Frici Funk. He told me he was jealous because it seemed that she loved me more than her own daughter, Ági.

I left my family without realizing what step I was actually taking. I took a train with a group of other orphans through Vienna to Paris, where we stayed for several days. In Paris I lived with Frici's (Fred's) sister, Szeren Csillag, and her family. While I was there, they received a telegram from Malvin asking them to hold me back from leaving, at any price. But Szeren's husband told me about the telegram and allowed me to decide my own fate, and I still chose to leave.

## No Turning Back

Very soon after I arrived in Vegreville, Alberta, I realized that it was not the place for me. I was totally out of my sphere and experiencing culture shock, and I was very unhappy and lonely. I felt that this life was not what I had been promised by the Canadian Jewish Congress, who was in charge of my care. I wanted to go to Toronto to be with the group of children I had come with from Budapest to Canada. I became very close to some girls I was corresponding with, and especially with Stephen Nasser. Mrs. Klein even teased me about his last name, that it meant “wet” in Yiddish, which I didn’t know as I couldn’t speak Yiddish. I longed and yearned with all my heart to go to Toronto, to unite with my friends, the only people I knew from my home. And I didn’t stop begging and agitating toward that goal.

But what happened was that at the end of the summer of 1949, a year to the day that I arrived in Canada, the Congress finally acquiesced to my pleas: I was able to get on a train and leave Vegreville. I arrived in Winnipeg with the hope of continuing on to Toronto, but Winnipeg would turn out to be the end of my journey — I think it was too expensive for the Congress to send me to Toronto. At the time I still felt like, what am I doing here? But circumstances were such that I decided to stay and go to school.

In Winnipeg, I lived with the Lipkin family — Esther and David and their sons, Raymond and Victor — and went to school at St. John’s Tech in an accelerated Grade 11 class, while working for my room and board. I had a very hard time, going to school and working. I got up, made beds, fed Raymond and Victor breakfast, went to school and came home for lunch to feed the boys; after school, I hoped to study a little bit (having been in Canada only a year, and having skipped Grade 10, I needed to). But then I would get a call to do whatever — prepare supper, do the dishes, babysit, iron the clothes. Saturdays I worked at Adrienne’s, a ladies’ clothing store owned by the Lipkins; Sunday was

cleaning day. I literally didn’t have enough time to go to the bathroom.

Esther always introduced me to her friends as her daughter, but I was miserable and lonesome. I worked at the Lipkins’ as a slave, I felt. I had to do everything, and it was really too much for a young girl, especially one who hadn’t been expected to do housework or do things in the kitchen before. I was actually seriously looking into returning home, preparing documents to be able to return to Hungary and be among my loving family. I felt that I had no one here who loved me, and I loved no one. Stephen and I had eventually stopped corresponding. When I finally heard from him about the possibility of him coming and he asked me to inquire about a job for him and look for a place for him to live near me, I felt that it would be too much of a commitment. Truly, we had barely spent any time with each other, and I had my doubts that we could make it work, considering how young we both were.

At least I had my very good friend Lusia, whom I spent a lot of time with. She was from Poland, and I had first met her when I was taken to Calgary during Christmas of 1948, with the Edmonton orphans. It was supposed to be a treat, I guess. We met all the young people who had come from Europe, as we had, including, to my happiness, Ibi Bein, who was from Budapest and had gone to the same school as me, the Jewish *gimnázium*, but was a year ahead of me. My second cousin Helga was here for a while as well, but we always had a love-hate relationship. She wanted to control me, and I was too headstrong myself and I wouldn’t allow for that. She kept saying we would go to Montreal together, but that never happened.

Lusia appeared in Winnipeg at about the same time I did. We were happy to discover each other, to have someone we knew from before. She went to school and worked for her room and board and babysat, as I did, at a family named the Probers. We were in the same class as well.

In the spring of 1950 came the well-known flood. We lived east of Main, on Machray Street, near the Red River. Esther was a total wreck and decided to leave the city with her sons (as many other people did) but left her "daughter" behind. Now I became a refugee again, a flood refugee.

During the flood, I was placed with a family named Blumes. Edith and Wolf Blumes were good to me, and they provided me with room and board and didn't ask me for anything in return. I ate there, and I was mostly free to come and go. School was closed for a while and I worked full-time at Adrienne's for twelve dollars a week. Even though I was paid a pittance, it was still money I wouldn't have had otherwise.

Having become a flood refugee, strangely, things changed for the better. I liked living with the Blumes, and I eventually met a boy I really liked and he seemed to like me too. That made a tremendous change in my life, to like somebody and be liked in return. It meant the world in the mind of a sixteen-year-old romantic, love-starved girl. Life became a little more interesting.

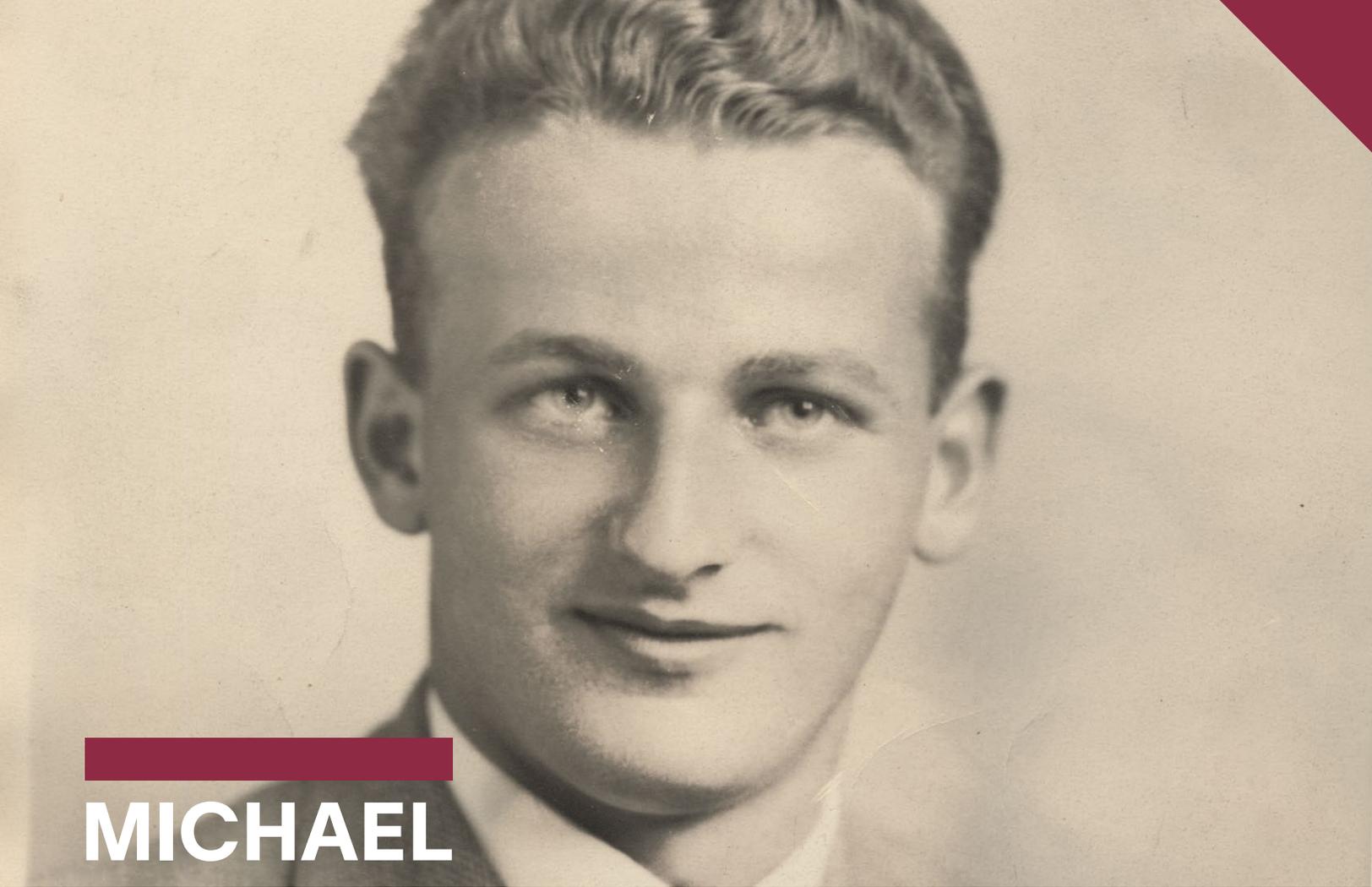
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He was Harry Garfinkel, a medical student. Our relationship gave me the incentive to decide to remain in Winnipeg. I believed Harry was someone I could rely on.

Around this time, I also had a dream that I was on a boat going home and realized that there was no

turning back. When I woke up, I knew that I couldn't do it. I couldn't go back to Hungary. I decided that I would stick it out.

I had another dream around this time, in which I was walking and searching for a place. I knew what the place was. It was Gödöllő, where my great-aunt, my grandmother's sister, lived in the summers, and where I spent time as a child. There was a cherry tree there that I gaily climbed to pick the cherries. I would eat some and throw some to my mother. It was an idyllic memory. Maybe it was also too idyllic a life, since it eventually turned into a nightmare. After waking up, I knew, once again, that I needed to make a life here in Canada.



# MICHAEL MASON\*

Michael, circa 1955.

Hungary is a country in Central Europe located southeast of Germany. Hungary had a large Jewish population before World War II. In the years leading up to World War II and the Holocaust, Jews in Hungary experienced rising discrimination from the Hungarian government. Hungary was allied with Germany, but the Hungarian government did not deport its Jewish citizens. In March 1944, the German army occupied Hungary. The persecution of Hungarian Jews increased immediately, and in every area outside of the capital city of Budapest, Jews were forced into ghettos and deported to Nazi camps with the collaboration of Hungarian authorities. In Budapest, Jews faced increasing persecution; they were confined in a ghetto in December, and thousands were forced on death marches or killed by members of the Arrow Cross regime. Approximately 550,000 Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

Michael (Miklos) Mason was born in Beregszász, Czechoslovakia (now Berehove, Ukraine), in 1928. He and his family moved to the Hungarian city of Sátoraljaújhely when he was young. During the German occupation of Hungary, Michael was sent to do forced labour; he was then briefly confined in a ghetto and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and then on to a Nazi camp in Mühlendorf, Germany. Michael was liberated nearby in the spring of 1945, and he reunited with his family after the war. In 1948, to be able to immigrate to Canada as a war orphan, Michael registered under the identity of a younger boy named Miklos Moskovits, who had died during the Holocaust. Michael settled in Hamilton and then moved to Toronto.

\*Michael was born in Czechoslovakia but spent most of his time in Hungary.

# MICHAEL MASON

Author of *A Name Unbroken*

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One of my mother's cousins, Aladar, lived in the small village of Bodrogkeresztúr, where he was the head of the Jewish community. He came to visit us in Budapest, and we told him of our intentions to leave Hungary. He had just received information that Canada had agreed to allow 1,000 orphaned Jewish children under the age of eighteen to immigrate there. My cousin managed to get the name of a child, also named Miklos, who had lived in the village and died in the camps and using that name and identity, and my photo, he put in an application for me to go to Canada. My last name was now registered as Moskovits, and my age was listed as seventeen rather than nineteen. My brother and sister decided to come with me. I assured my parents that if we got to Canada, we would try and bring them over as soon as possible.

Our cousin paid the police to sign my passport application. He told us that the police didn't even look at the paper, just at how much money they were getting. In a surprisingly short time, we all got passports to leave for Canada.

...

Before we could get visas, we had to have a medical check-up at the department of health. Twelve of us took the test, and we all passed the first part of the health check. Then we had to give a urine sample. I tried and tried but I could not do it. Not wanting to come back some other time, I took some urine from Minyu, a girl who had a full glass. It was a good thing she was not pregnant! I saw a lot of people I knew in the building. When a man called out to me, "Hello Miklos," I was relieved that this was still my name.

When my travel visa was shipped to the police station in Bodrogkeresztúr, the chief of police called our cousin, asking him to explain. Aladar told him not to worry, that his own signature was on the paper and that the child, Miklos Moskovits, had

died and no one would complain. Nonetheless, Aladar gave him a large sum of money to ensure I got my visa, which would allow me to leave the country.

In late September 1948, Fredi and I boarded a train to Paris, France. My sister had left a week earlier. I didn't say goodbye to anyone. I was at a meeting until 10:00 p.m. and stayed afterward, pretending to prepare for the next meeting.

When we reached the Austrian border, both a Hungarian and a Russian border guard came in to check our passports. In our compartment on the train, six of us were travelling with false papers. The Hungarian pointed to my suitcase and ordered me to open it. It happened to be the piece of luggage in which I was carrying a shoebox of cookies as a favour for a friend; I was taking it to his aunt who lived in Paris. I had asked my friend to be sure not to include any letters in the box, and he had promised he would not. Nonetheless, the Hungarian guard opened the box and found a letter sitting on top of the cookies. We were panicking, and I could already see us being taken back and put in jail. He started to read the letter and then stopped, folded it back the way it was, saluted and wished us a good trip. As soon as the guards left the compartment, I read the letter. It was full of glowing praise for the Communist government and stated that my friend's uncle was a high-ranking official. Looking through the window, we saw police taking people off the train and leading them into the station office. We were relieved when the train pulled out of the station. As the train crossed the border out of Hungary, I thought that I would never want to come back. One of the boys, Zoltan, had a flask of rum with him and offered everybody a drink to celebrate. The conductor came in and asked for a drink as well, also glad to have crossed the border.

When we arrived in Paris, a Hungarian-speaking woman was waiting for us. She was a volunteer for the local Jewish organization, and she took us to a suburb of Paris called Jouy-en-Josas, where the former president of France, Léon Blum, owned a country house. The house was now being used as temporary shelter for children orphaned by the war, and many children were there when we arrived. The place was beautiful, located on the slope of a high hill. Four people shared one room, and there was a large dining room and a full kitchen with cooks and helpers. The food was tasty and we were treated as guests. The first chance we had, Fredi and I took the local train to Paris, which was only a twenty-minute ride away. Fredi and I walked along the streets, eager to see the city. We saw a woman selling bananas and, having never tried them before, I wanted to buy some. We each had ten US dollars that our parents had given to us when we left Hungary. I didn't speak French, so I took out a one-dollar bill and pointed to the bananas. She filled up a bag with at least twelve of them. The dollar was very valuable in Europe and I hadn't wanted to spend the whole amount, but I didn't know how to ask for change and she wasn't offering any. We ate as many bananas as we could and left the rest on a bench. We spent the day just getting to know the city, walking mainly around the opera area, and also saw where the Louvre was; I marked in my book how to get back there. I looked around me and, for the first time, I felt free. It was a strange, beautiful city. Although I couldn't speak the language, I felt I was in a free country, not threatened by communists or Hungarian anti-semites. I felt liberated.

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We had been in Jouy-en-Josas for three months when one morning, the woman who had picked us up from the train station came and took the six of us to Paris to meet with the Canadian consul to try to obtain visas to go to Canada. We were all called into his office. The consul looked us over and said, "So, you guys want to go to Canada? Do you know that Canada is a tough, pioneer country? In Canada, expect to work hard, but if you do you will be able to live in freedom and be well rewarded."

Then he pointed to my brother Fredi, who was the youngest, and called him over. He took out a bottle of whiskey from a cabinet and poured a small glass full. He said, "If you can drink this, you'll get your visas." Fredi picked up the glass and, just like he had seen in the movies, lifted it to his mouth and swallowed the whiskey with one motion. He didn't make a sound, but I saw tears in his eyes. We got our visas.

### *Le Havre to Hamilton*

In December 1948, we boarded a ship called the *Scythia* and sailed from Le Havre to Halifax, Canada. There were children on the ship with us from almost every country in Europe. Fredi and I stayed on the top deck the whole time because a sailor friend of our father's told us that we wouldn't get seasick that way. We were practically the only ones who made it to the dining room for dinner – everyone else was seasick. One evening, the ship rocked so much that a table came loose and smashed into a wall of mirrors, covering the floor with glass. The weather was also getting much colder and we had to dig out our winter coats. I even put on my fancy knitted sweater.

Seven days later, we arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax. Most people disembarked, but we had to stay on board. More than fifty of us assembled on deck as a couple of photographers took our pictures and asked us, "Who is the one-thousandth among you?" We pushed the youngest-looking one forward and they took his picture separately. Some of the children were taken off, but a group of us had to stay on board.

Later on, some people from the Halifax Jewish community came and took us to a synagogue, where they had prepared a banquet to welcome us. They gave speeches telling us that we would have a wonderful life in Canada. After a delicious dinner, they drove us back to the ship. It was snowing and beautiful, and in a short time everything was white. There wasn't much traffic on the streets and it felt quiet and peaceful. We were told that we had to spend the night on the ship because

we had to go through immigration in the morning. I was pleased with myself that I could understand so much more than I had thought I would. My evening English classes had been very helpful.

The next morning we disembarked and were placed into wire cages in a large reception hall. It made us feel like animals in a zoo. Thankfully, we didn't stay long in the cages. We were called out individually and, with little questioning, we got our passports stamped and were admitted into Canada.

We were then taken to the train station and given tickets for sleeper cars and for dinners in the dining car. We boarded the train to Montreal. Out the windows, all I could see was snow. The cars at the stations kept their engines running, I was told, to make sure that they would start. It looked so cold and there was so much snow that we were already talking about how we could get back to Europe! I sat with three others in the dining car, and a young girl who had been with us on the ship asked if she could eat with us. Naturally, we welcomed her. Her name was Trudy and she was all alone because her family had died in Auschwitz. She had survived by hiding as a gentile in a small city in France. She spoke English and I was glad that I could talk to her. I asked the waiter to bring us dinner because I wasn't familiar with the menu. He obliged and brought us a well-put-together, complete dinner. Some of our group at another table didn't speak English well and ordered three types of potatoes.

When we arrived in Montreal the next day, a couple of women were waiting for us from Montreal's Jewish community. They took us for dinner and then back to the railway station. My brother and I were going to Hamilton – one of our cousins, who lived in St. Thomas, had arranged this – and everybody else was going to Winnipeg. We said goodbye to our friends, but just before boarding, Trudy approached us. She explained that she refused to go to Winnipeg because she wanted to come with us. We were happy that we'd know someone in Hamilton.

Early that Sunday morning in Hamilton, a Hungarian-speaking woman was waiting for us. Her name was Mrs. Lukatch, and she told us that Fredi and I would be going to stay with the Rosenscheins in a very nice home where we were to receive room and board paid for by the Jewish congress. Trudy was to go with her until they found her a place to stay, as they had not been expecting her.

We were introduced to Mrs. Rosenschein and her two daughters. The older one was about my age and the other was younger, closer to Fredi's age. The father was not home, as he had gone to work early at a tailor shop. Mrs. Rosenschein said he'd be home soon for breakfast and to meet us, and then she told us how wonderful it was that some time in the future we could marry her daughters! I understood enough English to know what she had said, but I didn't translate for Fredi. I didn't know the customs here, but I was certainly not thinking about marriage.

As we started to eat breakfast, Mr. Rosenschein came in and joined us. They served a delicious breakfast – it was the first time we were introduced to bagels with cream cheese. What a wonderful combination. They were the most hospitable family, and had really been looking forward to meeting us. I, however, could sense problems. Their two daughters were so beautiful that we couldn't take our eyes off them. We couldn't get involved with them at this time. I was old enough to know that living in the same house, in the next room, would not work. I was twenty years old and I was not ready to get into trouble.

They showed us our room upstairs and we left our luggage there and went to find the Jewish community centre. There, we met Mr. Bradshaw, the director. He welcomed us to Hamilton, took us around the centre and told us it was always open for us. "Our city is glad to have survivor children come here," he said. "We already have six other orphaned Hungarian boys. They should be coming in a few minutes to meet you." Soon after, we met Robert, Leslie, Jack and Morris. Arnold and Dugyu

joined us later. We were all friends immediately. Leslie already owned a car, and we all got in and went to see his place. We met his hostess, Mrs. Stein, who told us to come by any time.

That afternoon, my mother's cousins Al and Ida Green, who lived in St. Thomas, came to see us. Al drove a brand new green Chrysler, which really impressed us. He took charge of us; he was the one who had arranged that we come to Hamilton, to be close to them. Uncle Al, as he told me to call him, asked us how the place they selected for us to stay was. I said that we liked the family but I was concerned that it would be difficult to live in the same house as the daughters, and that we'd prefer to stay with Mrs. Stein. He drove us to her home, and though she wasn't eager to take more

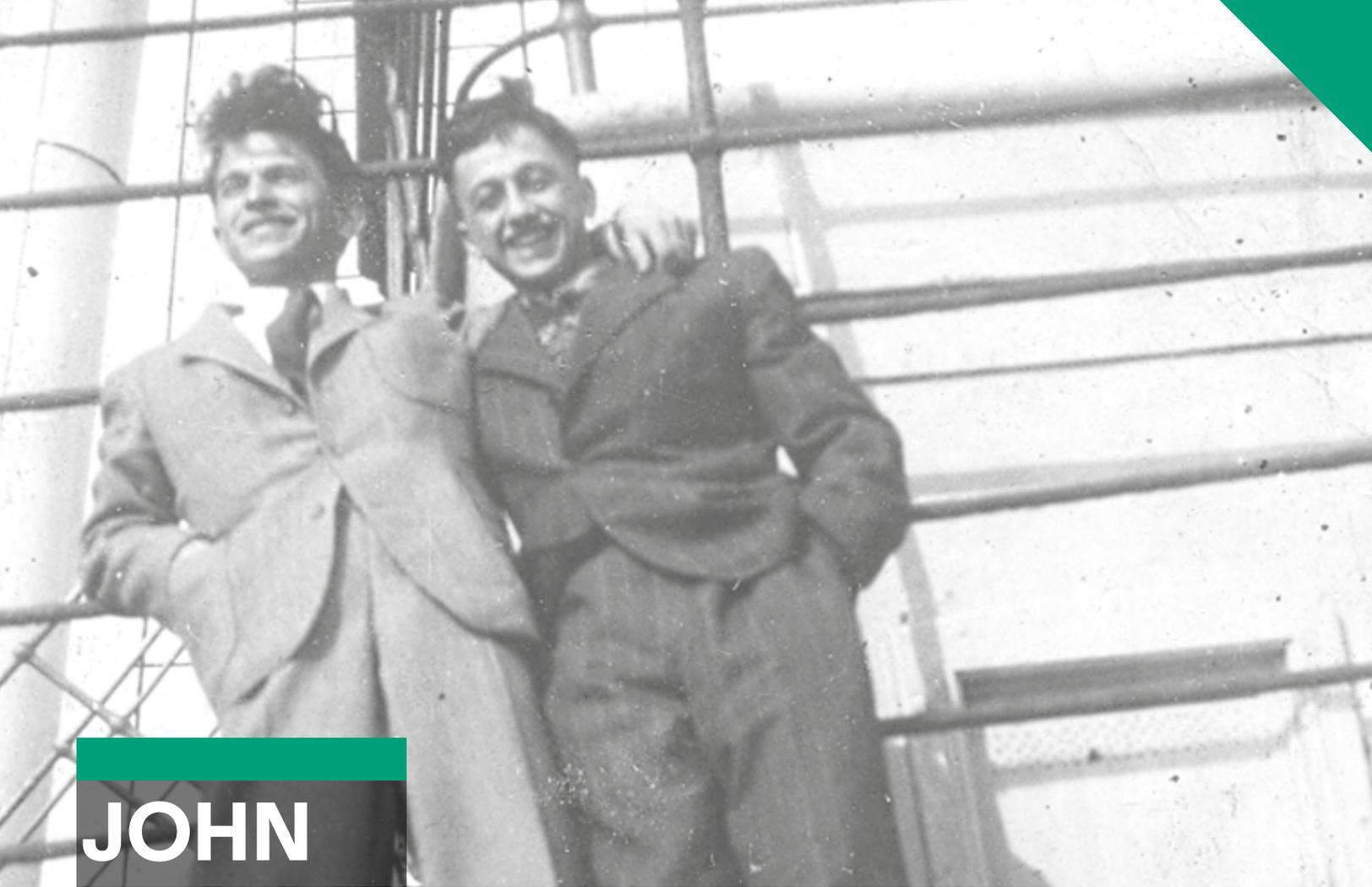
boarders, Uncle Al promised her more money and she finally agreed, under the condition that we help wash dishes. I explained that I had never done this before, but I was willing to learn. We moved and Uncle Al apologized to the Rosenscheins for us leaving.

Unfortunately, on my second day at Mrs. Steins', I accidentally broke a plate. She forbade me to ever touch anything in the kitchen again. That left Fredi in the kitchen to help, which did not please him at all. He broke a plate the next day and was also forbidden to help in the kitchen. From then on, we all got along fine.



War Orphans Project Excerpts

# CZECHOSLOVAKIA



# JOHN FREUND

John (right) and friend Tomy Newman (left), aboard the RMS *Aquitania*, en route to Canada. 1948.

Czechoslovakia was a country in Central Europe made up of several provinces. In 1938, Hitler threatened to go to war unless the Sudetenland, the region with a large German-speaking population, was given to Germany. To avoid war, the leaders of Britain, France and Italy – the three most powerful countries in Europe at the time – agreed to Hitler’s demand and pressured Czechoslovakia to give up the region. Hitler did not keep his promise. In March 1939, the German army invaded and occupied the rest of the country. Approximately 260,000 Jews who had lived in Czechoslovakia were killed in the Holocaust.

John (Jan) Freund was born in České Budějovice, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic), in 1930. In 1942, John and his family were sent to the Theresienstadt ghetto and camp, where they suffered but managed to survive. In 1943, they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. John was eventually separated from his family. He was forced on a death march when the camp was evacuated, and he was liberated in the spring of 1945. John was the only member of his immediate family to survive the Holocaust. In 1948, John immigrated to Canada as a war orphan and settled in Toronto.

# JOHN FREUND

Author of *Spring's End*

I was offered the opportunity to leave the country and settle in Canada, assisted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Canadian Jewish Congress (working with the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services and other agencies). I was ready. I was told that as a Jewish orphan living in Europe, I qualified for entry into Canada – a country I knew nothing about, a place where I knew no one. All I knew about this country with the strange name was that it was in North America.

I applied.

Around Christmas 1947, I went to Budějovice for a few days. Then came the so-called February 1948 Revolution, setting Czechoslovakia back into the Middle Ages for many years to come. On March 12, 1948, a group of thirty war orphans under the age of eighteen left Prague by train. I was among them. As I waved goodbye to Prague, to Europe, to the old world, I began to look forward to a new life in Canada. I was almost eighteen and I had much to live for.

## EMIGRANT – IMMIGRANT

So many people in the twentieth century made the move from their homeland to a new land. All longed for a visa for North America. Mine arrived in 1948. Had it been issued a few years earlier, my entire family could have become Canadian and would have survived the war.

I never considered myself homeless, a refugee or a displaced person. The choice to leave my native land was my own. I never regretted it. Those who make the same trip now, in these days of instant travel, leave their homes at noon and arrive before supper. We left Prague in early morning by express train and, after travelling for about sixteen hours, arrived at the harbour of Bremerhaven in northern

Germany. The trip across the choppy North Sea was rough. The small ship was tossed hither and yon. There were about thirty of us in the group, mostly boys. We were all survivors, orphans.

Once we landed in England, we boarded a train to London. As the train approached, I was able to see the big city of London, the dream of all my classmates in Prague. For two days we stayed in a dilapidated warehouse in Cheapside, in the miserable East End, full of poor people living in slums. A few of us ventured out to see the town – Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, the famous avenue Piccadilly and Leicester Square. While in Trafalgar Square, where Admiral Nelson sits high on a pillar protected by roaring lions, we noticed a little man crossing the road to talk to us.

"You refugees?" he asked. "Yes," we replied. "Jewish?"

"Yes," we said.

"Come home with me and meet my family."

We went by the underground to visit Phineas Goldenfeld, his sad, greying wife and their two children, Regina, a girl of eighteen with thick glasses and dark hair, and Lennie, a boy of eleven.

"These boys survived the Nazis and lost their parents," explained the little man to his family.

Excited, Lennie ran into the next room and returned with a toy gun. "I will shoot them all."

He was hard to contain. Mrs. Goldenfeld served a modest meal and Phineas took us back to Trafalgar Square. My contact with that family continued and on each subsequent visit to London, we met again.

Canada was willing to take us in and the Canadian Jewish Congress paid our passage. After two days in London, we were off to Southampton by train. In Southampton, a large ship from the famous Cunard Line, *Aquitania*, awaited passengers. She had been a troop carrier in the war and had accommodated over eight thousand troops on her overseas journeys. Once inside, I felt like a movie star. The ship was like an enormous hotel with hundreds of bedrooms, dining rooms, theatres and ballrooms. It was full of people of all descriptions. My first meal in the ornate dining room, which consisted of many courses, was also my last one. Once we started to move, my stomach began to feel like a whirlpool; it started to churn and I soon found myself on the upper deck, throwing up. Then I went into the dormitory room, where a bed was assigned to me, and I stayed there for the next two days. The trip lasted five days, in the worst of winter weather. Waves as large as an apartment building were tossing the poor *Aquitania* from side to side. The creaking of the walls had me almost convinced that I would never see Canada but would drown in the freezing water of the Atlantic Ocean. However, on the fifth day, my fellow passengers urged me to go out on the deck. I saw land again, a little speck that grew larger and larger until we docked. This huge country was Canada – my new home.

### *Into Another World*

*Into another world waves brought me;  
Goodbye Europe with old churches  
Away from the crooked streets  
And mattresses full of sweat...  
Into a new world a ship brought me  
Wave farewell to those left behind  
They would also like to start again  
But must stay behind to guard against...  
Into a new world I was brought by a dream  
Never to see blood spilled again  
But can I really throw away  
The dreams that soiled my youth?  
Will I ever return to the old?  
Will I ever see the stones of my fathers?  
Will I have to return  
To fight the old wars once again?*

### TORONTO

After disembarking, we travelled by train through endless flat fields covered by deep snow. After a stopover in Montreal, we arrived in Toronto. There were perhaps twenty of us. A man on the train recognized us as refugees and gave us each two dollars so we would not arrive at our destinations penniless. Our trip ended at the beautiful, cavernous Union Station. Some of our group had stayed in Montreal, others remained in Toronto and others headed to Winnipeg.

Toronto of the late 1940s was a medium-sized city with straight streets. It was full of small, private homes located outside the downtown area. There were practically no apartment buildings like there were in Europe. The houses near the downtown area were close to one another and dilapidated. Further out were larger villas surrounded by gardens. This was a country inhabited by English descendants, so each home was a castle with flowers.

At the foot of the city lay the large Lake Ontario. In contrast with the cities of Europe, however, the lake was not part of the city. In the downtown area there were unattractive, medium-sized office buildings and stores. Unlike in European cities, people in Toronto lived relatively far from where they worked or shopped; there was hardly any housing downtown and only a few large hotels. There were few neon signs and only a few movie houses and restaurants. To my sorrow, there were only a few theatres, concert halls and art galleries in town, and none were in the glorious European design. A few people had private automobiles. To get around, one had to take streetcars, which were, to my eyes, far more modern and efficient than those in Prague. Lighting in the evening was poor. After all, only a hundred years earlier, there were only a few muddy streets here and a very small population.

Our little group was housed in a large home referred to as the Reception Centre. The centre was serviced by volunteer Jewish women. Later, this

became a Jewish library. Those first few days in Toronto, we did not venture far. I realized that learning English was a priority. It was April and school was still in full swing. I was urged to enrol in a nearby public school and actually sat for a few days in a class of twelve-year-old boys, just listening. I found this experience not only boring but also humiliating. After all, only a few months earlier I had been translating Latin passages of the poet Ovid.

...

The brilliant sunshine during my first spring in Toronto warmed me up and prepared me for a better future. My first job was as a busboy in a doughnut shop. I earned enough for room and board and saved for a brand-new bicycle. I turned eighteen on June 6, 1948. I did not know that much of what was ahead of me would be good.

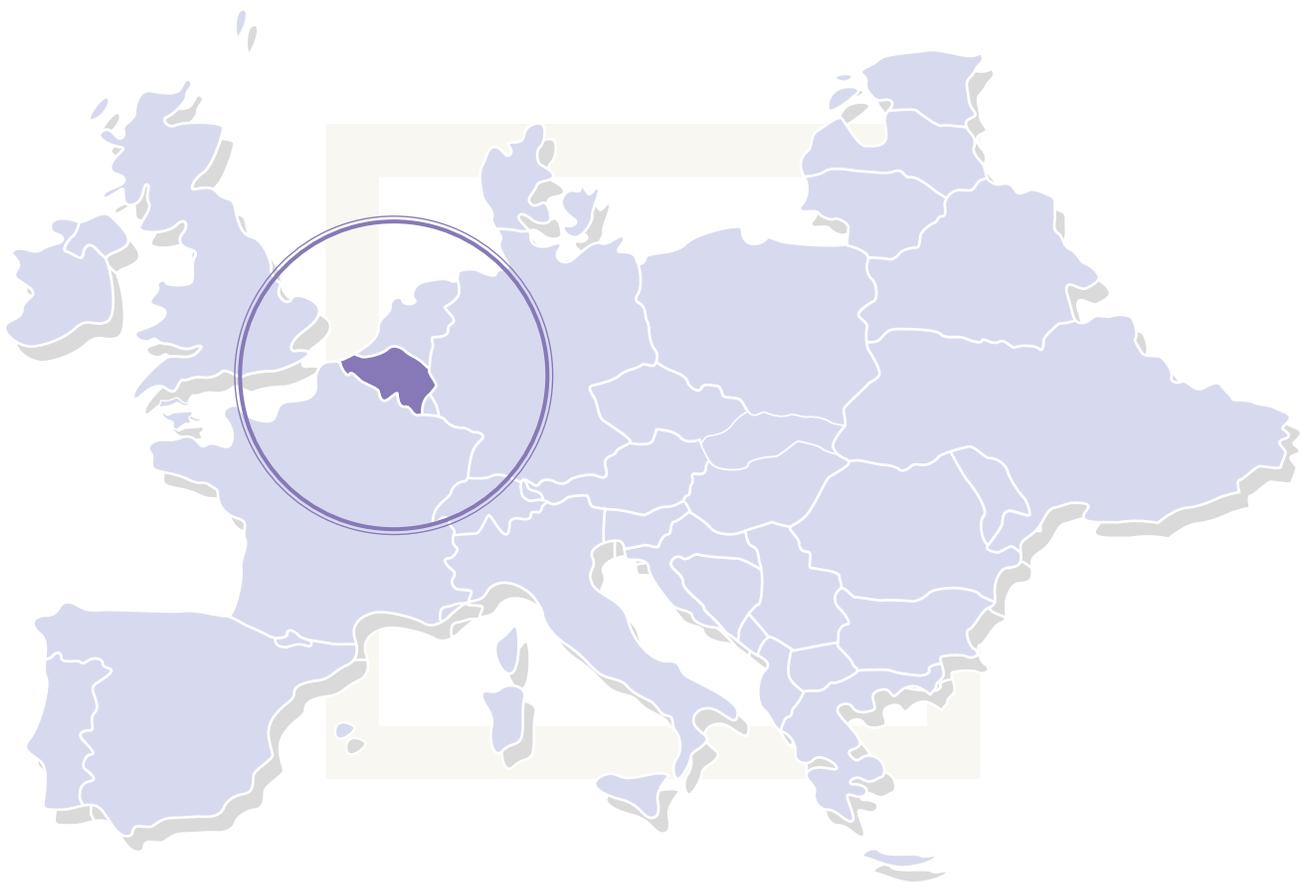
While the battles of ideology intensified in my old homeland, I focused on my new life in Canada. As a new Canadian, I learned the ways

of independence. I had to get a job to pay for my education and to settle into as normal a life as could be hoped for. I did not become a medical doctor as I had dreamt of as a boy. Instead, I obtained a certificate in the respected profession of accounting. As a chartered accountant, I worked steadily, earning a satisfactory living until my retirement in 1989, more than forty years after my arrival in Canada.

I never gave up my love of music and the arts. While young, I read the major European authors, but I never really became an educated man. My doubts about myself and humanity remained with me. I was always aware of the struggles of other people, and this caused me sorrow. The peaceful life that I have enjoyed personally never became a reality for the world.

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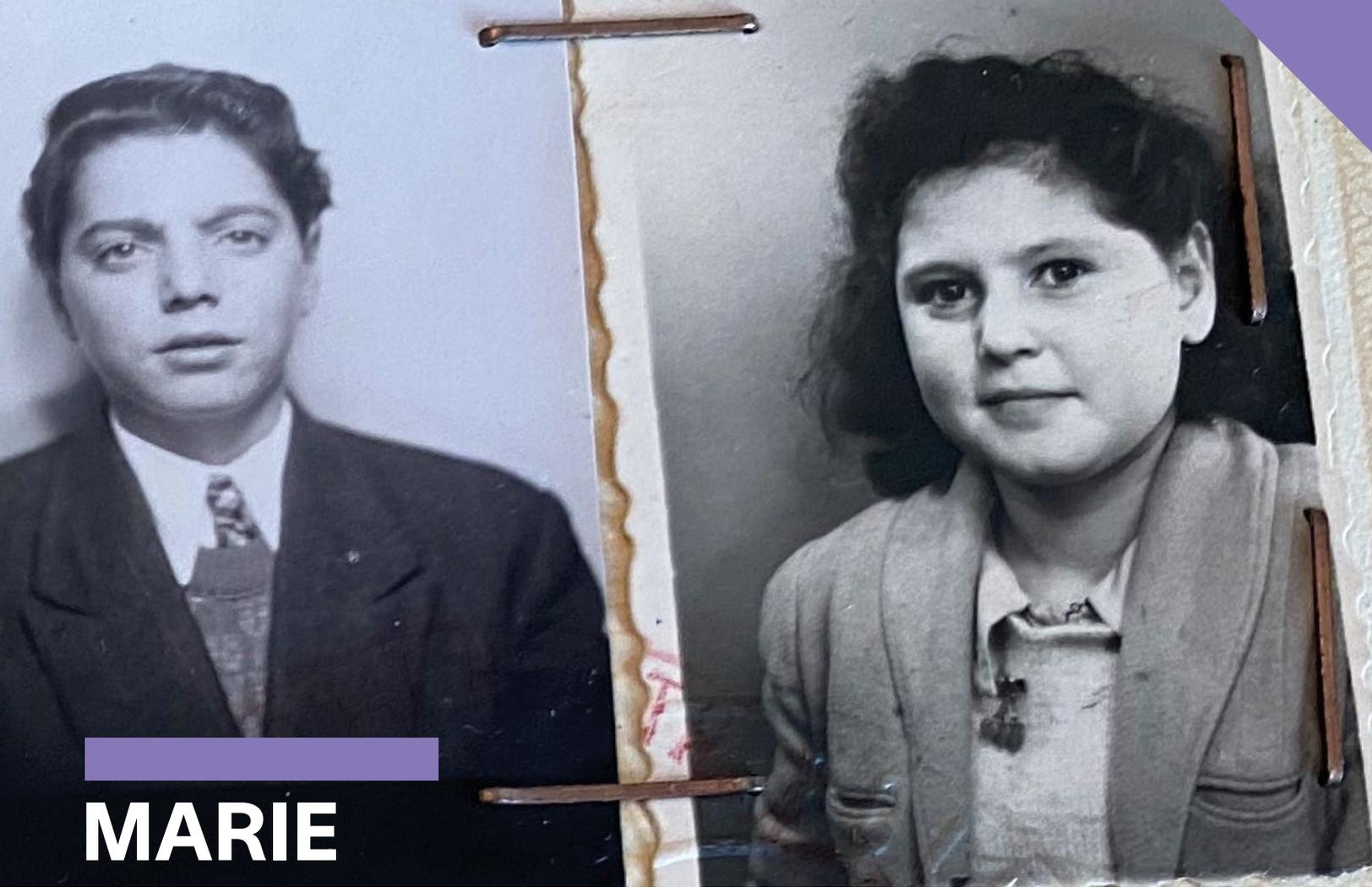
God has been good to me. I do not deny His existence, but pray to Him only with great doubt.



War Orphans Project Excerpts

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# BELGIUM



# MARIE DODUCK

Photos of Marie and her brother, which were used on their joint passport to immigrate to Canada.

Belgium is a small country located in Western Europe, between France and Germany. At the onset of the war, Belgium's Jewish population was relatively small and new: the majority of the 70,000 had arrived after World War I and less than 10 per cent had Belgian citizenship. In the years leading up to World War II, Jews in Belgium felt the rise of antisemitism. In May 1940, after Germany invaded Belgium, the persecution of Jews increased, and Jews were eventually forced to wear the yellow star. Between 1942 and 1944, German authorities interned Jews in camps and deported approximately 25,000 to Auschwitz-Birkenau. In September 1944, Allied troops, including soldiers from Canada, entered Belgium, and the country was fully liberated in February 1945. Approximately 23,000 Jews who lived in Belgium were killed in the Holocaust.

Marie (Mariette) Doduck was born in Brussels, Belgium, in 1935 as the youngest of eleven children. During the German occupation of Belgium, several of Mariette's siblings, as well as her mother, were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Mariette and her other siblings survived separately by fleeing, hiding with non-Jewish families or hiding in convents and orphanages. In 1947, Marie immigrated to Canada as part of the War Orphans Project with three of her siblings. She settled in Vancouver.

# MARIE DODUCK

Author of *A Childhood Unspoken*

Eventually I recognized that I could not stay in Europe. There were so few options for us, none of them very good; there was no real future. I remember seeing posters plastered to the Morris columns that said that children could leave Europe. I was twelve years old, and I made up my mind that I was going to leave. So I went to city hall, where I announced that I was an orphan and I wanted to go to America. And who was there doing the same thing as me but Henri! The two of us filled out the paperwork and underwent medical tests, and we got two passports. I'm still not quite sure how I managed because I didn't have the right papers to prove my birth. Henri must have figured something out though because we did get the passports. On each passport was space for two children: Henri and I were on one passport and Esther and Jacques on the other.

...

The rescue of Jewish child refugees from war-torn Europe was the project of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), which was founded in Canada in 1919. Even before the war in Europe started, the CJC lobbied the Canadian government to accept Jewish refugees, with very little success. Between 1933 and 1945, Canada accepted only a few thousand Jewish refugees from Europe. By comparison, the United States is estimated to have let in around two hundred thousand refugees.

...

So the CJC waged a futile battle because the Canadian government was run by people with the same mentality as those who had caused the war in Europe, people who did not like Jews.

...

The CJC was persistent, though, and after the war, it met with more success. It administered the War Orphans Project, through which it brought 1,123

Jewish refugee children to Canada between 1947 and 1952. I was a War Orphan, as were three of my siblings.

When we arrived in Canada, we refugees legally became wards of the CJC. We were told that we were "damaged goods," and we were subjected to wellness checks by the CJC, and we always felt as though we could be rejected and returned to Europe for any perceived infraction. Imagine having survived what we survived, including two years of limbo after the war ended, with no proper papers, no place to call home, no certainty of food or shelter, and then to experience ongoing uncertainty about our fates. It definitely affected us, physically and mentally.

## *Transition*

...

We were taken to England first, in the fall of 1947. The Channel crossing was difficult. It made me unbelievably seasick — an unfortunate sign of things to come because during the Atlantic crossing to Canada, I would also be very sick. I glimpsed the famous White Cliffs of Dover, and I don't recall very much about England after that. My passport indicates that I was only in England for about a week, maybe two, before I was shuttled to Southampton and to the boat that would take us to Canada. As we were driven around, I saw that there were royal decorations all over London: it was during the time of the royal wedding, when the future queen Elizabeth wed Philip Mountbatten.

At some point on that voyage, I threw overboard the red sweater I'd kept with me since I left Maman. It was seven years old, just a bit of cloth by then, and though I was still small, I had long outgrown it. But I hadn't let myself relinquish it until that point. I was too young, and not well enough physically,

or old enough mentally, to reflect on the symbolism of the act, what it meant on different levels: a letting go of my childhood, which had been long destroyed in any case; an attempted goodbye to the Mariette of Europe, to the hunted little girl who survived the Nazis; a recognition that I was in transition, passing from one phase of life to another. By then I felt that I was an old woman trapped in a twelve-year-old body. I had seen and experienced things that no child should ever have to.

...

Reflecting now on what we orphans had lived through, the scenes that even now, more than seventy-five years later, are so hard to describe, I wonder if the people in Canada who were waiting to adopt us weren't a bit nervous about what we were.

The ship that bore me from England to Canada was the RMS *Aquitania*. I remember it as a rickety old ship, but then, I was a young and very seasick child.

...

According to administrative records, I left Southampton on the *Aquitania* in late November 1947. On December 2, she delivered my siblings and me to the famous Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the historic port of entry into Canada for immigrants from around the world. As far as I know, I was one of the youngest Jewish refugees on that ship making the crossing.

### *Arrival in Canada*

There was no noise as I walked down the gangplank onto solid ground. As I remember it, it was an entirely soundless event. We had arrived, the so-called damaged goods. Records show that there were thirty-three of us Jewish refugee children on the ship. There was no one to meet us, nothing to welcome us except barbed wire. We walked into a building where the border guards, *les douaniers*, were waiting, and they gave each of us a card with a number. Mine was pinned to my dress; I was number seventy-three. Once again, our identities were stripped from us. I remember

Esther murmuring to me, "What is going on, Mariette? You said we were free, that they told us we would be free here, and here we are, in another prison." How could I disagree with her? There were bars on the windows, and it looked and felt like a prison. All of us knew what that felt like. We, all of us Jews, had just come from Nazi-occupied Europe, one giant prison from which we had been lucky enough to escape with our lives.

We had a few valuables on us. If our experience during the war had taught us anything, it was not to depend on anyone, to be as self-reliant as we could. So each of us had squirreled away the means to sustain ourselves if we had to: some money, little trinkets that we could maybe sell and of course items of personal sentiment. I had some photos, including one of my mother, and before I left Belgium, my sister Sara had given me a small child's ring with a diamond in it.

*Les douaniers* promptly confiscated it all, except the photos. Eventually they gave me back the ring, but it was missing the diamond. An entrance tax, I suppose.

We did not arrive penniless, but we entered the country penniless, and that is how we were depicted. Of course, none of us reported the theft by *les douaniers*. To whom would we report it? And why? It was not yet our country and we had nothing. We were just kids but we had lived through so many years of hell without parents, without elders, sometimes living on the streets, entirely self-sufficient. We had all learned not to trust the authorities, that they would probably do more harm than good. We had travelled across the ocean in an old ship, we had figured out how to communicate with each other across the dozen or so languages that we all spoke. We didn't need anyone! We could survive anything! That was our mindset. So we said nothing about the theft.

Our final destination was not Halifax. That was merely our port of entry into Canada. Once we went through customs, we finally met someone who was there to greet us: a social worker who

welcomed us on behalf of the Canadian Jewish Congress. In addition to funding the War Orphans Project and our entrance into Canada, the CJC also helped many of the foster families defray the cost of taking in an orphan, though the family I ended up with and some others didn't take the money because they didn't need it. The social worker was charged with helping us Jewish refugees get to our new homes in Canada. A few children stayed in Halifax, but the majority of us were destined for points west: Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg, the cities with the largest Jewish communities in Canada. We had already been chosen by families, and the social worker put us on the train and accompanied us on the journey.

When the train stopped in Montreal, the social worker announced, "We're here; time to get off the train. Why don't you stretch your legs and walk around a bit until your host families arrive?" So we did. We got off and walked a bit. I soon went back to the station and found the social worker and said adamantly, "I cannot stay here. They do not speak French here. I don't understand them. They speak a *patois*<sup>1</sup> that is not French." And here I was quite rude, but I was trying to express how I felt to her, and I was twelve, remember. So I was very frank. I said, "*Ils parlent français comme une vache espagnole*. They speak French like a Spanish cow." In any case, my siblings and I, we got back on the train and onto the next stop.

The next stop was Winnipeg. We arrived in December to find seven feet of snow. I'm a girl from Belgium, where it snows on occasion, but not very much. People met us at the train station completely bundled up, in earmuffs, winter coats, hand muffs and big hats. I looked at the social worker and said, "I can't stay here, I will die." And she looked at me and said, "*Mariette, qu'est-ce que tu dis? What are you saying?*" And I said, again, very bluntly, "I cannot live here. It's too cold; I will freeze to death. I can't stay here." I met my adoptive family, the Smiths, very famous for their quality meat, their corned beef. My sister and I stayed there for a few weeks (Henri and Jacques were taken to a different family). I had no problem with the Smiths, but I

could not stand the weather.

The families who were taking us in kept us close with the other refugee children who had arrived in Winnipeg. They took us to the YMHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association) and socialized us with children with whom they felt we could more easily identify and talk to. But I didn't want to be around anybody else. I wanted to be away from that, away from my past, away from what reminded me of what I had tried to leave behind in Europe. The social worker was very understanding, very patient. She said, "Mariette, there is no other place to live. This is the end of the line. We are putting all the Jewish children from Europe here." But I said no. I put my foot down, and I said, "I can't stay here. I can't stay in the cold, and I can't be around other survivors." ...

So when I went back to the social worker and said I had to go on, I said this with no intention of taking my siblings with me. They could stay in Winnipeg. I find this hard to explain, even to my adult self. Mariette, at twelve years old, simply had no fear of being on her own. She had been alone for so long that the idea of coming by herself to this new place was not daunting. In fact, it was essential for her survival. And what Mariette knew, if she knew anything, was how to survive. I had learned how to eat with a knife and a fork on my own, to put myself to bed and get myself to sleep and get myself up in the morning — all of this I had been doing for years, all on my own! To survive meant to need no one for anything. And the feelings of Mariette's siblings, if they felt left behind or abandoned or not included, that was not part of the equation, because for Mariette it never had been.

But Henri found out, and he said, "We're not staying here if you aren't." I protested. I promised to tell them where I ended up and how to reach me, but it didn't matter. He said, "Mariette, we stay together." My siblings came with me, all three of them — back on the train, farther west. I remember the train slowing, and I looked out and saw very little: A little red building with a trail of smoke coming out of it. A little puff. And snow, still. I asked

<sup>1</sup> A dialect that is specific to a region or a particular group.

the social worker who was with us where we were, and she said, "Calgary." I immediately hoped we weren't stopping here; it wasn't the snow that put me off here, it was the lack of, well, anything. I had come from Brussels. It wasn't Paris, but Brussels was an old European city. I thought, if I'm going to hide, I need places to hide. There seemed to be nowhere to hide in Calgary.

But there was one more stop on the train, Vancouver. I asked Jean Rose, the woman who was now accompanying us, "What's there, what's it like?" And she told me a little bit about it: it doesn't snow much, it rains a lot, it's not a big city. And I said, "Is it by the ocean?" Because I wanted to be by the beach. I had so few memories of my family. There were so few clear memories of happy moments, but I did remember being at a beach: the sand, and the waves, and the beautiful weather. It was perfect. I remembered being happy there, genuinely happy. And Jean Rose said, yes, it was by the ocean. And I think I must have been a bit exasperated because I said, "It took us all these weeks to come to this place?" I had stated on my application that I wanted to live somewhere close to the ocean!

### *Vancouver*

We arrived in Vancouver on January 3, 1948. It had taken us a little over four weeks to cross the vastness of Canada. We arrived at the train station at the foot of Granville Street: me and my siblings Esther, Jacques and Henri; and three boys — David, René and Lazar (Larry), my future brother-in-law (he would marry Esther). Later on, I would learn that, of the 1,123 Jewish orphans who came to Canada as part of the War Orphans Project, only forty-seven ended up in Vancouver.

As in Winnipeg, in Vancouver there was a couple waiting to adopt me. Several Jewish families had come to collect their Jewish orphans, and in a moment, the plan was changed. Joe Satanov spotted me, and even though there was already a family ready to take me, Mr. Satanov pointed to me

and told the social worker, "I want that one. She's mine." So I went to live with the Satanovs.

...

My siblings all went to different families. Who would have taken four children all at once? The CJC had had a difficult time finding homes for the orphans in Canada. In some cases, they had promised families children much younger than those who ended up coming over, who were mostly teenagers. I realize now, as a grown woman, how much courage it must have taken these couples, these families, to welcome grown children into their homes. What guts! We were all in Vancouver, but we all had different places to live. Once again, I was on my own with strangers.

The Satanovs were well known in Vancouver's small Jewish community. Mr. Satanov was one of the founders of the Beth Israel synagogue, the Conservative synagogue in Vancouver. They had come over from Russia a few decades earlier, and I didn't understand the Yiddish they spoke, and they didn't understand mine. They spoke an upper-class Russian Yiddish, more polished than mine, which was a street-roughened Polish Yiddish. And I could speak no English, and they spoke no French. So at the beginning we couldn't communicate at all, except through pictures. They had no children, and Mrs. Satanov, Minnie to her friends, was past her child-bearing years. I discerned quickly that she didn't want me or trust me. And I can't say I blame her. I must have seemed half-wild, distrustful myself, and disinterested.

It was a difficult transition for all of us, but especially for me. During my first year in Vancouver, I ran away no less than twelve times. I just bolted. Living in a home, having to respond to elders who were trying to communicate rules and regulations, having a timetable and expectations, none of this was familiar to me. Plus, from age five or six to age ten or eleven I never spoke unless spoken to. Remember, I was a child of silence. I could sit for hours and not say anything, or say only what others wanted to hear. Being expected now to engage in conversation was disorienting and dislocating,

and my response was to find the escape route.

Each time I escaped, Mr. Satanov found me and brought me back. He always said the same thing, though it was several months before I could understand what he was saying: "No matter how far you run or where you go to, you are mine. Never forget that." He was so determined, so possessive in a way that I could make no sense of.

...

My foster mother eventually became my best friend and I hers, and I looked after both my foster parents as they got older. But I never called the Satanovs Mum and Dad, despite them asking me to, and I never changed my name, even though they became like parents to me, and I spent far more of my life with them — thirty-two years — than I had with my real parents. I called them Uncle and Auntie, a European custom of respect — Uncle Joe and Auntie Minnie.

...

### *Culture Shock*

...

We immigrants encountered prejudice even in that classroom run by the CJC and at Hebrew school, as well as in the public schools. The kids my age were shocked that we knew anything about music or literature or culture. We were aliens to them; we almost literally came from another world. It was inconceivable that we could know anything. The prejudice was really intense, and it made us survivors conscious of our foreignness, even when we were among other Jews. We learned all over again to hide a part of ourselves, as we'd hidden ourselves in Europe. And I have to say, we kids from Europe, survivors, we looked down on them quite a lot too; to us they were very ignorant, even if we were the ones subjected to the teasing and the looks.

In my halting, often frustrating way of communicating, with gestures and drawing pictures, I managed to convey to Uncle Joe that I wanted to go to school, a proper school, to learn, and especially

to speak, English. I drew a little red schoolhouse with a chimney and smoke coming out of it, like the building I'd seen from the train when we stopped in Calgary, and he understood. So, he enrolled me in the public school close to our house, Maple Grove. I was at Maple Grove for ten months, and in that time, I completed Grades 1 through 6.

At Maple Grove I had a teacher named Miss Mowatt. She was the kind of teacher that everyone should be lucky enough to have once in their lives. Good teachers are so important in their role as guides for young people as they grow and mature. Miss Mowatt responded to me as a human, and to what I needed, and I clung to that even after I left the school. I would go back to visit her, to tell her how I was doing, to describe how I was struggling. She was instrumental in my transformation because she helped me so much with my English, using the chalkboard to write out the alphabet. She recognized quickly that I could pass tests so long as they were not written tests, and she let me take all of my tests orally. After her, my other teachers did the same. I was so concerned about making mistakes on paper that I would become paralyzed with fear when it came to writing tests.

Miss Mowatt also encouraged me to call myself Marie rather than Mariette. Mariette is a fairly common European name but doesn't easily roll off the tongue of an English speaker; Marie is much more common and more straightforward to pronounce. So, with Miss Mowatt's gentle push, I became two selves. I was still Mariette, but I was also Marie, who lived with the Satanovs, whose adolescence and young adulthood were shaped by Vancouver, who came of age in Canada. Marie provided another form of hiding initially. In creating her, I gave Mariette a place to hide, a way to retreat from the world.

Here was the beginning of my transformation. Survival is a coat, and you learn to put it on and take it off. But it never leaves you. Bit by bit, I learned how to peel off the mantle of survival. It was not easy. It began with the language.

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As I made my way through school, acquiring a proper education, my transformation also unfolded. After I completed Grades 1 through 6 in one school year at Maple Grove, I went to high school at Point Grey and completed Grades 7 through 9.

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After Point Grey, I attended Magee Secondary School. I was there for six months and finished Grades 10 to 12. I finished twelve years of schooling in less than five years, and when I was done high school, I went to the Fairview School of Commerce, a business college, and then I took classes at the University of British Columbia. I had learned English and mastered my accent, smoothed it out until you could hardly tell that it wasn't my first language, and I became Marie. Not bad for damaged goods!

I was very lucky with the Satanovs. Not all survivors can claim to have had a good experience with their adoptive families. (As far as I know, of all the child survivors who came to Vancouver after the war, only my brother Jacques and I stayed with our

foster families for the long term.) My first year was difficult, but we learned, the three of us, how to get along, and I lacked for nothing. The Satanovs had a nice home, though for that first year, it was only a place to sleep and get a meal. I had nice clothes; I benefitted from my foster parents running a ladies' wear store. For my sixteenth birthday I got sample dresses and shoes, a whole closetful, and I was always well fed.

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We were among the first families in Vancouver to have a television in our home — a black-and-white set with big rabbit ears. There was no colour television in those days. We took our dinners in the den so that we could watch, except on Friday, on the eve of the Shabbat. That was a proper Jewish dinner, no TV.

Eventually, I would come to see that I belonged.

