

***Refugee Boulevard: Making Montreal Home after the Holocaust***  
**Audio Tour Transcript**

[00:00:09] **Anna Sheftel:** What did you know about Canada before you arrived?

[00:00:12] **Tommy Strasser:** Nothing, nothing. Not even knowing that, and if I would have known, believe me, maybe I would have chosen Venezuela if I would have known the harsh winters, you know. [Laughter] I would have become a Venezuelan, I imagine.

[00:00:25] **Renata Zajdman:** Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

[00:00:28] **Ted Bolgar:** It's above United States. That's all I knew. And, when I came to Quebec, French. I never, I thought it's English here, it's dominion or whatever. I didn't know anything.

[00:00:40] **Musia Schwartz:** So, some representative came to our orphanage and says, "Would you like to go to Canada? We'll be happy to have you." I says, "Yeah, by all means." I knew very little about your country."

[00:00:52] **George Reinitz:** They, they just told us that from Halifax that "You're going to be in Montreal." Ah, Montreal! I didn't care where I go. I didn't know anything anywhere ... but I knew there was a quintuplets. [Laughter]

[00:01:19] **Fishel Goldig:** Welcome to *Refugee Boulevard: Making Montreal Home after the Holocaust*. My name is Fishel Goldig. I will be guiding you around this neighbourhood for the next hour. You should be standing at the Rubenstein Water Fountain, at the corner of Park Avenue and Mont-Royal Avenue, in Jeanne-Mance Park. If you're not at the fountain, head there now.

[00:01:54] My life really only began at age fourteen, when I came to Canada in 1948. Everything that came before was bad dreams and awful memories. The first few years of life in Canada were quite difficult. I was a survivor of the Holocaust. An immigrant in a new country who spoke neither English nor French. I moved into this neighborhood with my mother, who worked as a dress finisher and my father who worked in a rubber factory. Although I was big and strong and wanted to get a job to help out, my father would not hear of it. Instead, I was sent to study at Yeshiva Merkaz Hatorah High School.

[00:03:00] In the years following World War II, this area was a vibrant hub of Jewish life. This audio tour transports you back to that time through the stories of six Holocaust survivors who also arrived in 1948 and quickly set about remaking their lives here. Ted Bolgar, Paul Herczeg, and George Reinitz were refugees from Hungary. Tommy Strasser came from Czechoslovakia, and Musia Schwartz and Renata Zajdman immigrated from Poland.

[00:03:36] As you listen, you'll be following in their footsteps, walking along the same routes they navigated during their early days in Montreal. We will visit places where newcomers gathered, made new friendships, embarked upon careers, and formed families. As we travel back to the late 1940s and early 1950s, keep in mind that these stories of war, loss, displacement, and starting over are common to many immigrant Montrealers. This has long been a place where people have come to build new lives. It's important for us to take a moment to acknowledge that where we walk

today is unceded Indigenous territory, traditionally cared for by the Mohawk Nation. This audio walk tells a story about settlement on this land, and we express gratitude for those who cared for it long before any of us were here.

[00:04:35] You will hear my voice intermittently providing directions and pointing out sites along the way. The walking pace I will set is modest, so if you arrive early to a site or fall behind, just wait for my voice to indicate the next site. Do make sure you pay attention to your surroundings as you walk, being careful to cross the street only when it is safe to do so. If you have a copy of the accompanying booklet, there is a map on the back cover or you can bring up the map on your phone by visiting [www.refugeeboulevard.ca](http://www.refugeeboulevard.ca).

[00:05:16] I should also let you know that I'll be referring to places by their English names, just as we did in those early years, and as many of us still do to this day. So Boulevard Saint-Laurent? That's what we called St. Lawrence Boulevard. This place in which we're standing, Parc Jeanne-Mance? For us, that was Fletcher's Field. You may no longer use those names, but this is how we still remember and talk about these places.

[00:05:46] Let's start by giving you a sense of direction. The mountain, Mount Royal, on the other side of Park Avenue, marks the western edge of this neighbourhood. It will serve as a reference point throughout this walk.

[00:06:01] Now starting at the Rubenstein Water Fountain, begin walking away from the mountain along the sidewalk towards Jeanne Mance Street. As you make your way down the street, Ted and Paul will talk about their struggles to leave Europe. Jeanne-Mance is the first cross street you will encounter. Stop at the traffic lights and wait there for my instructions.

[00:06:25] **Ted Bolgar:** We all wanted to get out of Europe. It so happened that Canada was the first country changed its mind, none is too many. So we all, "Okay, let's go to Canada." Now, that was a restriction eighteen or younger and orphans. So we all became younger than eighteen and orphans. Most of us had different names and everything. But, there was only one purpose: get out of Europe! Canada was the only country, because we went to other ah consulates: "Can we get a visa?" "What are you?" "A Jew." "Mmm, there is no visa for Jews." As a matter of fact, one of them said, "Where were you born?" I said, "I was born in Hungary." "Then go back to Hungary and apply as a Hungarian." I said, "Look, look, once they threw me out, the second time I escaped, I can't go back to Hungary!" [Laughs]

[00:07:22] **Paul Herczeg:** We heard that the Canadian Jewish Congress was able to obtain 1000 visas for so-called war orphans and we applied to come to Canada.

[00:07:34] **Fishel Goldig:** It's me again, Fishel! Have you made it to the lights at the intersection of Mont-Royal Avenue and Jeanne Mance Street? We're turning left onto Jeanne Mance Street when it is safe to do so, walking along the sidewalk closest to the mountain. You'll know you're on the correct side if you pass in front of a large brick building with an arched window above a wooden doorway. We'll be returning here later, but for now, we'll continue past it, walking about two hundred meters. Watch out on your left for a three-story, semi-detached, red brick building with a children's play area extending into the courtyard. That is where I will meet you next.

[00:08:22] **Tommy Strasser:** After liberation, of course, my first thing was to get back to my hometown and to see whether any of my family survived. Unfortunately they didn't. So I lost my taste in remaining in my hometown, even in my country. For that matter even Europe didn't actually appeal to me. However, it took me about three years before I was able to get away from there. In the interim, I had a couple of stopovers in the Czech Republic. I went to Germany, where I was in an UNRRA camp, that's the United Nations Relief Organization that was housing survivors. From there I snuck over the French border, eventually wound up in Paris, where I lived for three years and, in 1948, I was being offered the possibility of coming to Canada as an orphan under eighteen. Now, I qualified on one point: I definitely was an orphan, but I certainly wasn't eighteen. I was way over eighteen. So one of my good friends falsified my birth certificate, made me four years younger, and I arrived in Canada in ah June of 1948. At the Port of Montreal they put us into taxis to transport us to the lodgings and the taxi driver was a Frenchman and we got into a conversation. I was proficient of course because of living in France. And it turned out that the man was a college professor moonlighting during the summertime. So I said, "My gosh what kind of a country is this that a college professor is not earning enough, he has to work as a taxi driver?!" That was my first impression of Montreal.

[00:10:15] **Musia Schwartz:** We came to Halifax. We were 48 of us kids, nobody spoke English. Then we were put on trains. They asked me if I want to go to Montreal, Toronto, or Winnipeg, which was eni, mini, mani, mo. But Montreal I've heard somewhere, read a Polish book about Canada, and there was Montreal figured there. So I said, yeah, Montreal is fine.

[00:10:37] **Renata Zajdman:** The train from Toronto to Montreal lasted probably eight or ten hours. I was so hungry. And there was a dining room and I smell beautiful, I said, I guess there's some food, so I will go too. So I went to the dining room, beautiful, and a black man came, probably a waiter, and to me, anybody in uniform, I was terrified, it was authority. So, he asked me something, which I didn't understand, of course. I didn't speak English. So he brought me a piece of paper and a pencil. You know what I did? I put down my name, my destination, and my number of my passport, everything. He just looked at it, brought me toast and coffee, and I drank it and I said thank you, that's all I knew, and I walked out. I didn't pay for anything. He shook his head. It was the uniform. I was already conditioned to do it. That was my welcome to Canada so I came here.

[00:11:27] **Fishel Goldig:** You should be arriving at the red brick building with a children's play area in the courtyard. The address is 4652 Jeanne Mance Street, a building known to survivors as the Baron de Hirsch Institute, the Herzl Dispensary, the reception centre, or, simply, "the hostel." It was here that Paul and other young survivors spent their first nights in Montreal. While estimates vary, 525 of the 1100 child survivors brought to Canada through the War Orphans Project started their new lives at the Herzl. Continue standing or take a seat on the stoop out front as we listen to Paul, George, Tommy, and Musia reminisce about this building.

[00:12:22] **Paul Herczeg:** I was able to get on a boat with a lot of friends and we arrived in Halifax, 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1948. In the morning we got off the boat, we went through all the exercise with the Canadian authorities and the same day we went into the train, was right next to the pier, and overnight we came to Montreal. In the morning, we arrived at Central Station. There was a reception committee, people from the community, and they took us by car, maybe two in a car, we arrived here, to Baron de Hirsch Institute.

[00:13:05] **George Reinitz:** This is the place I was born. [Laughs] That's my first Canadian home. It's a memory from 1948.

[00:13:15] **Tommy Strasser:** If I'm not mistaken, it was a hostel or something, on Jeanne Mance Street near Mont Royal, which was set up as a reception area for Holocaust surviving orphans. But it was like almost like the idea of a summer camp type of a thing, you know, where you had huge rooms with beds set up and a table in the middle. And of course there was a dining room set up for us, because we were fed there as well.

[00:13:45] **Paul Herczeg:** It's a beautiful bed, good food, and social workers came talk to us, "What we want to do, looking after you, we'll find accommodation for you, jobs, whatever, just relax." That was an enlightening experience.

[00:14:01] **Musia Schwartz:** In the reception center on Jeanne Mance, which again was, as far as I was concerned, was like camp. You know, fine, so we have twenty cots in the room, big deal! Playing pranks and what have you. And then the woman who was running it, was Dr. Rosengarten, who was a wonderful woman! And she organized meetings where people would come to meet us. Open Night, it was called. And people with good intentions that sometimes turned sour, came because they want to find a whiff of their town or whatever. So, ultimately there was one family that wanted me to come and stay with them. Quite a contradictory beginning to this because generally you hear from immigrants they start somewhere in the slums. I started on Roslyn Avenue, near the Boulevard.

[00:14:53] **Fishel Goldig:** Over the years, this building has hosted a variety of other health and social organizations serving the Jewish community. Today, it is home to l'Hirondelle, an organization that builds on the Herzl's legacy by providing social integration services to new arrivals and refugees.

[00:15:17] It was here that psychologists and social workers offered newcomers various employment and educational opportunities. Most began working in factories, with men and women offered jobs that reflected the gendered division of labour at the time. In the last clip, Musia described how Canadian Jewish families would come to Open Nights at the Herzl in search of orphans to take into their home. Young women were often their first choice. Young men were more likely to be directed to independent lodgings. Another significant gender dynamic was that 75% of new arrivals who came through the War Orphans Project were men.

[00:16:10] Now continue walking in the same direction along Jeanne Mance Street until you reach the next corner, which intersects with Villeneuve Street. Stop and wait there. As you walk, Paul will recount how programs at the Herzl set into motion the early stages of his life in Canada.

[00:16:35] **Paul Herczeg:** What pleased me the most, the next day the first thing a teacher arrived for English lessons. Well that's the most important thing. When you don't have a language, you don't have anything. No skill, no education, no language, and no money. And, no family. I was alone. So, starting anew from scratch. But I wasn't worried, because they told me there's ample opportunity to work. Some social workers from the committee came interview us. Then they told me I have to take IQ test. "Whatever you say, I do!" So, in about three days after, I'm taking an

IQ test but I didn't speak English. So the IQ test could not have been very good. So they decided at the end of the IQ test that I will make a good worker in the tailor shop. Then they found me a job, Belgo Building, which is corner of Bleury and Ste. Catherine, that was a lot of clothing manufacturers. All I had to do, is there was one cutter, I had to bundle it up, count how many buttons went with it, you know six or eight. And I did that. I was bored to death. So no intelligence quotient or whatever it is but I didn't know what they talking about so I managed.

[00:17:58] **Fishel Goldig:** You should just be arriving at Villeneuve Street. Stop here at the corner for a moment.

[00:18:04] Just over twenty thousand Jewish refugees came to Montreal in the postwar period and it was mostly here, in this neighbourhood, that we began rebuilding our lives. At the time, this area known today as the Mile End or the Plateau, was predominantly Jewish. It had been this way since the early twentieth century when clothing factories, or the *schmata* industry, started to establish themselves along St. Lawrence Boulevard. Many of these places were owned by Jews and employed Jews. Yiddish could be heard on the streets and read on commercial signs.

[00:18:50] Now, turn left onto Villeneuve Street. We're staying on the same side of the sidewalk so you won't need to cross the street. We're headed towards Park Avenue, in the direction of the mountain. Walk as far as the next intersection, Park Avenue, and wait for me there. Here is Paul recalling his first day in Montreal.

00:19:16] **Paul Herczeg:** The next morning, I just went out to see the city, see something. I arrived in a new city, my new home, and I went out, I had a jacket, I put it on. I had no clothing, just a few underwear what, maybe a sweater, and I went out on the street. I went two blocks, just two blocks, to the corner of I think Villeneuve they call it, Jeanne Mance and one block left, to Park Avenue. OK? Then I see this big carpet store, a big carpet hanging in the window. But by then I was so cold that I thought I am not gonna make it back. [Laughs] And it was difficult to walk because those days they didn't clean the sidewalks and the snow was frozen to the sidewalk. So it's a bit slippery but I managed and I didn't want get out for a day or so. [Laughs] So, that was my first impression of Montreal.

[00:20:15] **Fishel Goldig:** Have you reached Park Avenue? Once you have made it, turn left and begin to walk back towards Fletcher's Field. We're staying on the same side of the sidewalk, so you don't have to cross the busy intersection.

[00:20:30] Park Avenue was a bustling centre for Jewish life, where people met, socialized, and frequented businesses that served the community. George will describe what this street was like at the time.

[00:20:48] **George Reinitz:** Saturday is Shabbat. People were walking up and down, meeting people and then it was Joe's Hall was on Park Avenue. Ping pong. We used to play ping pong in the front and in the back he was taking bets for the horses. He was a bootlegger. So, we used to go there and put two dollars in the horses.

[00:21:15] **Fishel Goldig:** Food is one way that newcomers began to feel at home in this new place. George fondly remembers Szekely Restaurant, while Paul has memories of Arena Bakery

and Faludis’.

[00:21:31] **George Reinitz:** A good restaurant near near Prince Arthur. We could have dinner for ninety-nine cents. Mostly Hungarian and, and there was a pool room and in the same restaurant there were Hungarian old timers who came before the war. They were non-Jewish, not educated people. They were doing manual work and it was a good influence on us. And they were very interested in the communist system. They believed that it’s a good thing, and they asked us a lot of questions regarding what’s happening because we just came and we tried to tell them that, you know, the system is not as, not as good as you think it is. But they were extremely nice to us. I found them honest, they talked to us. It was a welcome to talk to somebody whose been here, ask them about the customs, the laws. We didn’t, we had no knowledge whatsoever of what’s going on here. So it was a good source of information.

[00:22:31] **Paul Herczeg:** On corner of St. Urbain and Mont Royal: Arena Bakery. By then, you know, we had a job, we could buy a piece of bread, buy a cake, we were not desperate. And my friend George, once we bought a chocolate cake, a whole chocolate cake. I remember it vividly. We went behind in the street and ate it right on the spot. [Laughs] Things like this you know. But by then we were able to buy sometimes pastry. We were hungry for pastry, sweet, I don’t have to tell you, because we were all growing boys and we needed energy, so we ate a lot of pastry. Then, not far from the Y, one block on Park Avenue, it’s a big apartment. I recognize the house. A Jewish family, also immigrants, opened up a restaurant: Faludi. They were business oriented and she cooked in her kitchen and had about ten guys, like myself. Both of us spoke Hungarian among the boys, and we used to meet there for supper, for one dollars we had a meal.

[00:23:40] **Fishel Goldig:** Faludis’, the place Paul just described to you, was located in a second-floor apartment. Watch for the very last walkup staircase before the gas station. The apartment number is 4527. Stop at the foot of the staircase once you have found it.

[00:24:01] **Tommy Strasser:** We used to go and eat there because it was Hungarian-Jewish food and reasonable. It was, I believe it may have been their living room, after they finished their, their meal, you know, it became their living room actually. But they set up tables there, you know, tables that seated anywhere from four to six people. So there weren’t too many tables. There was a lot of other non-Hungarian Jewish people, you know, that used to come there because it was like a Jewish cuisine, you know. I always met somebody that I knew there, there was always somebody that I knew.

[00:24:37] **Fishel Goldig:** Did you find the last staircase? Look up to the second-floor apartment at 4527. This was Faludi’s, where survivors came to find nourishment, community, and a taste of home.

[00:24:51] Now continue walking down Park Avenue until you reach the busy intersection of Mont-Royal Avenue, where we’ll be turning left to head back towards the large, brick building I pointed out earlier. That building was the Young Men’s Hebrew Association, the YMHA, and its amenities were impressive. They included two gymnasiums, a swimming pool, a bowling alley, an auditorium, a theatre, dance halls, and game rooms.

[00:25:27] From informal places like Faludis’ to community institutions like the Y, young

newcomers found a variety of spaces to help them feel at home. This was certainly the case for Tommy, who vividly remembers his first experience at the Y.

[00:25:49] **Tommy Strasser:** The Jewish Congress also gave us free passes to the YMHA, on Mount Royal, corner of Park Avenue. Just a hop, skip, and a jump away. I was told that there's a club of Hungarian arrivals, and why don't I go and join them, you know, and meet them. And coincidentally, it was a very interesting happening. During the Holocaust, I met a guy that I was together with in a forced labor camp. We were together till liberation actually, in the ghetto in Budapest. When we got liberated, we said goodbye to each other figuring we'll never see each other again. I go into the YMHA, the very first time, I open the door, who do I see, my dear friend George. I was flabbergasted. I burst out in tears actually, you know like, like so did he for that matter. And we embraced you know, like lost brothers, which we were really. And then we reminisced of course, you know. That was quite a joyful meeting. Naturally, we became very, very close again.

[00:27:03] **Fishel Goldig:** You've now turned left onto Mont-Royal Avenue, passing the ornate entrance to the YMHA building at 265 Mont-Royal. Continue walking to the far corner of the building, to the intersection of Jeanne-Mance Street and stop there.

[00:27:26] **Paul Herczeg:** When I came to Canada I got a free membership to the Y. I spent almost every evening there. Y was home to us, not just because the Y was good, but all the boys, we all worked in the garment district, just a streetcar on Park Avenue to Mont-Royal, and that's where we met. We went for supper in the area and the whole group met almost every day. So we have a family so to speak, our night was taken up.

[00:27:58] **Fishel Goldig:** We're now at the corner of Jeanne-Mance and Mont-Royal. The Y operated here until 1963, when it relocated to the Cote-des-Neiges neighbourhood. Although the building is now subdivided into condos, there are still some signs of its original use. The pool where Paul played water polo remains in the basement with its original tiles intact. It can be spotted through the ground floor windows, located right next to the door, just around the corner on Jeanne-Mance.

[00:28:37] Once you are ready, head back towards the park. Wait for the lights to indicate that it is safe to cross Mont-Royal Avenue and wait for me on the other side. In the meantime, George is going to tell you about the important role the Y played in his life. It's a long story, so take your time getting back to the park if you are still trying to get a glimpse of the pool.

[00:29:04] **George Reinitz:** This is where I grew up practically, at the YMHA. I met original Canadians and that's where I started to speak English. Working out in the gym, we were all shtarkers, you know, who's stronger, who can lift bigger weight, and so on. I was pretty strong kid at that time and my partner, who I came in in a ship with, he was wrestling in Hungary. And he said, "Why don't we see the wrestling program?" So we went to the Y, in the basement there was wrestling. It was in a small room. That time was wrestling was done in a mat of canvas. So every time you wrestle, you're take all the skin off your face [laughs] and your knees. And um right away I liked it. I say, I liked the idea of using your head, moves, strength, and competition and there was a camaraderie. I was a very angry, frustrated kid, you know, what I went through, losing my parents and how they killed them and I'm still frustrated. I still can't accept what happened.

And um I had a few fights, because um, because of being a Jew, you know. And then I said, I'd better stop because I was too dangerous. And this really helped me tremendously because all that frustration, all the fighting, changed with wrestling. If I am frustrated, I can let it out in sports. And I would say that this sport, it really changed my life.

[00:30:58] **Fishel Goldig:** You should be across Mont-Royal, standing next to the park. Turn to look back up to the top of the old YMHA building. From this vantage point, you can see the original inscription engraved in the stone: Young Men's Hebrew Association. When you are ready, enter the park and find a seat on the park benches just ahead. We'll be resting here for a few minutes before moving on.

[00:31:26] Fletcher's Field was once an important gathering place for the Jewish community.

[00:31:33] **Ted Bolgar:** It was a very busy place. There were several tennis courts and a soccer field. Usually during the week they had some games, Sundays especially it was full with people. That used to be the hangout place, mostly Jews and mostly newcomers. You know there was three different categories in Montreal. The newcomers, like us, were called the greeners. Those who came earlier, the gels or the yellows. Those who came before the war, they were the regulars. Any good soccer player, made no difference, whether it was green, yellow, or whatever, were right away accepted. The rest of us it's a different story. I had very nice memories about Fletcher's Field. I usually came in the evening because my girlfriend lived on Clark Street, over there. This was the only private place you could come with your girlfriend. Went usually to the other side, it, more privacy.

[00:32:41] **Fishel Goldig:** I remember as a shy youngster approaching the guys playing soccer on Fletcher's Field. I didn't speak a word of English, so I asked in Yiddish: "*Ken ikh shpilt mit aykh?*" "Can I join in the game?" The goalie answered: "Sure!" But I didn't know what sure meant! So I was standing there wondering, "Did he just invite me to play?" When the ball finally came to me by chance, I kicked it back. After that I was part of the team!

[00:33:15] It's time to continue. Stand up and walk along the path to the far corner of the park, walking away from the mountain. You'll pass fenced-off tennis courts, beyond which the path will veer off towards the right, revealing a lone bench just past the curve in the path. This is our next meeting point.

[00:33:40] Here is Tommy telling a story about one memorable afternoon in Fletcher's Field.

[00:33:48] **Tommy Strasser:** When the Jewish team was playing, we always used to go and watch it of course. So one day, when we were watching the game—there were several hundred spectators—and all of a sudden a brawl happened. Somebody recognized a kapo. A kapo was a overseer, if you wish, in concentration camps. They were the ones who were in charge of, let's say, of a barrack, and they practically were the difference between life and death, you know, because they were often, I mean oftentimes they were Jewish, and they often beat their own you know co-religionists. So oftentimes, you know, they did it because they enjoyed it, oftentimes they did it because they were forced to do it, because it was a question of live or die, I mean, you know, if they didn't do it, they were punished. So, somebody recognized one of these kapos that was in charge of him, and he identified him, and all of a sudden, dozens of people started beating him,

they beat the hell out of him, till eventually I think the cops came or something and they took him away. So that was one occasion you know that I remember vividly.

[00:35:12] **Fishel Goldig:** Do you see the bench up ahead, just beyond where the path turns off to the right? Take a seat on that bench and spin around to look behind you. Directly across Esplanade Avenue, you will see a large, sand-coloured building with a single pillar to the left of the glass doors, with a sign that reads Compagnie Marie Chouinard.

[00:35:41] The building is the former site of the Jewish Public Library, originally known as the *Yiddisheh Folks Bibliothek*. The library opened its doors here in 1953, moving from its former location in a three-story mansion, further down Esplanade Avenue. Here is a recording from the opening ceremony of the new JPL, which took place right here on October 14, 1953.

[00:36:12] **Archival Recording:** We know that you will join us in carrying on actively the work of the *Folks Bibliothek* as it has carried on for the past forty years. Except now we have the room, we have the shelves, and this is not merely an institution for distributing books. From its very inception, it is a, a cultural institution, we are interested in adult education. Let this be the symbolic start for future activities and when some of us are getting older, the young will come and carry on. Thank you very, very much. And again ... Now, "God Save the Queen"...

[00:37:06] **Musia Schwartz:** They were a beacon. You came when you didn't know the language. They had Polish books, they had German books, they had Russian books. And there was a woman there who was really persecuting me, why I don't read Yiddish. I say, "I don't know how." "So learn!" I say, "I have to learn English now." And one day she said to me, "I know that you turn your nose up at everything in the Jewish library," she says, "but there is a lecturer that we have now that even, you just go to one lecture, even you won't turn your nose up at him." And that was Irving Layton. And that began a fifty-year-old friendship. And that's where I met my husband. He claims to be the matchmaker.

[00:37:57] **Fishel Goldig:** The JPL hosted lectures, political debates, and English and French language classes for new immigrants. It was also the birthplace of a Yiddish theatre group, which still performs today at the Segal Centre, Canada's first and only Yiddish Theatre. I have had the privilege of being a member of this group since 1971. For Paul too, the library opened up a whole new world.

[00:38:29] **Paul Herczeg:** I spent a lot of time in the library. That was my second home. And I read magazines, the newspapers because they told me, "You read the papers, you learn English" and more and more I understood. So I got the more interested in politics and what's happening in the world. And then I got my second obsession: the books! [Laughs]

[00:38:52] **Fishel Goldig:** Stand up from the bench and turn left to continue walking along the asphalt path, watching out for bikes that share the way. We're walking alongside Esplanade Avenue and to our right are the fenced-off tennis courts. We'll continue walking until we come to a crossroads. It's also where the fence of the tennis courts comes to an end. Wait for me there.

[00:39:20] **Renata Zajdman:** At that time already I met some people which were also refugees and so on. So once in a week we would meet in the library. And I got myself a, you know,

reputation there I'm intellectual because I had only one pair of shoes, those little pumps, and already there were holes in them, it was winter. So I would stuff them with newspapers. So I, I was embarrassed, everybody was wearing boots, I would come to the library first, you know, sit there. So they knew always see me in the library [Laughs] because of my shoes! I was embarrassed they should see that I am wearing that one pair of dirty, torn shoes, that's all I had! It's just that I knew somebody to talk to once in a while, you know. As a matter of fact one of the people recommended me to that factory, that's how I got the job, and at Steinberg's yeah, thanks to people which I met in the library. That was my first network, my first contacts.

[00:40:15] **Fishel Goldig:** Up ahead where the fence comes to an end, the pathway will split off. Stop when you arrive at the crossroads and wait for further instructions.

[00:40:28] The title of this tour takes its name from a 1949 publication that nicknamed this walkway *Refugee Boulevard*. It was a popular gathering place for Jewish immigrants who frequented the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, or JIAS for short, which operated a couple of blocks further down Esplanade Avenue. In the years following the war, JIAS provided integration services and helped newcomers find places to live. Here is an excerpt from the journal describing this place in 1949:

[00:41:09] **Zelda Abramson:** "... renamed 'Refugee Boulevard' for the large number of newcomers who on Sunday mornings fill it in such large numbers that it looks like an open-air mass meeting. The plain fact is that these people, in the words of one cop who was called by a frightened tenant, 'are very orderly, only there are so many of them all over the street that an oncoming automobile may well injure some of them.' ... In the winter, JIAS offices and corridors are jam-packed with milling humanity ... As soon as the first signs of spring appear, the mass moves outside and fills the streets until such time as the wet ground of the park is dried by the sun. Then the park is occupied, and they stay in that section of the park until 1PM when the offices of JIAS close on Sundays. They stand in groups and talk in many languages. And they cover a million and one subjects ..."

[00:42:10] **Fishel Goldig:** Ahead, the path splits off in a number of directions. Here, Esplanade Avenue intersects with Marie-Anne Street. We're going to be turning left to cross Esplanade to begin walking down Marie-Anne, along the sidewalk on the further side. The first street you'll come to is St. Urbain. Wait for my voice before crossing.

[00:42:39] Survivors' integration was not easy. Canadian Jews provided many essential services to help newcomers settle. However, many of us felt excluded from Canadian Jewish society, particularly when it came to dating. We were viewed as too poor, too different, and too foreign. For both George and Tommy, dating was complicated during this period.

[00:43:10] **Tommy Strasser:** They felt the newcomers they don't know beans, you know, they're ignoramuses, you know. So there was like rules, you know. I had a lesson, from one of the girls, you know, where they explained, that the first date you just walk and talk, OK. The second date you're already allowed to hold hands. The third date you're allowed to put your arm around her, you know. The fourth date or maybe the fifth, you're allowed to kiss.

[00:43:41] **George Reinitz:** The Jewish girls, they were afraid of us. They says the newcomers

are very aggressive and they uh shied away from us. So we went to nightclubs of course looking for girls all the time. And we were starting to mix with French girls. It was the thing to have French girlfriends. I met them at a factory like where I worked in a factory and at lunchtime we used to eat together and they said: "I wanted to get a job at Eaton's but I cannot get it because I don't speak English enough." They made friends with us because we already spoke English. We tried to learn French also but um French is a hard language to learn for a Hungarian tongue. [Laughs]

[00:44:24] **Fishel Goldig:** You've now reached St. Urbain. When you see a walk signal, cross and continue walking until you reach the next intersection. Here Renata tells a very different story about what social life was like in her adopted city.

[00:44:44] **Renata Zajdman:** Yeah some refugee family on Hutchinson. They were renting out rooms. I had a little room there, but I was staying in my room. And uh on Sunday I was very alone, so I would pretend that I am going to see some friends, I was sitting and watching movies. I would go from one movie to another. That's how I learned English. And that's it, that was with the Sundays when I had a day off. And then my sister came three years later. She came with her little boy and then she got pregnant with another child so I took a lot on myself. But she wasn't very happy. I didn't know at the time the expression "a battered woman." She was. But the situation was so bad that I, I just couldn't take it, and I couldn't help her too much. She was getting very depressed. Her war never ended. So I didn't have too much of a social life, not at all.

[00:45:38] **Fishel Goldig:** Cross the next street, Clark Avenue, when it is safe to do so. If you look up ahead on the left side of the street, you will see a sign for Schreter's, a family-owned clothing store that is near and dear to many survivors' hearts. Although newcomers felt ostracized by the attitudes that some Canadian Jews held towards them, Schreter's is a place that stands out for the generosity and warmth that many experienced there. Schreter's moved to this location in 1955 following a fire that destroyed the original store located further south, down St. Lawrence. Let's listen to Paul, Ted, and George reminisce about what Schreter's meant to them. Stop once you arrive at St. Lawrence Boulevard.

[00:46:34] **Paul Herczeg:** When we were at the Baron de Hirsch Institute, they took us to a clothing store, the Schreter's. And Joe Schreter, was also Czech-Hungarian, told us, "Guys," the first what we bought, the Jewish Congress paid for it. Very interesting that we were about twenty guys, friends, when we met on Sundays to go somewhere, we each used the same suits practically. [Laughs] I've got pictures, I can tell you, the same grey suits we had [laughs], like a uniform! Joe told us, "Whenever you need anything, come back, don't worry about it! We don't have the money, we pay us later." And we did!

[00:47:17] **Ted Bolgar:** Usually on Sunday afternoon some people came and took us out of the uh place where we lived. One of them was Schreter. It was terrific because he spoke Hungarian and that's what we spoke. Anyway they took us to get an ice cream and he was talking to us, talking to us, then he said: "I have one advice to you guys: Buy real estate." Now the problem was we had no idea what real estate was. Also our allowance was three dollars a week, so it was way above our head.

[00:48:00] **George Reinitz:** We were told that you go to Mr. Schreter on St. Lawrence Boulevard and he will dress you up. I asked him, "What I owe you, and so on." And he said, "No. You just

come back when you can afford it.” It was a very nice gesture of Mr. Schreter, who treated us very nicely and it sort of give us a different outlook of giving because we were not used to that.

[00:48:35] **Fishel Goldig:** You should now be at the corner of St. Lawrence Boulevard and Marie-Anne. When you see a walk signal, cross St. Lawrence. We’ll make a brief stop inside Parc du Portugal just on the other side of the intersection, to the right.

[00:48:53] Although we were very thankful for being allowed to come to Canada, we still experienced antisemitism here too. Since we were used to so much worse, this was not very concerning at the time. What was more hurtful for us was the way we were treated by the local Jewish community, which had no interest in hearing our survival stories. We were often treated with aversion and suspicion by our own people! I remember in the locker room after soccer practice, my friends and I being treated like we had a disease. The Canadian players would never change near us, instead hurling insults and calling us “greeners,” or “greenhorns,” or “mockies.” Tommy, Renata, and George have difficult memories from this period too.

[00:49:51] **Renata Zajdman:** And I was working as a domestic for a family, a Jewish family. But actually they came from Russia so I could talk to them. I wasn’t much older than their own daughter who treated me like garbage. Her friends would come and they said “Who’s that?” “Oh, that’s our maid.” I was completely isolated working there as a domestic. Was not a nice experience. That lady asked me one day: “You are such a pretty, young woman, I wonder how you survive? You probably flirted with the Germans, and I understand, it was the war.” So that was the attitude. If you survived, then you are scum. If you didn’t, you’re a victim, and that’s it. And that was the attitude of Canadians. They just didn’t have imagination. They didn’t understand. I survived because I was lucky, people helped me, and my own courage. So that’s why we didn’t talk.

[00:50:39] **George Reinitz:** In the beginning we didn’t want to talk about it too much, and people, somehow I felt they didn’t care! They were not that interested. I don’t know if they knew about it or they’re just not interested. I talked about it with my friends too, I says: “How come they’re not interested?” Well because they don’t know what hunger is. They never experienced hunger and freezing and beating and so on, so it’s, it’s not in their system. And it’s in our system. Among us, survivors, there is not much dialogue going on without talking about the Holocaust. We can have lunch and talk about family or business and then we say, “Hey, remember in Auschwitz, you know, the soup was, how it was?” All of a sudden, you know, it doesn’t go away.

[00:51:29] **Tommy Strasser:** If and when people were talking about their experience or something, when people were saying, let’s say, that well we were fighting for a piece of bread crumb, so you know the uh, the Canadians, they would say to us, “You know we also had a little bit ah hard, you know, like uh, we didn’t have butter to put on our bread.” You know so that created also a resentment. “Eh, big deal, you didn’t have no butter, we didn’t have bread!” [Laughs] You know, so these, these are little incidents you know, that actually created animosity for both sides.

[00:52:11] **Fishel Goldig:** It’s now time to leave the park. Return to St. Lawrence Boulevard, where you’ll turn left to head south, crossing Vallières Street. Like Park Avenue, St. Lawrence Boulevard, which was known as the Main, was a busy thoroughfare with a host of Jewish businesses. Here is how George describes this street.

[00:52:35] **George Reinitz:** It was dark. You know it was very, very dark. Cold. I remember the cold in the winter. And the streetcar was banging, you know, it was, it was a ring when it comes by. It was, it was ringing and it used bother me, that streetcar would. Um, a street of a lot of little shops, little, little shops, selling everything, you know. You can buy everything within a block. There was hardware store, even was a store there that was selling tombstones. Of course Schwartz's was there. Moishe's was there, still there. It's not the same but um a lot of tailor shops, Union Gas Credit. There was not much action, because action was in the market.

[00:53:28] **Fishel Goldig:** The market George is referring to is Rachel Market, the site which we'll be coming to in a few moments. Stop when you arrive at the next intersection, at Rachel Street. In that last clip, George also mentioned Moishe's, the famous steakhouse. Here Tommy will talk about working there and then Paul will recount his experience working at the Bucharest, a Jewish restaurant also on St. Lawrence Boulevard.

[00:54:00] **Tommy Strasser:** I started off as a bus boy. From bus boy I was promoted to waiter but as a waiter, seeing that I was the youngest one, I got of course the worst station you know, because people didn't like to be there because a lot of traffic, you know, everyone was around there so I was always the last one to get customers to serve. So they had a little side room where we went and sat while we were waiting for the guests. But it was dark, you know they didn't put the lights on. So one Saturday night I was sitting and waiting for uh customers to arrive, nobody came, and in the interim I fell asleep. And, when they sat some customers down at my tables, I wasn't there! So they started looking for me. So the manager came into the room and saw me sleeping there, he says, "You sleeping here, go home and sleep at home!" That was it. That was my career at Moishe's.

[00:55:05] **Paul Herczeg:** Schwartz's existed at that time, Moishe's existed, and the Bucharest, which is another restaurant, just across from Moishe's [inaudible], and they had a beautiful steak restaurant. It's a little bit lower in price than Moishe's. Moishe's was already out of our budget. But we went to the Bucharest, and they had two floors where they had parties: weddings, bar mitzvahs, and different affairs. So, on the weekend, I used to go and work there to make money. And for about ten years I worked there. So I remember fondly about this restaurant because that's where I spent my youth.

[00:55:52] **Fishel Goldig:** You should now be on the corner of St. Lawrence and Rachel. Nearby, you will see a historical marker with photographs and a map indicating that this park was the former site of the Rachel Market, officially called Marché Saint-Jean-Baptiste. You will return to this historical marker in a moment, but in the meantime I invite you to stroll through the park, imagining the market as George describes his memory of it.

[00:56:26] **George Reinitz:** The market was on Rachel and St. Lawrence. It was fun to go to the market early in the morning. That's where people went. That was the shopping. That's where they bought everything. People are handling and, and bargaining and the display was very, very nice. Farmers used to really bring in their product early in the morning, that I remember, setting up their uh kiosk and they, you know, uh Jewish people used to go and shop there, buy the chickens for Saturday. I know the butcher was Jewish in the market. I remember the butcher, yes he was, he was a fun guy. Yeah but the *shaychet* used to go and cut the chicken neck and, and uh it's kosher.

[00:57:19] **Fishel Goldig:** I remember going to Rachel market with my mother to visit that *shaychet*, who would perform the ritual necessary to make the meat kosher. She would buy live chickens, take them down to the *shaychet*, and then hang them on a wall nearby, which was designated for plucking the feathers. She also bought live fish from the market, which she would leave to swim around the filled bathtub right until the very last moment, so they would be fresh for the Sabbath.

[00:57:56] In this next part of the walk, we will hear about the informal social clubs that survivors established to meet people, give and receive advice, and just have fun. These clubs brought together survivors who shared similar trajectories when coming to Canada. They also gave them a network of solidarity to overcome the discrimination they felt from local communities.

[00:58:30] **Ted Bolgar:** New World Club. Every Sunday, we had a pianist, we were dancing there and sixty to seventy-five percent of us married with girls from this club. I married my wife also through this club. All those who married outside, they married later. By then they establish themselves in a business or somewhere, they knew the language, it was a different story.

[00:59:00] **George Reinitz:** We had a club called the 48-ers. The 48-ers club had meetings and even sometime in the summer we had a, went out picnicking, the 48-ers, and uh every year we had a new year's party. What we had, not only only survivors, not only newcomers, the club was open to have, you can bring a girlfriend, you can bring a boyfriend. So it was not restricted. [Laughs] ... But most of the girls who came, it was like me, I was alone and I liked the idea of being part of a family. A lot of my friends married also newcomers but I say, I wanted to marry more into a Canadian life because I wanted to belong to a family. So my wife was born here, her mother was born here. So Eleanor was at the party and I had a date and my date had to be home early, she had a curfew by her mother [laughs]. So I came back to the party and Eleanor's date was drunk. I took her home. And that's how the whole thing started. It developed as usual and I got married about a year and a half later.

[01:00:20] **Fishel Goldig:** For most survivors, marriage was an important part of getting settled, rebuilding their lives, and moving forward. Weddings were often small and informal.

[01:00:33] Make your way back now to the historical marker I pointed out earlier, at the corner of Rachel. From there we'll continue our walk down St. Lawrence, crossing Rachel Street.

[01:00:48] **Ted Bolgar:** My best friend Paul Herzceg, Pauly, was married in the Bucharest Restaurant, that was the cheapest. And, we were there all, everything ready, except we found out that the piano was a floor below. So, four of us took off our jackets and one, step by step, managed to get the piano up there. It was hard work. When we were finished, I put on my jacket and my wife and I led Pauly to the *chuppah*. And later on I also had the honour of cutting the uh *challah*, which meant Paul had no relatives, have no family at all. We were the closest. And we were really like brothers. Since we had no real family, every one of us was part of the family. And despite how many years now, seventy or eighty, and we all have our own families, still, Paul and I are like brothers.

[01:02:08] **Musia Schwartz:** Then I met my husband. I met some other boys in between but I met my husband and we got married in 1950 in December. The people I lived with was like family.

And um made some sandwiches. The rabbi I don't think wanted to charge. His wife wanted to kill him for it. She didn't like that idea that he was so charitable there, because a couple of people came from New York and they were dressed well and they looked like people who could afford, so she says: "You, you think with your charity, you could have charged them." But there were just, I don't know, twenty people. But there was a wedding and a *chuppah* and uh, uh, *l'chaim*. And gradually things began to sound normal enough that I wanted to have my own place. Put a nail in and hang a picture. And as soon as we could afford the food anyhow, we wanted to have a baby. And now of course the nest is empty and has been for some time but I have two wonderful kids.

[01:03:08] **Fishel Goldig:** It is important to point out that most survivors only lived in this neighbourhood for a short period of time. As they established themselves, married, and had children, they moved to other parts of the city. And yet, many remain nostalgic, waxing poetic about a time when they were young and a place that offered them freedom.

[01:03:32] This stretch of St. Lawrence Boulevard has seen successive waves of immigrants pass through its corridors, and many of them tell stories that are similar to the ones you just heard. They detail what it was like to start from scratch, discover community, seek joy, and cope with adversity. These are experiences that new immigrants and refugees continue to live today. They are an essential part of the character of this city.

[01:04:06] We are now approaching the end of this tour. Once you reach Duluth, please cross St. Lawrence Boulevard when it is safe to do so. You will find yourself at the Museum of Jewish Montreal, located at 4040 St. Lawrence. If you'd like to continue your exploration, the museum has more walking tours that share Jewish stories of this city.

[01:04:33] We close with Tommy's reflections on what this time in his life meant to him.

[01:04:39] **Tommy Strasser:** Even after I moved, you know, I often times came down to Fletcher's Field, you know, just to be around the old neighborhood. And again, all my shopping, you know, whatever I did food wise, it was always done on St. Lawrence. The companionship, companionships that I formed during those times, you know, were very telling. And, like I said, I, I assimilated very fast. You know, like I said, with the club, playing soccer, you know, having all the nightclubs and you know the nightlife and all that, especially at my age, you know that was a telling factor. It was a happy times. I was young. I had no, no problems, no worries, no sicknesses, no financial obligations. Nothing but fun.

[01:05:52] **Fishel Goldig:** On behalf of Ted Bolgar, Paul Herczeg, George Reinitz, Tommy Strasser, Musia Schwartz, Renata Zajdman, and I, Fishel Goldig, would like to thank you for spending time with our stories. If you are interested in listening to the full interviews from which this audio tour was created, they can be found at the Montreal Holocaust Museum.

[01:06:17] *Refugee Boulevard* was developed by researchers at Dawson College and Saint Paul University, in collaboration with the Montreal Holocaust Museum. It was generously funded by these institutions as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Production by Philip Lichti.

[01:06:41] We are grateful to the Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal, for granting us

permission to use various audio recordings. Music arranged and performed by Murathan Akordeon and Biagio Farina, accordion player and singer from Montreal.