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**Interviewer: Benjamin Williams**

**Interviewee: Gerald Levin**

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**BEN: This is Ben Williams interviewing Gerald Levin on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014 as part of the Stepping Into Diversity project. The interview is taking place at Garnethill Synagogue. Gerald, could you start by spelling your name, please?**

*GERALD: It's Levin, L-E-V-I-N. Gerald Levin.*

**BEN: Thank you. And could you tell us where and when you were born?**

*GERALD: I was born in Glasgow and I was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1932.*

**BEN: And what are some of your earliest childhood memories?**

*GERALD: My earliest memories were [pauses] starting school in Glasgow, going to a primary school or nursery school. I went to Alma Road Academy, which was a local school in Pollokshields, where we lived. And I can remember joining the cubs and scouts, just simply growing up in Glasgow around quite a large Jewish community in Pollokshields. So I had quite a lot of friends and I used to go to (0:01:29:9 s.l Hyrah), that's a Jewish Sunday school, which was held in a synagogue in Pollokshields. I came to Garnethill when I was a bit older. I used to come midweek on a Wednesday and on a Sunday, but that was when I was starting to grow up in Glasgow. We were near tennis courts at Titwood Tennis Club, so me and my... I had one brother, he's younger than me, so we'd play tennis, and we also had a cricket field near us – Clydesdale Cricket Club, so both of us played cricket there. I've certainly got quite vivid memories of the Second World War, which did in many ways affect us as a family because there were several occasions where we were compulsorily evacuated. I was evacuated at one time to Seamill. I'd been to Carluke with the school, Rothesay was another place we'd gone to, because at that time there was quite a lot of activity, bombing in Glasgow. On one occasion when a German aircraft was being chased by fighters and it dropped a very large bomb not very far from where I lived and destroyed an entire tenement in Shawlands, and everybody involved there was killed. So it sort of brought home to us that it could happen anywhere at any time because the Germans were determined to try to knock out the ship-building industry in Glasgow, and also the sugar refineries in Greenock, and also there was the Singer Sewing Machine Company in Clydebank which made guns, rifles, so there was a lot of activity due to the war effort in the area. Therefore, when the Germans were bombing it, we were in the front line of it. We had a barrage balloon unit at Clydesdale Cricket Club. These were the balloons they put up to deter the planes from flying too low, because if they got caught up in the wires, it'd bring the plane down. And there was another one in a park just about 500 yards from the house, called Maxwell Park. There was another one there. So, I mean, it was quite*



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*obvious there was a lot of activity in the area. So these were vivid memories, and of course the war was a long time. It was five years and it was a bit scary. You never knew which way the whole thing was going to go. The Germans had advanced after Dunkirk right up to the Channel. They could have gone either way but as it happens they decided to go towards Russia and not towards England, so things could have been a lot different than they are today.*

**BEN: How old were you when the First World War... Sorry, the Second World War started?**

*GERALD: Started? Um... I was seven.*

**BEN: And is there a particular day... You mentioned the five year period was a long period. Is there a particular day that stands out in your memory from that period?**

*GERALD: I think the thing that stands out in your memory is when it ended. There was such a relief, and we all thought, "That's good, that's everything finished." But it took quite a while to end, to draw itself together. Rationing went on for many years after the end of the war. It certainly improved a bit but we still had rationing, food rationing, so it was still very difficult. Obviously there was a lot of soldiers coming back from the front, and they were being demobbed and they were all over the place. Of course, the war in the Far East with Japan was still on. It didn't stop until a year afterwards. So I remember the end of that as well, with the dropping of the atomic bombs, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But they were quite frightening times.*

**BEN: You mentioned a couple of times how scary it obviously was. How much of it made sense to you at that age? How much could you understand of what was going on?**

*GERALD: Well, one couldn't really understand a great deal because obviously information was very sparse as to what was happening. In times like these, the Government just told you what they wanted to tell you. I wouldn't say it was lies but they avoided telling you everything so you didn't know what was happening. If we were involved in some military action and they said the losses were heavy, you didn't exactly know how heavy. Was it 500 or 5,000 men died? We didn't know these things. There were things like when they tried to capture Arnhem. They just said that the activities had been unsuccessful. So you really didn't know what was happening. It was a bit scary. And it broke the family up, because usually your father was in the army or in the forces, or... my father was too old to join up for the Second World War. He had to help out at home. He was a fire warden. He had his business in town and he also was an auxiliary conductor on the tram. He was given these jobs to do so he had to be here, so we had to leave him. We went away to Rothesay or somewhere. If we saw him once a month we were lucky, if he could get away. Other than that, he had to remain in Glasgow.*

**BEN: And apart from your father, when you were evacuated, was the rest of your family kept together or were you sent to different places?**

*GERALD: Well, usually my mother came as well. When they evacuated the school there was me and my brother and my mother came. When we went to Seamill and Rothesay, and another place we went was Largs, and my mother came on two occasions. And,*



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*invariably, if she wasn't with us initially, she joined us.*

**BEN: And it was just one sibling you had?**

*GERALD: Yes. Yes, one brother.*

**BEN: And was he older?**

*GERALD: He was younger. He was two and a half years younger than me. But he wasn't terribly well. He suffered from asthma and impetigo, a skin infection. The two seemed to go together. So there were certain places that seemed to affect him worse than others. I'm told it's the spores from the seaweed that affect you if you've got asthma, so the seaside, although we went to Largs and Rothesay, were not the best places to go. Usually his condition wasn't very good. We'd see it deteriorate a bit in these areas. But we couldn't pick and choose. We had to go wherever we could, wherever we could find somewhere to stay. But a lot of it I think was panic-driven. If it was quiet and there wasn't any activity from enemy action, then people just settled back into some kind of a routine at home. But as soon as something started... there were raids on the shipyards, then people got frightened and moved out of the city again.*

**BEN: What was your feeling of going to those places? Was there a sense of relief in any way, or was it the fact that you just wanted to be back at home?**

*GERALD: When we went there?*

**BEN: Yes.**

*GERALD: Well, there was a certain amount of relief because obviously there wasn't the same amount of activity but there was always something happening. I can remember that when we were in Largs I woke up one morning to go to school and the streets were just full of people and vans, lorries, horses and carts, and apparently this was the night the Germans bombed Clydebank and they had set fire to part of the sugar refinery and a lot of the town was devastated and the people left. They were evacuated out anywhere and a lot of them came to Largs because it was as far away as they could get. They were sleeping out in tents on the seashore. So that was total disruption. That was quite frightening. You thought if it had come to this, where is this going to end? What's going to happen next?*

**BEN: And did that include the wintertime that people were out in tents? Can you remember what time of year it was?**

*GERALD: No, I can't remember what time of the year it was. I don't think it was wintertime. All I can remember is that the Salvation Army played a large part in keeping these people going. They gave them food. They had nothing. They just took what they could and ran, got out. As I said, they came even in horses and carts. You can imagine coming all the way from Clydebank to Largs in a horse and cart. It would've taken all night. And it did.*

**BEN: Is that how you travelled there?**

*GERALD: No. We came by bus. We came from Glasgow by bus. But we didn't come, you*



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*know, when... in a state of panic because there was bombing. We just came because things were beginning to deteriorate and you got a bit nervous. Some people had shelters in their gardens which probably would have helped, whereas we had quite a big cellar in our house, so we would be there if there was bombing. But I didn't think it was very secure. If the house had been hit... if we had survived, you'd have had to wait till they dug you out. So it wasn't the best idea, but, as I say, some people had these air-raid shelters, they called them. They weren't much good, but providing there wasn't a direct hit you would probably survive. It was just caused by fear of the unknown. If there was enemy action, people would say, "It's going to get worse." They didn't know but some people thought it could. You got out or you left.*

**BEN: What's the longest period of time you were in Rothesay or Largs?**

*GERALD: I think we were about over six months in Largs. That was the longest, although we were officially evacuated out to Carluke by the school, they didn't provide much in the way of facilities. We were boarded out. We didn't have any particular place to stay. We were just refugees. We all arrived by train and we were herded into church halls. People said, "I've got some room, I can take these four, I'll take these two." It was very nice of them. And that's how we were split up. They were supposed to open the school but they never did, and I reckon we were there about three or four weeks. That was it, we decided to come home. Things had quietened down and the facilities were no good. We felt we were putting people to a lot of trouble for nothing.*

**BEN: So it sounds like these places of worship would have had quite a significant role in supporting displaced people at that time. Is that fair to say?**

*GERALD: What, churches?*

**BEN: Yes.**

*GERALD: Yes. They used church halls to congregate people, to move a school of five or six hundred children, plus one parent with them. They gave you a badge with your name on it and your age. A pink one for a girl, a blue one for a boy. Actually, I've given them to the archives. I still kept it. It was sewn onto your coat so they were able to identify you. But, yes, the churches certainly helped, the ministers as well. They helped to get these people placed somewhere so they had somewhere to stay. They certainly weren't going to stay in the church hall.*

**BEN: So, did people go to families?**

*GERALD: Yes. We were given, I remember, a box of emergency rations, which we had to give to the people we were going to stay with to help out with the food allowance that they got because... We still had our ration books but you had to register with the grocer and the butcher, which we weren't there long enough to do all these things. That's another reason why we came back.*

**BEN: And when you were there for the six-month period, was that with one family?**

*GERALD: Yes. Yes, in that case. Well, the six-month period was in Largs and what had happened there was we actually stayed with a family for a couple of weeks and then we*



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*rented a house, a small house that was available. We took the house and that's why we stayed. And I actually went to school, higher grade school, in Largs. So that was the longest we were away. I didn't go to school in Carluke, I didn't go to school in Rothesay either. Just in Largs. We were there the longest.*

**BEN: And how many of your friends at that time would have been from the Jewish faith?**

*GERALD: [pauses] I can't give you an approximate number but there was... Certainly in Largs there was quite a large Jewish community. Some of them had gone down there at the outbreak of the war in 1939, so by 1941-42 there was quite a lot of people there. I would say there could have been several hundred. I don't think... Certainly Carluke there was just the school went there. There was just my pals, so hardly any were there. Not many. Rothesay, no, not many either, but we had friends that lived there and that was why we went there, but they weren't Jewish friends. I don't think there were many Jews living in Rothesay. But Largs, particularly, was a popular venue, put it that way. I think a lot of people used to go for the day to Largs anyway as a holiday resort, or go for a holiday, so they knew it and felt safe there. There was no industry there, nothing to attract enemy action.*

**BEN: Was that something you would have been conscious of at the time, of your faith, and of any feelings of difference between other young people?**

*GERALD: [pauses] Not particularly, no. There was the religious side of it didn't enter into it a great deal. I must admit there were some type of services when it came to the Passover or the New Year, but I wouldn't say they actually organized services on a regular basis on a Saturday. Now, there was quite a large community in a place called Ayr. There was quite a lot of people evacuated to Ayr and to Prestwick. And, believe it or not, I think the attraction down there was that there was a hotel that was owned by Jews called Invercloy. People who came to this synagogue by the name of Warrens, they owned it, and it had been going since the 1930s so it was very popular. A lot of people used to go down there for their holidays and of course it was a kosher hotel, which, as far as Scotland was concerned, was quite a novelty. You didn't find many places, and if you were observant obviously you didn't want to eat non-kosher food, and there you would find it was all kosher, supervised... I supposed it was the rabbinical ministers from Glasgow that would supervise it. So, a lot of people moved over to Ayr. That was the place you could go to get kosher food. They wouldn't necessarily all be able to stay in the hotel, couldn't afford it, but they would maybe rent a house and they would go there for meals. And it would be used as a sort of makeshift synagogue. So there was religious activity, but I wouldn't say there was anything like that anywhere else that I knew of.*

**BEN: Could you describe about the kosher food and the role that that plays in your religion?**

*GERALD: Well, we don't eat pork. And obviously there's been a lot in the news, in the papers and on the television about the killing of animals for Jewish purposes and halal meat. This business of having to... the veterinary people want the animals stunned first. I'm not going to go into all that but that's one of the things. We don't eat shellfish. So the things that crawl about, we don't eat. Also, cloven foot, hooved animals, we don't. With beef - I don't think lamb, but beef - it's only the front end of the animal that's used for human consumption. This dates back to very early days in the Middle East when the*



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*rear of the animal was usually infected because of the heat, because they weren't looked after properly, and therefore wasn't considered clean... clean enough to eat it, so the tradition's gone on since then. In actual fact, if one is a meat eater, the best part of the animal is not used for human consumption. And that's why you get a lot of publicity in the paper that non-Jewish people are consuming kosher meat and they don't know. But the only bit that's kosher is the way it's killed and the fact that they don't eat the rear end of the animal. Anyway, no butcher in their right mind is going to throw away half an animal simply because the front half has been sold and they can't sell the back. So it just goes into the food chain and that's how it works.*

**BEN: So what's different about the way that it's killed?**

*GERALD: Well, they slit its throat and they drain the blood out of it. And that's the difference. And the same happens, I think, with poultry. Rather than pull its neck, they cut its throat. And there is no way of knowing if the animal has suffered at all, even if it's only for five seconds. Which probably it has.*

**BEN: So what is the significance?**

*GERALD: I suppose it's just a ritual way of doing it. I suppose if one reads the Bible and sees that the sacrifices that were made in the temple, that this was the method they used to kill the animals. And it's just gone on from there. But whether it's better health-wise or not, I really wouldn't know. I don't eat a great deal of meat so I'm not sure. I prefer fish to meat. But there's no difference with that, with fish, as long as it's not crawling about the bottom of the sea, like a lobster or shellfish or anything like that, which is not kosher.*

**BEN: So you mentioned cricket as part of one of your early childhood memories. During this period of the war, and particularly through the spells of evacuation, were you and your friends able to continue with games like that? Was there that attempt at a sense of normality amidst what was happening, or was that...?**

*GERALD: Yes. Yes, there was. The school continued in spite of the activities that were going on with the Germans, with bombing. We didn't miss a great deal of school other than when we were evacuated. Certainly we played cricket whenever we could during the summer. We were quite fortunate that we lived in a villa which had a fairly large garden and there was a lawn at the back of the house. If we didn't go down to Clydesdale to play, or couldn't, we would play in the garden. So we did keep up some kind of activity. There was some normality. It was just uncertain from day to day what was going to happen next, and what was happening. So one had to listen to the radio very closely to see what was going on. As I said, we were only told what they wanted to tell you. So we were never quite sure what was happening unfortunately until it happened. But at one time there was a fair amount of activity, in the early '40s there was a lot of activity.*

**BEN: So, did the radio play quite a big role?**

*GERALD: Yes, Oh, yes. That kept you going, kept you up to date with all the news. Other than that, it was just guesswork, because the soldiers, any of them that came home on leave, were not allowed, or were never able to disclose what they were doing and where*



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*they were doing it, so you didn't know what was going on.*

**BEN: Was there a particular time of day that you'd gather round to hear the radio?**

*GERALD: Usually in the early evening, say between probably five and six o'clock or something like that. You'd get the news so you'd all listen to it. And, of course, there was rationing with everything, so there was rationing with paper, and therefore the newspapers were very much smaller, so there was less news printed on them so you didn't know much from that either.*

**BEN: Was there a particular paper that you remember your family having?**

*GERALD: Er, well, there was the Daily Express, the Daily Record. That was a paper that was bought a lot in Glasgow, very much a Glasgow paper. There was in the evening the Evening Times and there was also a paper called the Citizen, the Evening Citizen. So these were papers you could buy but you didn't get a great deal of news out of them. And there certainly was no point in buying all of them because it was much of a muchness when you got the same news in each one. And they weren't all that big; they didn't have 30 or 40 pages in them like you get today. You'd be lucky if you got about four.*

**BEN: What else was broadcast on the radio alongside the news?**

*GERALD: [pauses] Well, there was obviously a lot to do with... Workers' Playtime – music people working in factories would listen to. There was quite a lot of that. I suppose it's propaganda, but there was quite a lot of that going on. And, at that time, of course, I was young, younger, so it was mainly children's programmes, Children's Hour that was on from five o'clock that I used to listen to, but generally the programmes... And of course it wasn't until towards the end of the war that some of the programmes like ITMA, a man called Tommy Handley, these sort of things. Much-Binding-in-the-Marsh by Murdoch, was another. These kind of shows came into being but it was much later on towards the end of the war that they were being produced. I think during the war you didn't have very much to laugh at. I don't think these kind of programmes would have been very successful.*

**BEN: And of the music that was played, is there any particular piece of music that really evokes memories of that time, that stands out?**

*GERALD: Well, there was quite a lot of dance music at that time. There was a conductor called Henry Hall and you used to get programmes quite often broadcast with him conducting his orchestra. It was dance music. I think the idea was that to try to keep everybody healthy they had to have exercise and dancing was one way of getting exercise. So there was that, and as I say there was Workers' Playtime where they had music which the workers sang along with, and there was also concert parties which many of the artists who were not in the army made up these concert parties and went round factories in camps putting on shows. It was more like the shows they would put on in Glasgow in the different parks. You know, they had small theatres in the park and they would put on a variety show and have somebody playing an accordion or somebody singing and things like that, so that type of thing was being done.*



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**BEN: Would you go to that with friends or was it a family outing?**

*GERALD: The ones in the park, you'd probably just go with friends. But your family would go as well. Not necessarily all of you. If it was a weekend my father would go because, as I said, I didn't see that much of him during the week, and my mother would be doing things in the house. They used to have concert parties down in Queen's Park where they had a pavilion down there, which, I believe, at this moment is being rebuilt, so they're going to try to recreate it again. And there was also another one, a bandstand in Maxwell Park, so there was a band played. You'd go and sit and listen to that because it was usually volunteers mainly made up of people from the Salvation Army or something because during the war the younger people were in the Army, the Armed Forces.*

**BEN: Do you think these things played a significant role in keeping people going?**

*GERALD: Oh, I think. Let's face, all of these things were just a diversion and that's what everyone needed, because otherwise you would just keep thinking of what was going on or what was happening or what was going to happen. You didn't know it was all supposition but it was fairly nerve-racking, so, yes, it did help, it did help. It was a distraction and I suppose to some extent it cheered you up, even if it was only momentarily. It didn't last very long, till you heard about the next disaster. We were, as you know, we were very dependent for food particularly, and armaments being brought over from America by boat, and the numbers of boats that we lost was unbelievable. They were just sitting ducks for German submarines. So, it was quite upsetting to hear every day of these losses that we were suffering. One wondered what the end result was going to be. Were we actually going to survive, because without it, we weren't. No doubt about it. We couldn't, we couldn't make enough armaments, we didn't have enough food, we couldn't grow enough food, so we got involved with the Americans on this Lease-Lend thing, and we didn't even have enough boats of our own to bring the stuff over. We had to depend on the Americans who were mass producing these ships. So there you are.*

**BEN: At that age did you have a real sense of just how precarious it was?**

*GERALD: I think I was old enough to realise it was pretty precarious. It was probably in some cases the fear of the unknown but I took it seriously enough, but things could get a lot worse.*

**BEN: In terms of the rationing, tell me a little bit how that operated.**

*GERALD: It operated that one was given a weight of meat. You were allowed so many pounds of meat a week each. I think a lot of it was at the discretion of the butcher whether you got beef or you got lamb or the quality of it. The better you knew the man, the better the quality would be. Other than that you had to take what you got. The same thing happened with the grocer's shop. You were allowed a half a pound of tea, a pound of sugar. It was rationed that way. There was a weight and a quantity restriction. I can't remember... I think milk was the same. You got so many pints of milk a day which was either delivered or you could collect it. But it was just milk. In these days it was full fat. Whether that was better for you or not I don't know. That's how it came. But it was all rationed that way. If it was meat or fish, it was all by weight. Groceries was also weight*



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*but packeted. And you got so much. There was no choice in the different manufacturers. It was irrelevant who made the tea or the coffee, the type of coffee you got, you just had to take what you could get.*

**BEN: And would there have been an exchange of items between families?**

*GERALD: Yes. Yes. It was called the 'black market'. If you wanted a tin of pineapple chunks, it would probably cost you about ten shillings, that's 50 pence, which was just ridiculous. You could have bought probably a case of it for that normally, but this was how it worked. A lot of that stuff came into the country for the Americans, the American Army.*

**BEN: You said that the rationing continued for some time after the war.**

*GERALD: Yes, it continued for, I think, several years the end of the war. There was still rationing.*

**BEN: How old were you when the war finished?**

*GERALD: Well, it finished in 1945 so I was 13 when the war finished, so I was bar mitzvah when the war finished, so of course my bar mitzvah was a pretty drab affair. There was no catering facilities, you couldn't really do very much. You probably found that a family would pool their resources and be able to do something between them, but individually you couldn't.*

**BEN: Could you tell us a little bit about the bar mitzvah, and the concept and the role it plays?**

*GERALD: Well, a boy in the Jewish religion becomes a man at 13. He's eligible to take part in the services in the synagogue, and, more importantly, to make up the quorum, the ten, the median to hold the service if somebody is reciting the memorial prayers. You need ten men and the boy makes up one of the ten. He also can do his maftir, the part that he sang or performed for his bar mitzvah, he can do it again. He can do other maftirs if he can learn it, so he can do that. He can also take part in other parts of the service, like holding up the five books of Moses before it's put back into the ark. So he can carry out various duties in the synagogue. And it's a time of celebration so, obviously, there's a reception held at the end of the service on a Saturday for his bar mitzvah. Of course, over the years these things have ended up by being more like wedding, they've got out of hand, and they're very extravagant. So that's basically what a bar mitzvah is. Of course, naturally he gets presents so that's an inducement for him to perform as well as he can to impress his parents and his relatives that he's been conscientious over the last nine months learning this, and he does it as well as he can. So you get personal gifts like... In the old days you got things like prayer books or fountain pens, leather wallets, things like that.*

**BEN: So the war had actually finished by the time that your bar mitzvah took place?**

*GERALD: It had just finished.*

**BEN: But it was the same year.**



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*GERALD: It finished in June and my bar mitzvah was in November. So it had just finished. All the restrictions were still there so it was a pretty basic affair.*

**BEN: And did you then immediately from that point start to take that more active role?**

*GERALD: Um, no. No. I didn't go to the synagogue that often. I used to come... usually with my parents when the festivals were on but I can't say I came every Saturday. I used to go occasionally to the local synagogue in Pollokshields, but apart from that I didn't come here until I probably was in my twenties. I became a more regular visitor or a congregant. See, my father had died when I was 21, so there was a lot of disruption in my life at that time, trying to decide what I was going to do. I'd been at agricultural college and I still had my National Service to do, but I was exempted from that because I was in agriculture. And then when my father died, for compassionate reasons I didn't have to go in to do National Service, although the war was over, so I was able to find myself in my father's business, trying to make a living for my mother and my brother and myself. So that's how my life gradually sorted itself out.*

**BEN: Perhaps if you could tell us a bit more about your parents, if we could maybe go back a bit in time now. What brought your parents first to Glasgow?**

*GERALD: Well, my mother was born in Glasgow. Her parents came from Russia. So my grandfather came over here before the First World War, between 1900 and 1914. I think it was 1909 he came to Glasgow. He obviously brought some of his family with him but my mother was born in Glasgow. So she was born in Glasgow and brought up in Glasgow. My father he came with his father as a three-month-old child from Poland to Dublin, to a place called Inchicore. He was brought up there and went to school in Dublin. And it was only when he was a young man that he started travelling about the country. He stayed with an uncle in Glasgow, and then after that he decided to emigrate to New Zealand, where he was away for I think a year or 18 months, and he worked in the coal mines. When he came back to this country, he decided not to settle in Dublin. He settled in Glasgow and that's where he remained until he died in 1952.*

**BEN: So was it for work that they had first gone to Dublin and then come to Glasgow.**

*GERALD: Well, I think my grandfather had gone to Dublin because his brother lived there. He had gone before him and had established a business, so at least he could go and he could get work. The fact that he had my father with him, well, he was only three months old so he had to take him, he was a baby. So he had to take him with him. So that's why he came. But my father decided to broaden his outlook so he came over here to visit an uncle and help him in his business which had just started, and he liked Glasgow and he stayed on. So that how the family actually came together in Glasgow.*

**BEN: So what part of Glasgow was your mother born in?**

*GERALD: In the Gorbals, Abbotsford Place. Went to school in the Gorbals and eventually went to school at the Hutchesons' Grammar School. She got married when she was 18. My father was considerably older than that. He was nearly 40.*



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**BEN: And was it the Gorbals that your father moved to?**

*GERALD: No, my father lived up here, in the west end, because his friends all lived here and he went to this synagogue, came to this synagogue. This was his local church.*

**BEN: So, do you know what first brought them together, how they met?**

*GERALD: I think somebody introduced them. I think that's how it was. Most of my father's friends were married and he wasn't, obviously. And... over 30 they felt he was getting on and they introduced him and that's how he met my mother. It was on an introduction. I think most marriages in those days were done that way. They probably went out to a dance or something and they would meet other people, and if they hit it off they got married.*

**BEN: How much do you know of the circumstances that led to your mother's family moving to Glasgow?**

*GERALD: Well, I don't. I don't honestly know. I could only imagine it was the threat of the pogroms that brought them over here, that brought all of them over here. They were told to get out of Russia or Poland, and if they didn't they would be called up for the Army, and that was before the Revolution. But the Revolution certainly was coming so they were going to get involved in it one way or the other, and they realised that they weren't soldiers; they were workers and they would just be cannon fodder. They'd put them in as infantry and that would be the end. So they decided to get out anyway, just to save their skin. A lot of them got on ships from the Baltic and they ended up here.*

**BEN: Do you know how long those journeys took?**

*GERALD: I would reckon they would take several weeks. A lot of them of course wanted to go to America. And of course there's always been a myth that when they got off the boat here they said, "Is this America?" and they said, "Yes." But that's rubbish. They didn't have enough money to go to America. They had enough money to come here and that's as far as they got. The idea was that they might be able to get a job here, make enough money and get to America, and some of them did. But the majority of them never did. So they arrived here and they arrived in Glasgow, Liverpool, Leith, Edinburgh, Dundee... And there were communities all over Scotland at that time.*

**BEN: What do you know of how these communities were received when they first arrived?**

*GERALD: I think it was very hard because, first of all, they didn't speak English. So it was very hard. The Russian and the Lithuanian and the Pole could all speak to each other because they spoke Yiddish, but they couldn't speak their own language and they certainly couldn't speak English. So when they arrived here they had no idea what to do. They certainly could work with their hands but they couldn't communicate very well. So they had a pretty rough time of it. And of course gradually then more and more of them arrived so a community emerged from them.*

**BEN: What sort of jobs... You say that they were good with their hand. What types of jobs did they do?**



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*GERALD: They were upholsterers, cabinet makers, tailors, shoe repairers, shoe makers. They didn't do much in the way of repairing; they made shoes. Some of them made hats, but that was probably the people that made the suits. Then, of course, there were people who sold fish, meat, vegetables. They had a couple of cows so they had a dairy. They had all these things that they could all do something different to earn their living. And when they came for example to Glasgow, they opened small workshops, the ones that worked in the furniture trade and they carried on business that way, doing business that way. The others opened shops. So there was a whole community down in the Gorbals of shopkeepers, bakers, bakeries, butchers shops, dairies, fruit shops, everything. People selling religious books, several shops, booksellers that sold prayer books, prayer shawls, various religious attachments, you could call them. At one time, I believe, there was something like 15,000 lived there. This being the only synagogue in Glasgow, they actually came here but they had absolutely nothing in common with the congregation of this synagogue, who originally came from Manchester and London. They were very English, they spoke English, they didn't speak Yiddish, so they couldn't communicate with them, and they were academics. They worked or lectured, or technicians at Glasgow University. Most of them. The rest of the congregation were business people. They were maybe antique dealers or they made picture frames or sold pictures. They had shops, so they were a different type of person altogether. So when the people who eventually settled in the Gorbals came to Glasgow and saw what this was like, this was not for them, they settled in the Gorbals and they took over halls and made them into synagogues and eventually built a couple as well. At one time they had about five in the Gorbals.*

**BEN: And how much interaction was there between these newly arrived communities and the communities that were already living here at the time?**

*GERALD: I don't think there was a great deal of intercommunication. I don't think they got on terribly well at all. There wasn't much activity. There was... antagonistic would be the word to cover it. They didn't get on at all, and they kept themselves to themselves. As I say, they were different... they were academics here and these people were basically peasants.*

**BEN: And had that changed at all by the time that you were born and growing up?**

*GERALD: Oh, yes, yes. As I said, my grandfather, who probably had a workshop when he initially started business had now a factory. When the Second World War broke out, the Government bought these people machinery so that they were able to contribute to the war effort, so they were able to make things that the Army and the Navy and the Air Force needed.*

**BEN: So do you think that that contribution to the war effort was one of the biggest things that broke down the barriers between the communities?**

*GERALD: Yes, I would say so. Obviously they became more affluent. And when the war ended they were in a position to go back and producing what they were producing before the war but far better quality, cheaper and certainly in far greater quantity.*

**BEN: How would you contrast the experience of the communities such as your mother's and father's moving from Russia and Poland to migrant communities**



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**from that part of the world today?**

*GERALD: [pauses] Well, there's not so many barriers now. I think the biggest barrier in those days was the language. They just couldn't speak English, therefore they couldn't communicate. Now, most of the people communicate in this country with foreigners... With people in this country. You see them on television. They stop somebody in the street in Russia and all of a sudden they're speaking in English. You're not going to find many people walking about the streets of Glasgow, to be interviewed, to speak Russian. But a lot of people nowadays can communicate. I think that was the whole crux of it, the communication. Also, I think the foreign workers are workers. They're far more conscientious. They want to improve their standard of living and they don't want to leave here. It's not a case of coming here and earning money and sending it home and eventually going back. They don't go back. They don't want to go back. So they work hard. But this has been going on for years in this country, donkey's years. When the Asian communities started to come here, they had the most diabolical jobs with the cleansing department, driving buses, tram cars... They were hard jobs, they weren't easy, unsociable hours, but they didn't need a lot of communication. They didn't have to speak a great deal of English. Enough to get by would do. But they did it because the people in this country didn't want to do it. These were too menial jobs for them, and they prospered. And that is how a lot of the migrant communities have succeeded. And the Jews were no different. They just worked. They used to make furniture, as I said, and they would, for example, go round houses with a cart, pushing it with maybe a settee on it, or a bed, or some other kind of furniture, but they would sell it from their cart. Just like a stall. But they grafted. Is that a Scottish expression – grafters? But they were. And that is basically how they started, they succeeded. With regard to their workshops, as far as Glasgow was concerned, a lot of them found that these railway arches in the Gorbals... where the trains ran from Ayrshire, or to Ayrshire, from St Enochs railway station was above the road, and below it were these railway arches, and the railway company put doors on them and made them into storage areas or workshops, and a lot of these the Jews rented out and made them into workshops for themselves. They could make small factories. They didn't need much in the way of machinery. They didn't have the money to buy machinery. A lot of it was handmade so it was all labour intensive, so that's how they succeeded.*

**BEN: As you were growing up as a Scottish-born child but with this rich and distinct heritage from Poland and Russia, what part did those different strands feed into your identity and how conscious were you of those?**

*GERALD: [pauses] I don't think they were very obvious to me. I mean, with my father's family I didn't really know them They were in Dublin. Whereas my mother's family... it certainly made you a bit more tolerant because they didn't speak very good English, they certainly didn't write English at all. In the days where you signed your name, it was a cross. So it certainly made you more tolerant. You had to be patient to understand what they were saying. To a child, or a young person, they came from another world. But you got to know them, you got to love them. They were your relations. In those days, they had quite large families. That was one of the reasons why they settled in the Gorbals because they bought or rented out flats in places like Abbotsford Place, Bedford Street, there were large tenement buildings with large rooms in them. If they had seven or eight children they could accommodate the whole family in these big houses or flats. Whereas my mother and father... my mother, I think there was about seven or eight of them. So, of course, they all spoke English. They were all brought up in Glasgow. So, it meant that*



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*my immediate family were quite large, and they got married and they had children of a similar age to me, so I had quite a few cousins. There was quite a large family unit.*

**BEN: Do you think that was an important part, that there was that diversity there from a young age?**

*GERALD: Yes, I think so. Yes, I think that had quite a lot to do with it. I mean, I suppose among young people there's always a certain amount of rivalry. "Anything you can do I can do better" kind of thing. Don't forget, religiously we were invited to cousins' bar mitzvahs and engagements and then subsequently weddings. So, yes, that gave you a feeling of belonging.*

**BEN: Gerald, thank you very much for your time.**

*GERALD: It's a pleasure.*

**BEN: Perhaps we could come back again and pick up.**

*GERALD: Yes, you'll need to play it through and see what you've got and see if there's a thread there that you'd like to try again with.*

**BEN: We'd very much like to come back and hear more about your early adulthood and obviously more about the synagogue.**

*GERALD: We haven't talked really about the synagogue at all.*

**BEN: We could come up and pick up on that again, if that's OK.**

*GERALD: Well, the synagogue really is the hub. Everything revolves around here. Not in my lifetime, long before it. It's 135 years old but this how it all grew. And the last thing to happen here was the archives. That's comparatively young. That's 20 years old. But everything else... There was an orphanage in Glasgow, you had the kinder transport during the Second World War. You had the boot and clothing guild, which was a charitable organisation that looks after indigent Jews, which became just the Jewish Welfare Board. That grew up into a housing association. It got bigger and bigger and bigger. It was what probably was needed at the time. Therefore, when people required to be moved out of slum houses, they bought flats in Govanhill and put people into these houses to improve their standards of living almost instantaneously. They did that. There was an orphanage, there was an old-age home. So we can go through all sorts of things.*

**BEN: That would be fascinating. It sounds like a whole wealth of stories.**

*GERALD: Jewish organisations to do with Israel. Women Zionist Organisation, the JNF. All came here. A lot of it was generated over a hundred years ago by the person that was actually responsible for building this place. A man called Michael Simons, who was an extremely wealthy and successful businessman. He had a fruit business called Simons and company, which was one of the biggest fruit brokers in Europe; a huge thing. Eventually was sold out to Fyffes bananas. Just lately Fyffes bananas have joined up with an American banana company to be the biggest in the world. Well, that was him. And he was also very interested in the theatre, so he was a director of Howard & Wyndham. There's a book been written about the theatres in Glasgow. Oh, and he was responsible,*



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*I think, for building the Royal Theatre. I think he was involved with that. But he was instrumental in building Garnethill. And he was a baillie. He was asked to be Lord Provost over a hundred years ago and turned it down because he was just too busy. He couldn't possibly do everything. But he was a baillie, a justice of the peace, which was quite something in those days, particularly for a Jew. He was interested in starting a Masonic lodge, so he got involved. He was the first Master of Montefiore. So he was involved with that. He was involved with everything. He was the driving force, so probably there's still some of his energy about that keeps it going in some way. But as you go down that timeline you'll see all the different organisations to do with Glasgow, and to do with the Far East, Israel. And they were all started from here, generated from the congregation.*

**BEN: I very much look forward to hearing about that.**

*GERALD: We can talk about that sort of thing.*

**BEN: That would be great. Thank you.**

*GERALD: See what we can... rack my brains, I can remember.*

**BEN: Thank you very much.**

*GERALD: OK.*

**Recording ends: 1:09:42:5**