John Sitwell Interview 13.11.2019 (Part 1) – Defying Hatred Project

Stanger-Ross: I'll just introduce that this is Jordan Stanger-Ross with the Defying Hatred Project at UVic. And I'm here with John Sitwell in his house in Victoria on November 13th 2019, eating some beautiful smoked and pickled salmon and talking about the topics of Holocaust education and memorialisation. So as we talked about on the phone, the first topic that we might get into is your personal background and how you became involved. How that background led you to Holocaust memorialisation or education.

Sitwell: Ok. My background is Polish although I was born in Uzbekistan. My parents fled the Nazis by -- originally they were arrested by the Soviets when they crossed the border into Poland and they spent a year in Siberia. They escaped from Siberia and they went to Uzbekistan for two reasons. Actually there were a lot of Jews in Uzbekistan at the time. Reason number one was Uzbekistan was as far from the German front as you could get. And two, my parents entered the Haganah -- was smuggling Jews in an underground railroad through Iran into Palestine. But by the time we got to Uzbekistan where I was born, the British blockade was so strong that they couldn't get through. Excuse me, as I said I've just gotten over heart failure and whenever I walk I run out of breath.

Stanger-Ross: Sure, we've got time.

[00:01:52]

Sitwell: So when the war ended we went back to Poland. My parents actually had thought of resettling in Poland but a lot of people don't realise -- including many Jews -- that in 1946 in the city of Kielce there was a huge pogrom and many many Jews were murdered and so my father said "these people have got nothing" so we escaped from Poland and we went to Austria and I spent two years in a refugee camp outside of Steyr. And then in 19 -- like we got to the camp in '46, in '48 when the partition of Palestine took place, we were one of the first refugee boats to go to Israel. And then from Israel we came to Canada.

Stanger-Ross: How long were you living in Israel?

Sitwell: Four and a half years. We actually wanted to stay in Israel. I come from a very strong Zionist background, but my father right from the time he was very young, had some very severe blood pressure problems and my dad was a civil engineer -- well actually in Poland was called the “geodetic engineer”. But he was running survey crews through the Negev and he was getting very sick, so it was suggested by his doctors that he go to a different climate that wasn't quite as hot.

Stanger-Ross: What happened after that?

Sitwell: We moved to Canada.

Stanger-Ross: Ok.

Sitwell: We came -- well we stopped, originally, we stopped for two months in England. My mother had a cousin there. Blood-wise, she was my mother's cousin. The reality was that her parents were both killed -- meaning this cousin's parents were both killed when she was very young and my grandfather took her in and she was actually raised as a part of my grandparents' household. Although blood-wise she was a cousin, in reality she was very close to my mother. So we spent two months in England with her and then we moved to Canada.

[00:04:27]

Stanger-Ross: How old were you when you came to Canada?

Sitwell: I was about, uh, seven and a half.

Stanger-Ross: You were born in 19--?

Sitwell: '44.

Stanger-Ross: '44, okay. And where did you arrive to in Canada?

Sitwell: We spent one month in Montreal then we spent a little bit of time -- a little bit of time meaning about ten months -- in Toronto while my parents were learning how to speak English. And then the government of Saskatchewan was recruiting engineers to come to Saskatchewan and so my father was recruited and we moved to Regina where I completed my schooling and my university. Well, my undergrad degree in Regina. And then I moved to Victoria and my father retired about three years after that, so my mum and dad came to Victoria as well. In fact, that painting over there my mother painted that.

Stanger-Ross: Oh wow, that's beautiful. What's it of?

Sitwell: Just a composite of many things that she had seen.

Stanger-Ross: It's a synagogue?

Sitwell: Yeah. The painting she just called Jewish traditions.

Stanger-Ross: So, what brought you to Victoria and when did you come here?

Sitwell: The weather.

Stanger-Ross: The weather, yeah.

Sitwell: Well you can imagine moving from Israel with the heat and all of a sudden ending up in Saskatchewan with the cold, so it was my dream. Run along, as soon as I finish my education I would move to the west coast.

Stanger-Ross: And that was in the 1960s?

Sitwell: '68 I came to Victoria.

Stanger-Ross: Ok. What was Victoria like then?

Sitwell: I still love it now, but I loved it more then. I'm very much a traditionalist, I don't like the high-rises that we're getting now for example. I moved to Gordon Head and it was a wonderful blend of rural and urban. I still remember there were signs all over Gordon Head saying please keep the horses off the sidewalks.

Stanger-Ross: Tell me about your early days here. Were you connected with the congregation at that time?

Sitwell: Oh yeah, yeah. I've been a member of Emmanuel since '68. And for a long time we didn't even have a Rabbi, we would just take turns. Either we had somebody that knew quite a bit about the services or we would take turns doing various parts of the services. When I moved here of course it wasn't the way that it is -- the synagogue had not been restored at that time. It was a light green stucco all around and the top balcony there were seaming tiles that separated it so it wasn't for years that I even realised that we had another balcony up there.

Stanger-Ross: What was the feeling within the congregation in those days?

[00:07:52]

Sitwell: It was very positive. It was a very small congregation. As I say, I've been a part of the congregation for almost the entire time. For a little while I became a member, we had a group that met at Queenswood called the Hover Inn. And so we had our services there but that was for about a year or two and then I rejoined Emmanuel.

Stanger-Ross: What was the nature of that other group?

Sitwell: It spent more time discussing things rather than just rote services.

Stanger-Ross: Was it more traditionally oriented?

Sitwell: It's hard to describe. It spent a lot of time discussing as opposed to just having the services. In terms of background, going back again to Europe. You know, obviously most of my family was murdered during the Holocaust. My wife and I went back in 2005, we went back to Europe. We went actually with an Israeli group, there were 26 of us. Ri and I were the only two non-Israelis. Just an aside: Ria was born also in Uzbekistan but she was originally from -- or originally, went back again after Uzbekistan, to Lithuania to Vilna. Our backgrounds in some ways were very similar because as you know Vilna was actually a part of Poland before the war. In fact, the irony -- well I shouldn't say irony, it's not ironic. My father actually spent three years of the Yashiva studying in Vilna and then decided he did not want to be a Rabbi and he went to university in Warsaw and became an engineer instead. What can I tell you? Oh, when we went back: we went back actually for two reasons. One was that we wanted to do the march of the living. The other reason we went back, as I said being an Israeli group, was that everybody in the

group their families originated in Kalisz, my mother's hometown. So apart from doing the march of the living, we also went to do research on stolen family property. In fact right now we've got a lawyer, we're trying to fight the Polish government although it's not a very two-sided fight. They've got all the power. But my grandfather had two large estates outside of Kalisz. One was called the [*phonetically*] Wash-koof, which ironically it is the second oldest estate in the country of Poland. It was incorporated as a private estate in 1036 for the archbishop of Poland. So the first owner of Washkoof was the archbishop of Poland. The last owner of Washkoof was labelled as "he the Jew." So, as I say, we're trying to fight the Polish government, trying to get the property back, but that's not a very promising battle.

Stanger-Ross: I'm curious about your memories through that whole migration of your family between the '40s and the '50s. What are your first memories?

[00:12:09]

Sitwell: My first memories probably are in Austria in the refugee camp, but it's not a continuous memory. It's sort of, you know, certain events that stick out of my mind. Like one of the things that happened in the refugee camp was that I contracted polio. So I spent six months in a hospital outside of the camp that was run by Austrian nuns. In fact, it was interesting, when I came home -- home meaning back into the camp -- I couldn't communicate with my parents cause I had spent -- little children learn languages quickly but they also forget quickly. So although I came from a Polish-speaking background, spending six months in the hospital with the German-speaking nuns, I had picked up the German, what I had forgotten was my Polish. But one of the things that I really remember distinctly -- you know, like in those days, polio, people were so scared of it that if you had polio you were virtually isolated. So I remember one time my father came out of the camp to see me, and I remember I was in my room, the hospital room, and I heard pebbles hitting the glass. And I opened the window and my father told me to step back and he threw something through the window. It turned out to be a lollipop and I still remember, it was a red rooster lollipop.

Stanger-Ross: That's beautiful. Do you remember Israel?

Sitwell: Oh, very much. As I said, my background is [*unintelligible* 00:14:04] if you look at the Israeli Declaration of Independence, the 37 people that signed the declaration, one of them was the husband of my mother's cousin. His name was [*phonetically*] Svi-dur-ya and he was the first -- after Israel became a country, he became the first-up leader of Histadrut, but he married -- my mother's cousin was Guta Markovska and so Svidurya married Guta Markovska, they went to Israel, the two of them together, in the early '30s to work for the formation of Israel -- or, 'went to Israel,' went to Palestine -- to work for the formation of Israel. What I do remember is actually our first day in Israel. I remember -- my grandparents were smuggled out of Poland in 1943. And the reason that happened was -- I don't know how much you know of Poland's background, have you ever heard of General Anders? General Anders was the commander of the Polish free army. When Poland lost against the Nazis, he took the Polish free army to England where they were sent by the British High Command to Jerusalem. When it was obvious that the war was going to break out, my grandfather offered the Polish chief of staffs the second-floor of our manor house to use as military headquarters. So he developed a relationship with General Anders. So when

General Anders got the orders from England to go to Jerusalem, my grandfather made arrangements for my uncle to join Anders' army. And as such, he was allowed to take two people with him, my grandmother and my grandfather. So when we got to Israel in '48 my uncle was already there with his family and my grandparents. So what I do remember is that we landed in the Port of Haifa very very early in the morning. My grandparents lived in [*phonetically*] Var-ata which was just outside of -- well now it's actually a part of Haifa -- at that time it was just a village outside of Haifa. I remember that we got off the ship and we walked all day to Varata and my grandparents did not know we were there. We got to my grandparents' house just as the sun was setting and we knocked on the door. My grandmother came, she opened the door, and they were just sitting down to the Seder. So for me, going to Israel, was very very much [**voice trembles**] going from a state of slavery to a state of freedom. And I still remember my cousin Nathan, like everybody, was poor in those days. He couldn't afford a kipa so I still remember him sitting at the Seder table and he had a handkerchief with a knot tied at each end, and that's what he had on his head.

Stanger-Ross: And then you went from there to Saskatchewan more or less.

[00:18:08]

Sitwell: Yeah. Well we moved just a few miles away. We lived in Kiryat Bialik which, again as I say, was a small village outside of Haifa. What I remember is that we had to travel through about twenty minutes of open fields to get to Haifa. Whereas now, if you go to Kiryat Bialik, you won't find even a single building lot between Haifa and Kiryat Bialik. Haifa's just totally taken over.

Stanger-Ross: And do you remember your impressions of Canada when you arrived?

Sitwell: My impressions originally were very negative because I didn't speak any English. Like when I mentioned that we stopped for example in England, my relative took us to some of the tourist attractions and what I do remember is going through -- not Buckingham Palace -- but Westminster Abbey and my only knowledge of Anglo-Saxon society was basically what my mother used to read to me about Charles Dickens. And so I remember -- I call her my aunt -- but anyway she was driving up past Westminster Abbey and there were four people there. Three of them had sacks tied up to their chests. One of them was in uniform and I remember he had a sword. And I remember he hit one of them across the bottom and the three started hopping and I really really believed that these were three prisoners that were being tortured. It wasn't until years later I realised it was a sack-race that I had seen. So I came to Canada with a degree of trepidation. Some of it was well-earned, like for example my first day of school I remember. I literally spoke two words in English: yes and no. And I remember the bell rang for lunch hour, I was standing in the hall really not knowing where to go or what to do, and the principal came to talk to me and when he paused I said yes and then he talked for a while longer, he paused, I said no, and this continued for a few minutes and he grabbed me by the collar, hauled me to the office, and strapped me on both hands. So to this day I don't know what I said yes or no to.

Stanger-Ross: That must have been terrifying though at the time.

Sitwell: Mm.

Stanger-Ross: And that was in Saskatchewan --

Sitwell: No, that was in Toronto.

Stanger-Ross: Toronto, okay. Where you were for just a couple of months.

Sitwell: We were in Toronto for about ten months, almost ten months.

Stanger-Ross: And this would have been in 1950--...?

[00:21:12]

Sitwell: About 1955, yeah. In fact, since I mentioned [*unintelligible* 00:21:14] if you just come with me for a minute.

Stanger-Ross: Maybe I'll drag this along with us.

Sitwell: Sure. My nephew went back to Poland and he broke into our house. This was our house in Poland. This is the house before the war.

Stanger-Ross: Oh wow. And is that your family?

Sitwell: That's my family. Less than half of them survived the war. The house had a big portico with big granite pillars. The Nazis tore the whole portico off and sent the granite pillars back to Germany for their architecture. So this is the way the house looks now. When my nephew broke in, he took this picture because this was my mother's bedroom. So he wanted a picture of the window where his grandmother would have looked out every morning when she got up.

Stanger-Ross: You see the view of the sunset or sunrise.

Sitwell: Yeah. You can see here is a street sign on the highway pointing to Washkoof. This is -- the house had, well two things: number one, the walls were pure alabaster. When the communists took over, they found it too bourgeois so they ripped all the alabaster out and they replaced it with plaster. What they didn't rip out at the time was it had crown molding like this, however there's so many holes in the roof now that the crown molding is breaking down and falling to the floor. So what my nephew did was he took a piece of the molding for every member of the family and he made up these boxes to give to all of us.

Stanger-Ross: Yeah, it's a beautiful glass box with the piece there and then several photographs.

Sitwell: So as they say, we're finally trying to get that back. My grandfather had almost 4000 acres of land which, with Canadian standards is big, European standards it's humongous.

Stanger-Ross: And it's vacant now I think you told me, right?

Sitwell: Most of it's vacant. On the north end of the property, the Polish government cut off three farms so there are three farms at the north end that were originally a part of Washkoof. But most of it is vacant. When Ri and I were in Poland we were there with my cousin Edna for [*phonetically*] hna-riya and -- I think I want to sit down, let's go back. If you just have a seat I'll just bring something out -- yeah just go in, have a seat.

Stanger-Ross: Maybe I'll just slide this chair over so I can see what --

Sitwell: Sure. When we were in Poland, more specifically Kalisz, we were as I said looking for information, and the director of the Kalisz archives came up to me and said – [**breathing heavily**] I'm usually not this bad.

Stanger-Ross: It's alright, take your time.

Sitwell: And said, asked me whether my grandfather's estate was a large one, and I said yes, and she said just a moment. And she came back about 15 or 20 minutes later with a copy of this book which is the estates of greater Poland. And there's a whole chapter on our estate in here.

breathing heavily

Sitwell: Where is it? Oh, sorry it's old age. So this is Washkoof. It shows, that it was incorporated as a private estate in 1136 and then these are all the names of the people who have owned Washkoof since 1136. So on the last paragraph was, "in 1918 [*phonetically*] odyeku-kupiliyoo -- odyeku-kupiliyoo meaning from the previous owner -- "was purchased for 800,000 marks, Enyila Yeretzka" -- my grandparents, who owned it until it was confiscated by the Communists after the Second World War.

Stanger-Ross: There's an image of the grounds behind the manor. Wow.

Sitwell: Yeah.

[00:29:11]

Sitwell: For example there were quite a few buildings like this for the workers. My grandfather's workers used to live in. This was his administrative office. In fact what I have is a letter, being an estate obviously it was outside the city. So my grandfather -- and I still have a copy of the letter -- my grandfather built a catholic church on the property for his workers so they would have a place to worship. I have a letter from the Polish government thanking my grandfather for building this church on the property.

Stanger-Ross: So how much of this history did you grow up knowing?

Sitwell: Quite a bit of it. My mother was determined always to get the property back so as far as I can remember, going back almost to my boyhood, she was fighting the Polish government trying to get the property back. Not so much because of the value of the property, although it was worth quite a bit of money. My grandfather was not born to money. He made this on his own.

And so my mother's attitude was that he worked so hard for his family to benefit from the property, not for the Polish government or the Polish people to have it. That's what she always felt: for very strong moral reasons it should be returned to the family.

Stanger-Ross: Did you grow up aware of your family as survivors or of people who had been lost?

Sitwell: Very very much. My mother spoke a lot, my father could not speak as much about his family background, although he lost a lot. Like in my father's family there were seven children and two adults. When the war was over there was one adult and three children left, so the rest were murdered. In fact people keep on talking about Auschwitz -- my family, almost every single member of my family, was murdered in Treblinka. And in fact when Ri and I went back to Poland, our group went to Treblinka. So unlike Auschwitz which is basically there the way it was during the war, Treblinka is no more, Treblinka is just a series of monuments. We surrounded a monument depicting the mass graves of the Jews and we lit candles and we said Kaddish. I was just sort of shuffling my feet through the ground and some metres later I found a human bone fragment and a piece of barbed wire from the original camp.

Stanger-Ross: So not deeply buried.

[00:32:37]

Sitwell: Well, a lot of people cannot comprehend the magnitude. One of the monuments are a series of stones with the names of every Jewish community that was obliterated by the Nazis. There was 17,000 stones. So you know, when you throw a number out, you say 6 million, it's number. But all of a sudden when you see 17,000 stones with 17,000 names of a community, you know, it's sort of...And then the irony, when you go in through what used to be the gates of Treblinka, there are a whole series of arrows pointing to the different parts of the camp. So here you have this place where so many Jews were murdered, one of the arrows has "children's petting zoo." So they were murdering Jews but for the children of the German and Ukrainian guards they actually had a petting zoo for those children.

Stanger-Ross: That was your first time back?

Sitwell: To Poland, yeah.

Stanger-Ross: So how did that feel?

Sitwell: A lot of mixed feelings. You know, in many ways I had considerable resentment against Poland. I have a number of Polish friends so it's not a resentment that carries over that just because somebody's from Poland. But there were a lot of things that could have, should have been done. So I indicated, my grandfather was quite wealthy and money often does serve as protection. So my mother did not feel the Antisemitism as much as my father. My father came from the ghettos of Zamość, which is in the eastern part of Poland. And, you know, he used to tell me many many stories about how he used to come from school bloodied because people had

beat him up. Or else how my grandmother used to store food because at Easter time they would go into the cellar, into hiding, because so many pogroms because we were the Christ killers.

Stanger-Ross: So you were thinking through those things as you were there?

Sitwell: Yeah, quite a bit of it. A part of it was that I sort of remembered the people and the names of my relatives that had died. For example, one of the things that Helga has is a -- my cousin -- when I say cousin, my mother's first cousin, so she would have been my second cousin -- was a woman by the name of Yeretzka. Yeretzka was my mother's maiden name. She was a prolific writer in Poland. In fact it was interesting because I had somebody that contacted me about four or five years ago, he was from Poland and he was doing something with the BC Museum on the Holocaust. And so he came to interview me and he told me that there's a university in Poland -- I think he said it was Krakow -- that actually has a whole course on my cousin. But she ended up in the Warsaw ghetto and because she was a very prolific writer she ended up acting as a secretary for the Judenrat in the ghetto. I went on the internet after I got back from Poland and I typed her name in and I got seventeen hits and one of them was a lecture at the University of Boston by Dr. Samuel Kasov and he talked about Gustava. So I emailed him, told him who I was, and asked him if he had any more information about Gustava. He said that he could actually tell me virtually from the moment of her death. She was arrested in the ghetto and was waiting in line to get on the cattle cars to take her to Treblinka. In the ghetto she had become friends with a man and his wife by the name of Marcel Reich-Ranicki and interestingly enough I found a book, an autobiography, at the JCC Library by Ranicki, and he mentioned Gustava five times. He said that he and his wife were arrested the same morning as Gustava. They were waiting in line to board the cattle cars when he decided that they had nothing to lose by making a run for it and he and his wife convinced Gustava to run with them. Gustava agreed and as he and his wife made this mad-dash for freedom, he looked over his shoulder to see if Gustava was keeping up and he saw that she had remained in line. He said that he realised that at the last moment that Gustava had two children, four and eight. She realised that the two children their legs were too small to run but they're too heavy to carry so she chose instead of running to go to the gas chambers in Treblinka with the children.

[00:39:06]

Sitwell: In fact what I have, and I find it very touching, when Ri and I went to Israel we went to Yad Vashem and I told them who I was and they gave me a copy of Gustava -- have you ever heard of the Oneg Shabatt? Ok. Gustava was part of the Oneg Shabatt chronicles. When the Polish government was rebuilding what used to be the ghetto, they found two big milk cans and in one of the milk cans was an essay that Gustava was writing that was supposed to be smuggled out of the ghetto to tell the world what was happening with the deportation of the Warsaw Jews to Treblinka. But she was arrested before the essay was finished and as I said, when they found the milk cans, her essay was found and it's in Yad Vashem. So they gave me a copy of the essay which was really interesting -- well I shouldn't say interesting, but really touching because it was written on her old typewriter.

Stanger-Ross: Did you see the film that was last year at the festival about the --

Sitwell: Yeah. In fact, Helga -- I'm sorry, did I see it? No I didn't. Helga in fact, when she gave the introduction did speak about Gustava.

Stanger-Ross: Just for the students who might listen to this, do you want to give a short explanation about what the Oneg Shabatt was?

Sitwell: It was decided that the world should know what was happening and so different people were assembled to write and document the murder of the Jews.

Stanger-Ross: In the Warsaw ghetto.

Sitwell: In the Warsaw ghetto. And as I said, Gustava was a part of that. In fact Helga has a copy of her essay, what I had is a friend of mine and I had him do a translation of her essay so the copy that Helga has has got two columns, the first column in Polish, the second column in English, translated to English. But the essay was never finished because, as I said, she was arrested and sent to Treblinka.

Stanger-Ross: And this was an archive of materials that was then buried and then subsequently recovered after the war.

Sitwell: Well most of it. There were three milk cans originally and only two were ever found.

Stanger-Ross: The metal containers that they were --

Sitwell: The big metal milk cans, yeah. Excuse me, when we're talking can I warm up the blintzes for you?

Stanger-Ross: Sure! The pickled fish is terrific too.

Sitwell: I'm glad you like it.

Stanger-Ross: I've not had salmon that style. I've had herring that style.

Sitwell: Yeah.

Stanger-Ross: But I've not had salmon that style.

Sitwell: Ok it'll just take me two minutes.

--END OF PART ONE--

John Sitwell Interview 13.11.2019 (Part 2) – Defying Hatred

Stanger-Ross: Is that photograph here in Victoria?

Sitwell: Yeah. She had sheep in Gordon Head, and then she decided to have chickens. One of the -- like nowadays it's permitted, but in those days chickens weren't allowed so one of the neighbours complained so I had to go to Saanich Council and argue that she had six chickens -- I asked them whether six pitbulls would be allowed. They said yes. So I said, don't you understand, you're saying she can have six pitbulls but not six chickens.

Stanger-Ross: And?

Sitwell: So they backed off and they let her keep the chickens.

Stanger-Ross: That must have been pretty unusual at the time.

Sitwell: Yeah. Yeah because originally the by-law wouldn't allow her. So originally what they wanted to do was to get her to get rid of the chickens but as I said, I had to argue and they backed off.

Stanger-Ross: Was it hard do you think for your mother to go from wealth in Poland to circumstances here?

Sitwell: My mother was very very adaptable. So I mean on the one hand yes, she went from a situation where they had about 16 servants, she never cooked a meal, she didn't do anything. And then all of a sudden she was thrown into a situation where she had to do everything for herself. And as I said, she adapted very well to it.

Stanger-Ross: So you've always been a chef?

Sitwell: Not really. My first wife was not a cook, she certainly -- and as I said, try this: this is quince sauce and this is whipping cream. Oh, you're going to get it mixed up with the herring -- not the herring, with the salmon. So she didn't cook at all, let alone Jewish food, so the only way I could have it was if I learned how to make it myself.

Stanger-Ross: You said your first wife wasn't Jewish.

Sitwell: No. So I had to learn how to cook.

Stanger-Ross: That's good.

Sitwell: As I said, how it mixes with the pickled salmon...

Stanger-Ross: Nicely.

Sitwell: Here, take this. This is clean.

[00:04:03]

Sitwell: Yeah, with the picture of the house -- as I said, when we went back to Poland, there was myself, Ria, and my cousin -- when I say my cousin Edna she's not technically my cousin. She's technically -- just help yourself they're all for you -- she's my cousin's widow. But Edna and I are so close that we consider ourselves cousins anyway. So when we went to the archives we found out the information that we wanted to and the next day we got a taxi to help us physically find the estate. What happened was that the taxi driver who helped us find it, he dropped us off in front of the manor house and then he took off. And I couldn't figure out why he had taken off on us but in the distance I could see him going to the small farmhouses in the area. It turned out that he would knock on the door and he would say "are there any old people that live here?" Finally an old woman came out and he said "did you know the Yeretzkas who owned Washkoof before the war?" She said "yes my father worked for them." So he put her in the cab, brought her over to us, introduced us, and I said "did you know Esther Yeretzka, my mother?" And she said "yes we used to play dolls together." So she told me that after the war our house became a schoolhouse for seven years -- or six years. After six years the schoolhouse was shut down and the manor house was divided into 18 apartments. And then in 1979, because of the historical significance of the estate, some Polish bureaucrat decided that this thing should be brought back to its old splendid glory. So he kicked out all of the people living there, but nothing ever happened. So the house has just been deteriorating since 1979. Here, finish it off!

Stanger-Ross: I have to pause, you're feeding me so much good food.

Sitwell: So basically that was her story then. And then she was the one that told me about the fact that the Germans had dismantled the portico and sent the columns back to Germany.

Stanger-Ross: Sure. That must have been a powerful visit.

Sitwell: It was. It was very very emotional.

Stanger-Ross: So I'm thinking again about you growing up and in Canada. You're family was discussing this kind of history, were you aware of other people discussing the Holocaust or people curious about where you were from or having a knowledge about what that would mean?

Sitwell: Uh, yes and no. If we go back to the '50s and '60s it wasn't that far away from the Holocaust so people in general were interested. But I think that there's a difference between a personal connection and reading or hearing about the Holocaust, whether you're Jewish or gentile. To one group it's history, to another group it's a part of their reality.

Stanger-Ross: When you were growing up was your family connected with other survivor families?

Sitwell: Not too much, no.

[00:08:25]

Stanger-Ross: Where were you living in Saskatchewan?

Sitwell: In Regina.

Stanger-Ross: Were you members of a synagogue?

Sitwell: Yeah, oh yeah.

Stanger-Ross: And there were other survivors as members?

Sitwell: No, most of the people were Canadian.

Stanger-Ross: Do you remember discussion of that? Did you attend after-school there?

Sitwell: Yeah, as I said, the answer is yes there were a lot of discussions, but again there weren't a lot of actual survivors in Regina, so I repeat what I said, that there's a difference between people who see the Holocaust as part of their personal history and, as I say, those who learned from history books etc. etc.

Stanger-Ross: How would those differences show up?

Sitwell: Uh, the emotion mostly. Again, as I say, there were a couple of people. In fact, one of the people that my parents met when we were in the refugee camp, my father became the director of -- I don't know if you know Ort? Ort was an educational Jewish organisation and Ort ran a school in the camp because the Jews in the camp eventually we were hoping they would all go to Israel. You know, there were a lot of doctors and a lot of lawyers and a lot of philosophers, which isn't really needed at the time. What is needed is plumbers and carpenters, etc. So Ort set up a technical school in the camp and my father was the director of Ort. So one of the people that went through his school ended up in Saskatchewan and Regina as well, so we did meet them. But generally, as I said, most of the Jewish community in Regina were long-time Canadian citizens.

Stanger-Ross: And to shift here to Victoria, when you got here in the late-1960s were there other survivors in the community?

Sitwell: There were a few, yeah. In fact, my mother -- I don't know if you've heard of Dr. Peter Gary? Ok, so my mother and Peter Gary actually were the first ones to start going to schools to talk to high school kids about the Holocaust.

Stanger-Ross: And when would that have been?

Sitwell: That would have been probably about the mid-70s.

Stanger-Ross: Do you know what motivated them or how they came to be doing that?

Sitwell: You know, Peter spent time during the war in three different camps. So he was very anxious to keep the idea alive of the Holocaust. My mother felt the same way, my mother felt

that if people forgot the Holocaust that there was a higher chance of history repeating itself. So she felt very very strongly that the Holocaust should not be forgotten. And, you know, that was sort of the intellectual element but the personal element was that, as I said, in both my mother's and father's family, most of them did not survive. So it was in recognition of their memories that she felt very strongly that people should know what happened.

Stanger-Ross: Did you ever accompany them to school?

[00:12:33]

Sitwell: No, not really. Like I was part of the school system myself at that time. I spent my entire career as a school counsellor in the Greater Victoria School District. So as I said, I did my undergrad work in Regina, I did my grad work here in Victoria at UVic.

Stanger-Ross: Do you remember how you felt about your mum giving these talks?

Sitwell: Oh I was very proud of her. To me it was -- you know, I feel the same way. I feel that it shouldn't be forgotten. To be honest with you, I'm a little bit afraid that it will be and with -- we talked about rising Antisemitism -- I really think, and it's not paranoia, that there is a good chance. I don't think another Holocaust will occur. But certainly a good chance of Antisemitism becoming a very very real part of our society. And ours meaning both Canada and the United States. I worry because I see very very little difference in the United States, for example, between the Republicans and the Democrats. Most people when they talk about the right and the left see a model of a straight line with the left being very far away from the right. I don't. To me it's a circle. So if you're looking this way they may be far apart, if you're looking this way they're very similar. And if you look at the personality profiles of Hitler, Stalin, [*unintelligible* 00:14:30], Benito Mussolini, their personality profiles are almost identical regardless of whether they were right-wing or left-wing. I see that in the United States very very much. I see people choosing sides, I see people slinging mud at each other not realising how similar they've become. So certainly I am very concerned when I see people like Trump and his followers, but I see exactly the same phenomenon on the left side. And what scares me is that you're going to get an elastic effect that when people finally see through Trump and they dump him, the elastic effect will be to spring over to the opposite side, to the fanatic left. For example, last winter Louis Farrakhan made a comment that Jews are like locusts and there's nothing wrong with getting rid of locusts. Two months after he made that comment there was a Democratic Party rally where Bill and Hillary Clinton shared the stage with Louis Farrakhan and at the end Bill Clinton went up and shook Farrakhan's hand. So as I said, I do not see a big big difference in terms of -- Jews specifically, but other groups as well, you know, when people say "oh no no no, Trump is a racist," he probably is. But I see exactly the same thing when you get people like Omar, when you get people like Alexandra Cortez. They're very similar. What scares me is that dogmatism is dangerous, be it social, religious, political, etc. And what I see is the world becoming increasingly dogmatic.

Stanger-Ross: Do you feel that in Canada as well?

[00:16:46]

Sitwell: Yup.

Stanger-Ross: Where do you see it here?

Sitwell: Um, I think that the attitudes are very much in terms of camps, like if I want to believe in the Liberals then I close my eyes to whatever the Liberals do because they're my people, or if I'm going to go to the Conservatives, hey it's okay what they do. My own voting is usually quite negative in that I do not believe that any party should be in power for more than a couple of terms, just to keep them honest. I, on the one hand, don't have an alternative to our democratic system but it scares me when I see both in Canada and the United States this adherence to party philosophy or adherence to, uh, supporting the leader no matter what. So, you know, I could go on and on in terms of Donald Trump but, you know, we have the S&M crisis here in Canada. But people who are Liberal close their eyes, it doesn't matter. And it does matter. One of the things that I felt very good about in the last election is that Jody Raybould won and it's not a question of being necessarily a supporter of hers, but I was very happy to see someone stand up to a leader of a party and not jeopardise their career. So I'm hoping that other people will say "hey, it's possible to say no to my leader, to my party, without being ousted out." You know, that was one of the positive things in my opinion that happened. Like even if you look -- what do we have? We have a party whip. What's the job of the party whip? To whip everybody in line to support the party.

Stanger-Ross: Do you think your views on those issues are connected with your own family background?

[00:19:18]

Sitwell: Probably not on a conscious level, but subconsciously probably yeah. You know, I mean, what I believe is that with the Holocaust many many people felt -- by many people meaning non-Jews -- felt very guilty, very scared about what had happened. So many of their Antisemitic feelings were suppressed. I feel that that suppression now is easing and so a lot of the Antisemitism is coming out. Martin Luther King made a comment once -- and I really agree with that -- he said "not everybody who's opposed to Israel is an Antisemite, but 90% are." And I truly believe that. I had a colleague for example, that he felt very strongly that there should not be a single Jew that would be allowed to live in Palestine, even the Jews that lived there before the war. He felt that it should strictly be completely Arab-Muslim. He kept on talking about all of the Arab refugees. Yeah, there were Arab refugees, but what he didn't know was that there was 720,000 Palestinian refugees that were left stateless because of the creation of the state of Israel. Number one, many of them were stateless because they left Israel because the Grand Mufti told them to leave because it would just be a matter of days before the Jewish population would be slaughtered and they could come back. The other thing that he didn't realise was that over 800,000 Jews were made refugees since '48 from Arab countries. When I explained that to him he admitted, and said "gee I didn't know that." Having said that, all of a sudden it was erased, it didn't matter. So there could be -- you know, the fact that there were Arab refugees that's a big thing. Jewish refugees, didn't matter.

Stanger-Ross: Didn't change his views.

Sitwell: No. And I think that's a case. There was an interview by a British journalist with the Minister of Agriculture in Egypt about six, seven years ago. And he was talking to the Minister about the Arab refugee problem, the Palestinian refugee problem, and the Minister said that the refugees should be allowed to come back to Palestine and claim every single bit of land that they had before '48. So the journalist said "okay, what about all the Jews that were thrown out of Egypt under Nasser? Do they have the right to come back to Egypt and demand their property back?" And his comment was "any Jew that comes back to Egypt to demand their property back will be killed." And I really really do see some of that becoming very dominant among many people.

Stanger-Ross: I want to return to these topics, but maybe we'll bracket them for a moment. I want to return to that topic of Holocaust education and memorialisation in Victoria. So in the mid-1970s you mentioned your mother and Peter Gary were beginning to give school talks. Were there many such talks?

Sitwell: There were quite a few, and then David Katz became involved. And since then it became quite a regular thing. [Discusses some resistance in Saanich school district to ongoing presentations] [redacted]

Stanger-Ross: Do you know why that was?

Sitwell: What's that?

Stanger-Ross: Do you know why that was?

[00:24:38]

Sitwell: Um, I have a close friend of mine who was a principal of the Saanich School District. I asked him, he said basically he didn't feel comfortable with that. Well, you know, to me that's ridiculous. I mean, you know, I don't feel comfortable with it either. But it's a part of history, it happened. And it will happen again if we don't recognise it. Like my wife and I were once at the Esquimalt Rec Centre, I was sitting in the -- what do you call it -- in the hottub and I always wear my Magen David. A man ran up to me and started screaming at the top of his lungs, "animal you're murdering everybody in Lebanon!" and then ran out. And this was not an Arab, this was very fair-skinned, obviously a western European background.

Stanger-Ross: Do you feel like those kind of incidents have been common in --

Sitwell: Yeah, I mean not all of them are dramatic. Like, for example, I used to counsel a boy by the name of Isaac. And Isaac spells his name I-C-IC. And I said one day, "Icic, how do you get the pronunciation of Isaac from I-C-I-C?" He says, "oh my father always liked the name but he

didn't anybody to think that I was Jewish." So. You know, I mean it's there, it's just a question of whether it will remain suppressed or whether it will become so acceptable that it comes up again and becomes a part of mainstream thought in society. Like I remember one of the schools I used to be the counsellor, I had a girl that started coming in to see me in my office. She was a straight-A student, president of the student body, gorgeous girl. I mean she had every single thing going for her and yet, it was obvious that the only thing she ever wanted to talk to me about was about Judaism. It turned out that she was Jewish but her mother had experienced so much Antisemitism she was determined her children would not be subjugated to the same thing. So she did not allow her children to admit to anybody that they were Jewish.

Stanger-Ross: Did you become involved yourself in memorial or educational activities at some point?

Sitwell: At some point. Like after I retired I was invited by a couple of the schools to give a talk about the Holocaust. You know, on a personal level I was always involved in terms of -- I've never hidden my background, you know quite the opposite. I wear my Jewishness on my sleeve. My mother used to always tell me, and I agree with her -- because one of the first things when she would meet somebody is that she wanted to make sure that they knew that she was Jewish. Because she said if they're going to hate her because she was Jewish then you might as well know it now instead of developing a relationship. And that's been basically my feeling.

Stanger-Ross: Were you involved at any point in the Kristallnacht or Yom HaShoah events?

Sitwell: Yeah, oh yeah.

Stanger-Ross: What was your involvement?

Sitwell: A couple of times I was asked to speak. You know, certainly as an observer I certainly went to every single event that was sponsored by -- you know, at the cemetery and at the Shul.

Stanger-Ross: What was your impression of your events over the years?

Sitwell: I think the events -- "very good" sounds trite. I think that what's happening presently is really good in terms of the events themselves. What worries me though is that even within the Jewish community that you've got a lot of people that -- I won't say becoming anti-Israel, but what I said about the politics in Canada and the States I find that a lot of people are taking that attitude with Israeli politics. So, for a while I was a member of the committee for Kristallnacht. I became very upset when we were planning one and everybody in the group wanted to eliminate Hatikvah. I felt very very upset because they were talking about "well, this is what Netanyahu is doing" and I tried to explain to them Hatikvah has nothing to do with Netanyahu. When I stand up for Oh Canada it's not the song of the Liberals, it's not the song of the Conservatives, it's not the song of the NDP, it's a song of Canada. And Hatikvah is the song of Israel, it has nothing to do with Netanyahu so we can be for Netanyahu, we can be against Netanyahu, that's irrelevant. Hatikvah is the hope, the song of the people of Israel. I get very very upset -- I find there's a certain hypocrisy in the world when it comes to Israel. Specifically in Canada and the United States where, to me, whether it's Jew or gentile, every single one of us is living on usurped

Indian land. And that's okay. But all of a sudden they're willing to sell a whole nation down the tubes because of the Palestinian situation. I'm not going to get into whether -- you know, the politics of the Palestinians. But I'm saying hey, why are we -- again, I want to be clear, I'm not saying we shouldn't be upset about the Palestinians, but I'm saying why are we so upset about the Palestinians when we are living on land that belonged to the Indians. Even the land that was ceded by treaty, the treaties were coerced. So here we are sitting on Indian land and some of us talking about, you know, "bad Israel" in terms of the Palestinians.

Stanger-Ross: What do you think of some of the efforts at recent Kristallnacht events, in particular, to talk about residential schools and to talk about Indigenous dispossession in the context of a Kristallnacht event?

[00:32:27]

Sitwell: I've got mixed feelings about that because on the one hand certainly there are certain similarities, especially in terms of attitude, but it worries me that it'll become too diluted, it'll become what I said a while ago, a part of history. Like "man is cruel and look what happened to the Indians, look what happened to the Vietnamese, look what happened to the Cambodians, oh, and the Jews as well." You know I had a teacher that once asked me whether I thought that perhaps we should forget what happened in the Holocaust. And the answer is no. Not because I'm a Jew but because what happened in the Holocaust was not a hiccup of history. A million Armenians were butchered by the Turks. Over a million Cambodians were butchered by the Khmer Rouge. We can go on and on and on. So the propensity for Holocausts is there and the only way we can ever beat it is by remembering them very specifically. So I would be the first to go and support anything to do with raising public awareness of the residential schools but I don't want to do it in terms of either diluting what happened at the residential schools or diluting what happened in the Holocaust. I'd like to keep them as two separate events.

Stanger-Ross: Why?

Sitwell: Because as I said otherwise I believe both events will be diluted.

Stanger-Ross: So what's the importance of holding separate or specific particular events?

Sitwell: Well again, as I said, to keep the memory alive of what happened -- like for me, to keep the specific memory alive of what happened to Jews in the Holocaust. For First Nations people, to keep alive what happened to them in terms of some of the atrocities that occurred to them. And as I said, if we sort of mix everything together we'll lose both.

Stanger-Ross: Obviously there are diverse views on this particular topic and I've talked to folks in this process who have views on either side, and in both instances I try to understand what is the benefit of a particular approach.

[00:35:27]

Sitwell: If I take a bucket of water and I put in a cup of salt and a cup of sugar and a cup of vinegar, etc. etc., mix it all up, it's no longer salt or sugar or vinegar, it's a mixture of everything. And that's the way I feel about what we have done to each other, whether it's, as I say, to the Indians, to the Jews, to the Armenians, etc. etc. You know, in fact the Armenians are a good example. To this day Turkey refuses to acknowledge what happened to the Armenians. And I think it's very important that the Armenians keep in mind and make sure that the world forgets [sic] what happened to the Armenians, not just what happened in general, what happened to the Armenians.

Stanger-Ross: I know it sounds like I keep asking the same question again and eventually we'll move on but I'm gonna keep trying for a little bit. So if we take the Jewish story, for example: held separately from those other instances of genocide, what is the specific value in holding it apart from the lessons we might learn in general from --

Sitwell: Okay. We're just a few days away from Remembrance Day. The purpose of Remembrance Day was to remember the Canadian soldiers that died. Not the fact that we abhor war, not that many many soldiers in many countries died. Our memory was specific in terms of the people in Canada that left our shores to go and fight for our freedom. I would be adverse to sort of say "oh yeah but other people also died so let's remember everybody." Yeah, the French should remember the French soldiers, the Brits should remember the British soldiers, the Canadians should remember the Canadian soldiers.

Stanger-Ross: And at an event like Kristallnacht -- so Kristallnacht traditionally, as you know, has been outward looking from the community. So in contrast to Yom HaShoah, right.

Sitwell: Yeah.

Stanger-Ross: So Yom HaShoah we usually do within the community at the cemetery. Kristallnacht we have -- were you there the other day at the most recent one?

Sitwell: No I'm finding it very difficult to get around now.

Stanger-Ross: Sure. But you know, as you would --

Sitwell: But before that the answer's yes. I went to every single event.

Stanger-Ross: So you'd be aware the Premier might be there and other faith leaders and so on.

Sitwell: Yeah.

Stanger-Ross: And as was again the case this year. So in that context, what is the role of informing the Premier, Minister of Education, other faith leaders here in Victoria of the specificity of the Holocaust of the Jews.

[00:38:46]

Sitwell: Because I don't think it's paranoia to believe that it could happen again. To me it's a very real threat.

Stanger-Ross: Yeah. To Jews specifically?

Sitwell: Specifically, yeah. But it could happen for whatever reason. You know, I have a lot of my non-Jewish friends saying why through history has this happened to us? It's almost endemic to our culture, meaning western world culture. As I said, it was a bit of a shock after the Holocaust but it's coming out again. The same genre of people that picketed in Europe with signs saying "Jew go back to Palestine" are exactly the same people, or genre of people, who are now yelling "Jew get out of Palestine."

Stanger-Ross: I think I understand where you're coming from better so thank you for sticking with me through a series of attempts there. Let's return to the topic of Israel. You mentioned Hatikvah in particular -- what role do you think Israel should play in memorial or educational events about the Holocaust?

Sitwell: We saw how quickly Trump turned his back to the Kurds. I think we can go through history and see many many leaders turning away from certain allies. To me what happened in the Holocaust could not have happened had there been an Israel at the time. So I really believe that if Israel was to disappear that you would find a very strong resurgence of Antisemitism. But I also believe very strongly we did not leave Israel voluntarily, we were taken out by force by the Romans. At no time was Israel ever Jew-free. There has always been a connection to Israel. I mean, Jew or non-Jew, all they have to do is go through our Sidurs, go through anything, and they can see how for 2000 years Israel is the centre of our universe. And it's a very emotional centre. Excuse me -- I don't know why, I've never had as much trouble breathing as I have today. When I was in university I had a professor by the name of Arthur Kratzman. Kratzman was a communist, and I don't mean that in a derogatory sense. He did not believe in nation states anywhere, he believed in one concept and that was the brotherhood of the proletariat. Therefore he was very anti-Zionist, very anti-American, anti-British. In other words he did not believe in the concept of any nation state. And yet he told me that when he had to go to a conference in Israel, he got off the plane -- those in the days when you had to walk across the tarmac to get to the terminal. So this is a man who does not believe in the concept of Israel, in the concept of Zionism, and yet he got off, started walking across the tarmac, and he said he was totally overwhelmed. He literally fell to the ground and started kissing the tarmac.

Stanger-Ross: Have you returned often to Israel yourself?

[00:43:18]

Sitwell: Yeah, and I find the same thing. For example, when I lived in Israel, we were never allowed of course to go to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was part of Jordan. When Ri and I went back to Israel and my cousin Edna took us to Jerusalem, we were coming to the crest of the hill and I just broke down crying. It's exactly the same as what happened with Kratzman. I just couldn't help it.

Stanger-Ross: Where do you think that feeling comes from?

Sitwell: Upbringing. The realisation that, as I said, what happened couldn't have happened if Israel was there. But even apart from the Holocaust, Israel is the centre of Judaism. And you know, like you were saying your daughter's preparing for her Bat Mitzvah. How could any Jew prepare for a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah without recognising that we're talking about Israel, we are the children of Israel. To me it's impossible. And I say to me because I know people that have done it. But to me it's impossible to separate Israel from me being Jewish. In fact, see that little black plastic box, straight ahead if you follow my cane.

Stanger-Ross: Yeah. Oh, right here. This?

Sitwell: Yeah. Those were two shells that were actually fired during the '67 war.

Stanger-Ross: Ok.

Sitwell: My cousin sent them to me.

Stanger-Ross: Wow.

Sitwell: See, when we talk about -- okay what makes me happy. As I said, my father's family, most of the family was murdered. My cousin Doev who lives in Haifa, his father, my dad's brother, was murdered at Treblinka. Doev was taken in by a family in Poland who risked their lives to save Doev from the Nazis. And yet, at the same time, they taught him to be an Antisemite. They had mercy in the child while still being able to hate the Jew. When the war was over and the Red Cross reunited Doev with his mother, they're walking down the streets in Warsaw and a Hassid walked by and Doev picked a rock up and yelled "*jidek*" -- Jew boy. Now since then Doev has been in Israel since he was about five years old. He fought in '73, he fought in '67, very very strong Jewish or Israeli patriot. But that's how he started. When I was in university I was friends with a guy by the name of Albert Hizan. Albert was a Dutch Jew, same story as Doev. He was taken in by a Calvinist family who risked their lives to save him from the Nazis. He said once a week he would be beaten with a belt to drive the Jewish soul out of his body.

Stanger-Ross: So you spoke a little bit about being part of the Victoria Shoah Project when they were organising Kristallnacht and there were discussions about Hatikvah. Can you tell me more about those discussions?

Sitwell: Well to be honest with you, since that happened I was never invited to come to another meeting.

Stanger-Ross: Yeah, so tell me about the meeting that this came to a head, or the meetings.

Sitwell: Well it came up about two years ago. We were planning the ceremony at the Jewish cemetery and as always, we always finish with Hatikvah and when I suggested this I was totally put down. That Hatikvah -- that they don't agree with what Netanyahu's doing and that they don't think it's appropriate to sing Hatikvah. As I said to you a few minutes before, to me Hatikvah is

nothing to do with Netanyahu just as Oh Canada has nothing to do with Justin Trudeau. It's a song of Canada.

Stanger-Ross: So what happened when you made those arguments in those meetings?

[00:48:34]

Sitwell: I was voted down. I went to the Rabbi and the Rabbi went to talk to some of them and basically what they did was they compromised not by singing Hatikvah but by playing -- if you remember the last number of years, they've had the record of Hatikvah when the camps were liberated and the Jews that were liberated were singing Hatikvah. So they compromised by having that record with Hatikvah being sung in the background. But Hatikvah was not sung at the service itself.

Stanger-Ross: These are the Yom HaShoah services.

Sitwell: Yeah and these are my friends. I feel very badly. I'm not opposed to them, but I'm certainly opposed to the way they're looking at the situation. Like to me I don't care who is the head of Israel, whether it's [*phonetically*] Itr Carabeen, whether it is Netanyahu, whether it's anybody, Hatikvah is the song of Israel.

Stanger-Ross: Were you a part of the group when the [commemorative organization] [redacted] separated into two groups?

Sitwell: Um, not really. I attended for years I was a part of the group [redacted] in terms of -- but it was still basically, you know, they still did both the Shoah and the Kristallnacht. In fact, just an aside about Kristallnacht. About two years ago a friend of mine passed away. A non-Jewish, gentile friend. And Ri and I were the executors of his will. I got a phone call one day from one of his neighbours indicating that a roommate he had was doing all sorts of strange things and could I please come over and discuss it with her. So Ri and I went over there, we sat down in the living room, and she said "are you a reborn Christian? I am." And so I said "no, my wife and I are both Jewish." And she said "oh just a moment." She left the living room and came back a few minutes later with this big crystal plate with a big Magen David on it. And she said "I got this at an antique shop and I was told that it was a wedding present to a couple who were married in the 1930s in Berlin and it was smuggled out on Kristallnacht, out of Germany, and it came to Canada."

Stanger-Ross: Wow. So you were involved with [organizing events] [redacted] for a while.

Sitwell: For about six, seven years, yeah.

Stanger-Ross: And what happened that?

Sitwell: Well the group was dissolved because the new group basically took over.

Stanger-Ross: Do you remember that process, what the discussions were at that time?

Sitwell: Um, the discussions what, about how to remember Kristallnacht or how the group was dissolved?

Stanger-Ross: I guess both.

Sitwell: Okay, I'm not sure how [redacted] [W]e were doing the same thing over and over and over again. Whereas this new group is doing things that are new. So this year's event is not a facsimile of last year's event but, as I said, it's a group though that definitely is keeping a hands-off policy in terms of keeping Israel separate from this event and to me it's wrong and it just shouldn't happen.

Stanger-Ross: And was that part of how the new group emerged with these different views?

[00:53:27]

Sitwell: I can't tell you that. [redacted] I wasn't sure what had happened, and so I sent a letter saying I would really like to be a member of the group so I was invited to come in on one of the planning sessions and, as I said, we got into this difference of opinions in terms of Hatikvah and I was never asked to come back again.

Stanger-Ross: Would you go back or is it not a group you could?

Sitwell: I'd like to go back but I'd like to see more of a balance. Like I don't want to be odd-man out with everybody -- literally everybody -- being of one opinion and me singled out being another opinion. So yeah I would definitely like to be a part of the group but I'd also like to see more balance in terms of the views of the Jewish community. So in other words more of a cross-section.

Stanger-Ross: I'm just thinking. I think we've covered most of what I intended to talk about. We talked about your own background, we've talked about in a kind of weaving together about what's happened in town and what you think is important about Holocaust memorialisation and what role it plays. Are there other things that you'd like to say before we end the interview?

Sitwell: I'll probably think of a lot of things after you leave but right now I'm not quite sure.

Stanger-Ross: And if you do we can record another interview, that's no problem at all. That can sometimes be great if things come up and we have another discussion.

Sitwell: Yeah. As I said, to me one of the biggest things that I've said two or three times already, I really do worry about repetition. Not of the Holocaust, I don't expect millions of Jews to be massacred, but I definitely am anticipating an atmosphere in society where Jews and Zionism are

going to be suppressed. I am very chagrined for example by American society, meaning American Jews -- when Hertzel and the Zionists went from country to country in Europe trying to get Jews to contribute money to buy back the fatherland in Israel, they were welcomed with open arms in Poland, in Russia, in Hungary, in Lithuania, but when the Zionists went to Germany they were kicked out by the German Jews who said "this is the fatherland." And I see definitely a repetition of this attitude in terms of the United States now. I know that some people say "oh yeah yeah, see you're not a real Canadian." Crap. I'm more of a Canadian than many Canadians. But the analogy I use: if my mother and father were to get a divorce, by having sympathy to my father's position or to my mother's position does not make me anti to the other person. They're both very important to me. And I see the same thing politically with Israel and me being a Canadian. I don't see the two as being an antithesis to the other.

Stanger-Ross: Ok. Maybe I'll end it there.

Sitwell: Ok. Help yourself to some more before you go!

--END OF INTERVIEW--