**Moniek Garber – Life Before The War**

INT: Good evening. Today is the 12th of September 2012 and I’m here to interview Moniek Garber. Good evening. Moniek, can I ask you about your very early days? Could you tell me please what your name was at birth, where you were born?

MG: Yes my name at birth was Moishe

INT: And when

MG: 1923 and I was born in the town of Wolozin. That’s how it’s spelt.

INT: W-O-L-O-Z-I-N. And that I see from your papers is in Belarus?

MG: It is now in Belarus.

INT: What was it then?

MG: Poland.

INT: Poland. And tell me a little, if you would, about what life was like then? You were born in, I think you told me, on the 12th of the…?

MG: The 10th

INT: The 10th of the 12th 1923.

MG: What was life like? Well a) it was still the Depression. I remember that my uncle in particular was affected because he had a sawmill/owned a sawmill and had problems selling the wood. Apart from that, I suppose we were thought of as the rich family in the town, but of course, the people assume that somebody is rich. It wasn’t all that easy.

INT: Is that because you were one of the few Jewish families there?

MG: Yes. I, my grandmother was the last of the Itzhaikins are the people that founded the Yeshiva (and the synagogue for that matter too). Some ancestor of mine, also called Haim Volozhin, in 1740 he built the synagogue. He was a linen merchant and linen is bleached in the sun so he had a huge piece of land, several acres, on which the sheets of linen were bleached and somewhere near the bottom of his land he erected the first synagogue in our town. Now his grandson was, is known as the Etz Haim he was a student with the Gaon of Vilna and the Gaon encouraged him to start the Yeshiva.

The money seems to still have been available then because he more or less did it largely on his own plus, believe it or not, the help of the local lord. He sort of supplied materials and things like this and the Rabbinical students were supported for a few years by Haim

INT: And so was this Yeshiva still going strong when you were a young boy?

MG: Oh yes. Strong I’m not so sure but I would say there were probably about 40 would-be Rabbis, yes. At the height of its success I think they had about nearly 500. It was a huge institution.

INT: It must have been.

MG: Yes

INT: But would your family yourself, would your father be a part of the Yeshiva or was he a businessman?

MG: The Yeshiva was built just opposite the synagogue so sort of just outside of what I think were the original grounds of our family. There were all kinds of problems. The tsarist government interfered and so on and of course there were the usual problems within the community. Different views on things and things like this.

INT: And was your father part of running the Yeshiva or?

MG: No.

INT: No.

MG: By the time we came along we merely attended the synagogue although we were usually seated on the right side.

INT: Is that the more honourable side?

MG: Yes it is. It is the honourable side, the right side.

INT: How big was the synagogue at that time?

MG: Very large. It’s a very big building in fact.

INT: And the Jewish population of your town?

MG: The Jewish population; about 4000.

INT: I see.

MG: It wasn’t the only synagogue. By then there was another synagogue at the bottom of the town and my cousin was telling me there was a third synagogue. I’m not quite sure whether he was right or wrong. My cousin died just 2 years ago in Israel.

INT: Right. And if there were 4000 Jewish people, what proportion of the town was that? Was that a significant proportion?

MG: Oh about 80% I would say.

INT: Gosh

INT: Oh, the majority of the town was Jewish?

MG: Oh yes.

INT: I didn’t realise that.

MG: That was quite common in Poland.

INT: Yes

MG: In what they called Shtetls.

INT: And if you had such an eminent Yeshiva that would attract other people to come and live there as well.

MG: Fair point.

INT: And did you have brothers and sisters?

MG: I had my older brother, 6 years older, his name was Daniel, Daniel Garber and he was a pianist.

INT: I see. So your life must have been fairly lacking in incident until the Nazis rose to power?

MG: Well more or less yes. Well, until the war started.

INT: Until the war started. And then what?

MG: And then I was arrested not entirely without cause in the eyes of the Soviet Union and that was in March of 1940 if I’m not mistaken. There were supposed to be held elections for the people to agree to become part of the Soviet Union and there were various …The school started very quickly after the Russians arrived.

There was a plaque out with a cut out head of Stalin and some slogans. Well whoever glued it onto the paper didn’t do too good a job so his nose wasn’t stuck on and I sort of …either my sense of tidiness or whatever it was but I sort of…

INT: Did you know it was Stalin? You knew what you were doing?

MG: Oh yes, yes.

INT: So what did you do with the poster?

MG: Well I sort of tore off his nose.

INT: And did somebody see you?

MG: Yeah well one of the things the Soviet Union needed were organisers, these people who report to the authorities. So somebody in the school saw me doing it. I didn’t hide it but I didn’t think it was very important. And I was arrested and I was given 5 years in a youth camp. After a long train journey and various things I came to the youth camp and the camp commandant there refused to have me because I was political.

INT: Really?

MG: So back from Moscow, from the Ukraine back to Moscow, I was sent to another concentration camp.

INT: And that was a concentration camp?

MG: Yeah

INT: Rather than a…

MG: Yeah a concentration camp rather than a youth camp.

INT: It was not for Jewish people in particular?

MG: No

INT: No

MG: Not specifically for Jewish people.

INT: What happened with your… did your parents try to get you back? Because they must have been…

MG: You don’t do anything of that kind, not in the Soviet Union.

INT: And did they know where you ended up?

MG: No I don’t think they had the slightest idea where I was but sometime in 1941, before I was released in fact, I received a parcel from my father and my brother and there was a letter, honey and things like this, and I would later hear that by that time my father was already shot, by the time it had arrived to me because he was… When I was very young my father was on one occasion Alderman of the town, he was elected Alderman.

INT: Which is really like a mayor of the town?

MG: Well sort of. Things have changed. The way local authorities had ministers altered in the meantime. But I remember a conversation with my mother in which she more or less was asking why he doesn’t want to be Alderman again and he said ‘Because I don’t want to be like…’ and he mentioned the previous Alderman who was an alcoholic, a compete alcoholic actually. Everybody wanted to meet the Alderman for a drink and so on so it was a way of…

INT: It was a way of avoiding getting too much to drink.

MG: Sort of. It was a way to avoid the alcohol; he decided not to be Alderman. When the Germans came in they made him head of the Judenrat and then of course he was supposed to choose the usual thing, 50 people to go and do some work, dig trenches basically intended for the graves of the people.

INT: Do you think your father knew that?

MG: Oh yes

INT: Yes

MG: My father was a rather impatient man. He apparently said to the officer “You want to do the dirty job do it yourself”. So the man took out a pistol and shot him. So my father was in fact the first man to be shot in our town by the Germans.

INT: And your brother?

MG: My brother, my brother was taken from our town to Minsk, which is the nearest large city, the nearest was Minsk. And he was teaching the piano in the Conservatory. He was actually a very proficient pianist.

INT: And what happened to him after that?

MG: After that he survived the war, he married a Soviet woman, they escaped from the Germans eastward and after the war he thought he could go back to Minsk to his position as a professor I suppose but they wouldn’t let him go back. Partly because by that time his brother was a traitor to the Soviet Union.

INT: So he must have survived because he wasn’t in Poland, he was in Russia?

MG: He survived because he was, he was in fact in Kazakhstan as far as I can make out.

INT: Right, and while that was happening what happened to you? You were taken to the camp?

MG: Well I was sent to the first camp which was not far from the Finnish border. There are two big lakes; the Onega and the Ladoga. The Ladoga is the northern one, has a long projection northwards and I was right at the tip there. Basically felling trees, not that I was skilled enough to fell the trees but I cut the branches and things like that.

INT: So it was a work camp?

MG: It was a work camp yes.

INT: And were the conditions like the ones you read about in the Gulags?

MG: No, no, the conditions were not the same as in Germany. The population was not intended to be eradicated. But the population was intended to work until they dropped. So basically people would survive, some people who sort of knew their way about and were lucky. Camps were administered internally; the prisoners also administered the camp. The guards were outside the actual perimeters, they merely guarded us. They were a poor lot; they had good food but apart from that they were frozen otherwise.

INT: They wouldn’t have wanted to be there either I suppose.

MG: Yeah.

INT: You were saying that some people survived longer than others under that sort of regime?

MG: Yes, scurvy was one of the worst problems, frostbite too, but scurvy… For weeks there was no medical assistance because as you know scurvy is caused by a lack of vitamin C and there was nothing to deal with vitamin C, although there was cod liver oil to deal with other illnesses.

INT: What age were you at that point?

MG: Well, by then I was 16/17.

INT: So your education would have stopped.

MG: The time I was in the camps. Now the reason I was released. I was released in September I think, about September 1941. Now, what happened, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union sought alliance with Britain, they couldn’t get an alliance with Britain because of all the Polish problems. Poland was already an ally. So I don’t know how many people know it but anyway, Stalin was out of action. He had, let’s say a kind of nervous breakdown after the invasion by Hitler. So Kaganovic and Molotov administered the country.

INT: And how do you know this?

MG: Kaganovic was the senior one. How do I know that?

INT: Yes

MG: Well amongst other things, at one point we were marshalled in the yard of the camp and a letter was read out to us about the treacherous Germans having invaded our country and so on and so on and then it was signed by Kaganovic and Molotov. And everybody at the camp was delighted because that meant that Stalin had kicked the bucket. We thought, but he didn’t. Kaganovic was the Commissar of heavy industry and he was sort of in charge, not Molotov. Kaganovic was the top man. What happened to him later, by the time I left the Soviet Union, I couldn’t tell you. He was an elderly man I think by then.

INT: And what was the consequence of the letter? Were you then released?

MG: We were yes. A large number of Poles were released. Stalin then came more or less back into power and stopped the Poles getting out of the Soviet Union but by that time I was out.

INT: So you were very fortunate then.

MG: Yes

INT: And so you said that your father was the first person to have been killed.

MG: Yes.

INT: What happened to your mother?

MG: Oh my mother died when I was a nine year old boy.

INT: Oh right, sorry.

**Moniek Garber – Life During The War**

INT: And the rest of your town, what happened to them? The 80%?MG: I would say 95% were probably executed.INT: Right.

MG: In two actions. I don’t remember the details actually. My cousin was particularly interested in this

MG: Yes. It’s not just himself; several people took part in it. So, some people did survive from our town you know. Various papers tell the story of two girls from the village and a peasant sort of said ‘Right you are my two daughters, you are staying with us’. So there are various people; there were people who abused the Jews and there were people who helped them. An interesting instance was a man in our town, a Pole. Ah here I must explain. There were basically three major groups in the town; Jews, Poles and today you would call them Belarussians. But the term Belarus actually was almost invented by Stalin; he created Belarus, there was no such entity ever before historically and still isn’t in some opinions. The Pole married a Jewish woman. The Jews ignored him, the Poles ignored him and they brought up a family. Now I’m told (again by my cousin, probably he got the information) that when the Jewish people were gathered in the ghetto in the town, several houses, they were the only ones who dared to try and supply food, tried to get some back. The German guard didn’t see them and they tried to bring in food and so on.

INT: So they were outside the ghetto?

MG: Yes

INT: Oh I see because

MG: They didn’t think of her as being Jewish.

INT: Right.

MG: Nobody mentioned it so she

INT: She kept quiet.

MG: She survived with her husband.

INT: But she still tried to help the Jews that were in the ghetto.

MG: Yes, yes. Which I thought indicates the fact that there some human beings

INT: Who are very decent? Absolutely. So taking us back to the speech of Kaganovic and your chance to get away, how did you get out of the area?

MG: Well when I got away I was told to go either direct…In the Soviet Union people didn’t choose where they went; they were told where to go. I was told that I’m to go into the Ural Mountains, a town called Magnitogorsk copper mines. Well I didn’t fancy the idea so on the way I heard from various other people released that a Polish army was forming so I just went down and I became… I was too young to be a soldier so I was a cadet.

INT: And they were pleased to have you. Did they know you were Jewish?

MG: What?

INT: They were pleased to have you.

MG: Yes

INT: And they knew you were Jewish but that wasn’t a problem?

MG: How does one describe it in Poland? Formally Poland was a democracy with equal rights for everybody, formally, with [anti-Semitism](https://gatheringthevoices.com/glossary/anti-semitism/) naturally. But on a formal basis, basically, I had a right to be there, it wasn’t a question of whether they accepted me, you know. I was entitled to be there because I was a Pole; I was Polish by nationality.

INT: This is the Polish army after they had been conquered by Germany?

MG: And Russia

INT: And Russia

MG: Because don’t forget that two weeks after the Germans invaded the Russian army moved into eastern Poland in huge numbers. And this is what basically collapsed Poland. There might have been longer resistance to the Germans. People get the impression that Poland was completely squashed – it was partly squashed. There were various pockets of resistance. In Gdansk the Polish garrison resisted for two months until they were actually killed to a man.

INT: I didn’t realise that

MG: Yeah.

INT: So you were in the Polish army in 1941 in a conquered country.

MG: Yeah

INT: That’s right, and you were still fighting at that point then?

MG: No, there was nobody to fight.

INT: Exactly, so that’s what I’m trying to find out. I’m wondering what you’re doing there.

MG: We become allies of the Soviet Union theoretically.

INT: Right

MG: But you were allowed to be evacuated. So after several months in the Soviet Union, by a largely roundabout route because we got to the bottom of the Ural Mountains, where the first camp was, then moved to Tashkent which is virtually in the centre of central Asia, then we were taken to a port on the Caspian Sea called Krasnovodsk, from there we sailed to a port in Persia, which at that time the port was named after the Shah of Persia who was called Pahlavi, it was his family name. And I looked recently at the map and it’s no longer called Pahlavi But it was a port sat on the Caspian. From there we were taken to a suburb of Tehran because I was in the city on a few occasions.

And then we were taken by convoy, this time by Sikh drivers in the British army to what is today Iraq, and from there by some other drivers into Palestine. Then we were taken by Jewish lorry drivers to an area there where I was sort of enlisted into the army properly. And I was, certain things apply in the army, the Polish army, if you become a cavalry man you have to be a certain height. I was tall enough to be a cavalry man so…

INT: Had you ever been on a horse?

MG: Only about a couple of times in my life before.

INT: But no problem!

MG: Yeah, I’ve never been on a horse in the army. But we were sort of then taken to Suez, we accompanied on a French boat called the Mauretania, a huge French liner. We took Italian prisoners from Egypt to Durban in South Africa, then South Africa for a couple of months, basically to just feed us up because most of us were skeletons and then we took German prisoners who were unsafe to be kept in South Africa because they used to get out and disappear among the broad population. So we took them from there, we sailed from Durban, past Africa, on to the Atlantic, hugged the South American coast and then eventually delivered them in Nova Scotia in Halifax.

INT: Why were you sent to Nova Scotia?

MG: They thought that Canada was probably a good place for German prisoners of war.

INT: They are certainly out of the way there I suppose! And they were left there in Halifax, Nova Scotia?

MG: Yeah the Germans were left in Halifax and we joined a convoy. By that time of course the United States were already a huge convoy. By convoy we got into Gourock of all places.

INT: It’s a small world certainly. You must have been somewhat confused during all of this, no?

MG: You take it all in your stride.

INT: You were very young. Were you learning English as you went along?

MG: I was sort of. There was a doctor, oh there was a unit of the British army called the Cameroons, (they are the people who pushed the Italians out of Abyssinia) and a sergeant amongst their lot for some reason took a fancy to me and talked to me in English, taught me some English.

INT: Right

MG: But I had to learn English once I arrived here. I had a few phrases but, you know. I could speak to people but I didn’t really have much English.

INT: So when your Polish brigade or whatever it was arrived in Gourock what happened to them then?

MG: Well we were all properly in the army and we joined with those in the Reconnaissance regiment and then

INT: But you were still a Polish regiment?

MG: Yes in Dalkeith near Edinburgh, that’s where we were stationed. There is a big parkland and somebody’s mansion in the parkland, that was sort of where the camp was. And then it was decided that armoured cars were not really very useful. Reconnaissance started to be done by aeroplanes so they didn’t need Reconnaissance regiments. So we were simply transferred to tanks and we landed in Normandy.

INT: So you landed in Normandy as part of the D- Day landings?

MG: Well, no I would say about 5 days later.

INT: Right

MG: They were heavy tanks. We couldn’t be landed right away.

INT: Right. But that was still part of a Polish regiment?

MG: That was still part of the Polish army yes.

INT: Right

MG: It was, it was one of the three regiments of the 21st Army group which was Canadian, the other two regiments were Canadian and the Polish regiment was in the 21st Army group and that was the, that was the group that went right along the coast and all the way along the French coast, eventually into Belgium and Holland.

INT: And you were still fighting then?

MG: Yes there was a bit of fighting yes.

INT: Right and were you still in Holland when the war ended?

MG: No I was in Germany when the war ended. We, in 1944 we were held up on the estuary of the Rhine which for some reason incidentally in Holland is called the Ems The Rhine changes its name when it gets into Holland. So we were on the Ems in Holland and then in ’45 we sort of crossed. In the meantime there was of course the defeat of the paratroopers who tried to cross the estuary.

INT: At Arnhem?

MG: And there was an attack by the Germans in eastern Belgium. But in ’45 we crossed and eventually we were stationed near the south of Bremen. You know where the port of Bremen Harbour is? Just south of that.

INT: That’s when the war ended?

MG: The war ended yes.

INT: How did you feel as a Jewish person going into Germany at that point?

MG: I didn’t feel anything to tell you the truth. a) We didn’t have a clear picture of what was happening. Would I have acted differently? I don’t know, probably not. When you are in the army you do things which more or less have to be done. You are told to do.

**Moniek Garber – Immigration**

Then in 1945, just two/three months after the war, the Polish government sent me to Oxford. So I was escorted to the commanding officer’s office and told to pack my kit bag and off to England.

INT: To go to Oxford University?

MG: Yes.

INT: Why you?

MG: This is a letter from my commanding officer who was the Colonel when we were… in the armoured cars, that sort of thing. But he was an older man, he was retired. So this is a letter from him: “My dear boy, with great pleasure and satisfaction, you have given me great pleasure and satisfaction with your letter in which you thank me for helping you to get your education. I’m quite sure that it was not so much my doing but your willingness and ambition. I have to admit to you that I have of late thought quite a bit about the bitter pills that you must have swallowed whilst you were in the army.”

And then it changes: “Before the war, in Warsaw, I had a great friend of mine who was Jewish”

He was one of the most intelligent and learned man that I have ever met in my life.”

This is why I want it in the archives-  
“I have just now had information from France that the Germans got a hold of him and he was tortured and then killed. I feel that Poland has lost a great intellect in the loss of this man.”

Poland has lost. And then he tells me about if you are in Edinburgh come and see me and so on.

INT: And he was involved was he in ensuring that you went to Oxford?

MG: Ah now, I was sent to Oxford and I have never actually, until I found this, I never quite knew why it was that I was chosen. Mind you I wasn’t the only one, 70 of us were sent to Oxford.

INT: Right

MG: From the Polish army. I was one of them and it was quite a possibility that he may have had more influence than I have thought about it and maybe he was responsible. I had actually forgotten that I had written to him. But anyway the reason for having this faculty in Oxford was the fact that the Germans had systematically killed all the educated people in Poland and this was in fact an intention to replace the Polish diplomatic corps. So had things gone otherwise I would have been a Polish diplomat instead of living here. But things didn’t go that way because after my second year, during my second year

INT: When you were… sorry to interrupt you, what were you studying when you started studying there?

MG: Law and Politics.

INT: Which must have been a huge jump because you had stopped your education all those years before and then suddenly you’re in Oxford.

MG: Oxford.

INT: Yeah

MG: Yes now if you ask me how I learned my English. So I said to myself I’ll have to learn English, not just to talk to people. So I got a hold of the ‘Tale of Two Cities’ and started reading through it with great difficulty.

INT: I think most English people find it difficult as well.

MG: Yes and since I had to do philosophy amongst other things at Oxford I then went on to something that is difficult and that is Moore’s…He’s a Professor of Philosophy, he is a logician and it is so difficult to read that most people haven’t got through it but I have read ‘An Adventure of Ideas’ by Moore which is probably more than most people have attempted. But anyway I had acquired my English.

INT: While you were studying. Then what happened then?

MG: The faculty had to dissolve because of the money. Poland had a lot of money. The gold from the Bank of Poland was deposited in Britain, it was rescued from Poland and then it had to be handed over to the new Communist government in Poland by agreement.

INT: But that meant they couldn’t

MG: They only retained a certain amount of money for the upkeep of the Polish army but the rest was transferred so we simply ran out of money at the end of it. So then I worked. I did a variety of things poorly paid. I worked in Peebles in textiles for a while and at one stage I looked at my demob money, £70, and I said if I don’t get out of here and get a good job I won’t even have money for a bus ticket.

INT: Oh dear. So how did you do it with your £70?

MG: I found out that they were digging tunnels for the hydroelectric schemes. That was 1948/9, ’48 or 9 and I joined the hydroelectric scheme.

INT: And was this you back in Scotland then?

MG: Yeah I was back in Scotland from London. From, actually from Peebles. I went from Peebles to the hydroelectric scheme, the one on Loch Lomond side. If you go along Loch Lomond you can actually see the pipes going down on it, it’s still there. And you were earning big money from those days- £20 a week.

INT: And was that actually a physical job you were doing there?

MG: Oh yeah very much a physical job.

INT: Right.

MG: Drilling rock.

INT: And you had no training apart from your wood chopping had you?

MG: It doesn’t require much training. It is not…

INT: Particularly skilled.

MG: It is not highly skilled. It was miserable and wet and damp with a load of muck going on you but never mind.

**Moniek Garber – Settling In**

MG:I then went to London and wrote to London University, sat an entrance exam and got through and then I realised that my one thousand and something pounds was not going to stretch to take a degree so then I got a job in Bradford, again in textiles which wasn’t very much. Then I got a promotion. I got a job in Kilmarnock as a dyer. You know what a dyer is? It’s a textile chemist, that kind of thing. So I did this and I then met my wife and got married and two years later my wife decided that she will work and I will go back to university. So I, this time I went to Glasgow to do an ordinary degree in chemistry which, because I was a dyer, I thought I could do that. And one of the professors, Dr Bell, came up to me one day and said ‘I notice you are doing an ordinary degree Mr Garber’

I said ‘Yes’

‘No, no. That won’t do’

I said ‘Oh my God, do you think I should give it up?’

He said ‘No, I think you should do Honours’

So that was, so I did Honours and I then did MSc and that was it. And after a few years of teaching here in Scotland I got an offer to teach nuclear physics in Vancouver so I went there.

INT: And where were you teaching in Scotland?

MG: Round about the Glasgow area.

INT: Was that in schools or?

MG: Schools. Well I did a bit of lecturing at Glasgow University and at… what’s it called? One of the colleges in Glasgow.

INT: Stow College.

INT: Forgive my ignorance; if you did a degree in chemistry is nuclear physics related to Chemistry?

MG: Very much so.

INT: Ah.

MG: Actually the peaceful nuclear production, the uranium is split and it gives you the power. It then gets used up, it gets diluted actually. It has to be taken out. After that it is a huge chemical process. Very much involved yes. To dissolve the rods you have to precipitate the things that don’t belong in there and so on. It’s being now done at Whitehaven, near Whitehaven.

INT: Now I know why you were in Vancouver. How long were you there? Because you must have come back from Vancouver.

MG: Oh yes. When we got a bit older my mother in law was getting a bit old, my sister in law lost her husband and other kind of things.

INT: And that brought you back here?

MG: That brought us back yes.

INT: Also to teach nuclear physics?

MG: No, don’t forget by the time I got my degree I was already in my late thirties so…

INT: You were getting older.

MG: Yes so I just finished off teaching for a few years in a school and retired.

INT: Excellent, you certainly had lots of adventures. Once you were here in Scotland did you mix with former Polish people or Jewish people?

MG: No, by the time I came back from Vancouver the Polish community had diluted itself and I actually lost contact with them. Not that I had much contact with the Jewish community. My wife knew quite a number of Jewish people but I didn’t so… She actually worked for a while in jewellery for several Jewish people as a manageress. People called Jaffe? Do you know them?

INT: I think we know some people in Glasgow now called Jaffe, yes.

MG: Well one of the Jaffe’s, her husband was called Coates, Isi Coates and he had a jewellers. My wife was his manageress and before that there were also a family called the Crabbes, they had a jewellers shop. And the Pattersons, they are still operating, my wife worked for them also.

INT: And what…Did something bring you back more into the Jewish community? Because I know you attend AJR meetings.

MG: My dentist is

INT: Norton

MG: Norton Grossman and one day he said to me why don’t you do some voluntary work? My wife died. I thought why not. Then East Renfrewshire phoned me and said ‘Are you Jewish?’

I said ‘Yes’

‘Well there’s a synagogue in so and so. They require some assistance in the office’

So I went up and I, and that’s how I sort of got…

INT: Oh that was the Reform, was that the Reform synagogue?

MG: Yeah

INT: Right and that’s how you met the Ansons.

INT: We always ask if you feel a sense of identity with where you came from and where you’ve arrived. But you’ve had so many places in between. Is it a hard question?

MG: Yeah it is. I retain a measure of, shall we say, of sympathy for Poland although it no longer deserves it, but I do retain it. To what extent I feel British? I felt that once I had become a British citizen then I was in Canada there was a degree of pressure to become a Canadian citizen. I didn’t, I didn’t bother. So I don’t feel too much. I am interested in what happens in the country but whether I am committed to it is a different story and difficult to say. For instance I certainly wouldn’t vote SNP so am I committed to Scotland? I don’t know.

**Moniek Garber – Reflection On Life**

INT: One of the very interesting things as well which I think happened Moniek, was the fact of your family being traced.

MG: Oh yes.

INT: Yes.

MG: This was. I didn’t know what had happened to my family and I actually tried to keep a low profile on the basis that if any of my family survived I was hoping that the Soviet Union would not be aware of it. But they were aware of it.

INT: You mean be aware of the fact that you were no longer in Poland?

MG: Not only were they aware that I was no longer in Russia but they were fully aware I was the Polish forces. They had an extremely efficient means of finding out. How on earth a country in which the majority of the population are constantly hungry, how they could devote that amount of energy and effort to keep tabs on insignificant people who have at one time been in their country. They actually considered the act of my moving out of the Soviet Union as treachery.

INT: As treachery? Even though you were actually Polish in the first place?

MG: Yes. They perceived it as treachery.

INT: And treachery, would that be punishable by death by any chance?

MG: For someone of my lack of importance probably by prison camp. People who served ten year sentences frequently got another ten years tagged on when it was time to be released.

INT: So you kept a low profile but you knew what had happened to your brother.

MG: No I didn’t know at that time.

INT: Oh right

MG: I didn’t know that he was alive. I only found out that he and his family were, lived in Soviet Union when I got that, met that young man from the JewishGen.

INT: From… Michael Tobias?

MG: Yes.

INT: Gosh

MG: So Michael Tobias. I actually met him at some meeting at the synagogue and I said I could give some interesting extra information so I told him about myself, extra information. He came back with a huge sheet giving my family tree which incidentally I sort of knew but this was much more up to date information.

INT: Once you found out about your brother did you find out, I think you were going to tell us, that he was in trouble?

MG: He died.

INT: Because of the fact that you’d left?

MG: He was in trouble partly because I had left the Soviet Union. This is what it meant, that he was not allowed to work in any city of more than 300,000 of a population. That was the kind of ruling. So instead of being a professor in Minsk they appointed him to be headmaster of a school of music which was probably not his metier at all.

INT: And am I right that your family thought you had died?

MG: Yes why they thought that I had been killed at Monte Cassino it was nonsense. So when they found out it was…

INT: It must have been so remarkable. So many years later.

MG: Yes.

INT: And was your brother still alive at that time?

MG: No my brother died in the 60’s.

INT: So it was his children?

MG: Yeah. People die much more quickly in the Soviet Union. People don’t live to old age for a variety of reasons. Those who do well die early because a) too much drink and b) not good enough food. Other people just die because of miserable conditions, and alcoholism is extremely widespread in the Soviet Union. This doesn’t mean that my brother was but probably. Just the pressure couldn’t have helped him very much.

INT: We usually end by asking people a very general question on reflections over a whole lifetime. What would you say looking back, if you can tell us, were the high points in your life? And of course the low points?

MG: Well the high point obviously was getting my education. That to me was the high point. Low point, I had quite a number. Extreme low point when I lost my wife and I was left here on my own.

INT: Of course

MG: We had no family incidentally.

INT: You talk about, you do have a nephew. Is that on your side or is that your wife’s side?

MG: My wife’s side yeah.