



Montreal Holocaust  
Memorial Centre

# Newsletter

Summer 2011

## MHMC Features

### Book Fair 2011

Keep an eye on your inboxes in August! Following an exciting event in 2009, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre is organizing another Book Fair dedicated to the memoirs of Montreal survivors. The date is yet to be confirmed but this should take place in the last fortnight of August, on a Sunday afternoon. All Holocaust survivors who live or lived in Montreal and who have written their memoirs are invited to present their books to the public.

Curious readers or others interested by the stories of lives disrupted by the war and the Holocaust are invited to attend this public event. The Azrieli Foundation will be there, presenting its publications and the Olivieri bookstore will also offer the opportunity to purchase reference books on the history of the Holocaust. In short, an exciting event for history buffs, book lovers and life story enthusiasts!

### Holocaust Education Series 2011

The Holocaust Education Series is back! From October 26th to November 6th the Series will feature current topics and world recognized presenters to help the public learn and discuss these important issues. The Teachers' Conference will look at how educators teach about the Holocaust and other genocides; an event will be devoted to

the Roma peoples from WWII to today; a panel discussion will debate the issue of minority and majority relations and the Human Rights Youth Action Committee will host an event entitled "Seeking Refuge" discussing modern day refugee issues. We are proud to present this exciting program, which will highlight the legacy of survivors and of the history of the Holocaust. Look out for the brochure, soon available in your neighbourhood!

## A Look Into our Collection: The Gerry Maass fonds

The Gerry Maass fonds constitutes one of the largest donations to the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre's collection since the organization's founding. It includes thousands of documents, photographs, letters and artifacts belonging to the Maass and Elsbach families, both from Germany. This significant donation reflects the story of persecution against German Jews starting in 1933 and allows the Centre to trace one family's desperate efforts to escape the Nazi regime.

Gerry Maass (1918-2009) was the youngest of three children from a Jewish family living in Hamburg, Germany. His father, Adolf Maass was a partner and manager of the transport company Kuehne & Nagel. Gerry's family lived in a beautiful house in which his mother Käthe (born Elsbach), a significant patron of the arts, collected antique books and German Expressionist paintings. The Elsbach family also owned Herforder Hemdenfabrik J. Elsbach & Co., the largest garment factory of lingerie in continental Europe at the start of the first World War.



Little Teddy (Herbert) Maass with his grandparents Elsbach and his parents Käthe and Adolf Maass, Herford (Germany) c. 1914.

The three Maass children left Germany before 1939, but not before experiencing the prohibitions and humiliations forced on German Jews. Teddy (Herbert), who left to study law in England in 1933, continued to work there until he was sent to an internment camp in Hay, Australia. Lisa was sponsored to immigrate to the United States by her father's adopted sister Blanche Oppenheimer. Lisa arrived in New York in 1940. Gerry (Gerhard), who was employed in Sweden thanks to a contact of his father's, came to Canada in 1938. The three children and their parents commenced an almost uninterrupted letter-writing correspondence until 1941, and Gerry kept meticulous copies of this correspondence.

Adolf and Käthe Maass were never able to leave Germany. The fonds documents their numerous attempts to get visas, including for entry to Cuba. Having lived through the expropriation and Nazi take over of the Elsbach company, Gerry Maass' parents were deported to Theresienstadt, before being killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau in May, 1944.



Gerry (Gerhard) Maass' German Passport, delivered 1938

The collection of documents donated also includes a series on Gerry's military career in the Canadian army, during which he served in France, Belgium and Germany. The donation also includes significant information on the steps taken by the Maass children to obtain compensation for Maass Family Property that was taken from them by the Nazi regime.

The Gerry Maass Fonds was donated to the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre by Gerry's wife, Joan Maass. It was organized and archived by Stéphanie Favreau, who is completing her Certificate in Document Management and Archival Studies at UQAM. The Centre wishes to thank Joan Maass and her daughter Barbara for their generosity. The Centre also thanks others who have recently donated items to the collection: Sonia Weinsweig, Liselotte Ivry, Lawrence Reich, Elie Dawang and Anne McDougall.

## A Look Into our Collection: Recorded Oral Testimonies

Since 1994, the MHMC has interviewed and recorded almost 500 Holocaust survivors and/or World War II veterans. The recorded testimonies of these women and men are essential for at least three reasons:

- They contribute to a better comprehension of the complex history of the Holocaust,
- They help us to put a face to the millions of victims of this tragedy,
- They inform the generations to come about the lives of Jewish communities before, during and after the tragedy.



Since November 2010, thanks to the Museums Assistance Program of Canadian Heritage, the MHMC is updating and improving its Oral History database.

Thus we deepen our knowledge of the collection so that we can share it more easily with researchers, students and the general public. Video clips of the testimonies are and will be used for our museum, website, educational projects and virtual exhibits.

## A Few Highlights

### Yom Hashoah 2011

Quebec Premier Jean Charest addressed the annual Yom Hashoah commemoration, held May 1st, which remembers the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust. More than 1,200 people attended one of the largest gatherings of the community. This year's theme, "The life that was", was illustrated by six survivor candle lighters who shared their memories about family and community life through video clips, as well as through songs and readings.



### Montreal Museums Day 2011

This year's Montreal Museums Day attracted 1034 new visitors to our museum including Manon Blanchette, Executive Director of the Board of Montréal Museum Directors, Mrs. Helen Fotopoulos, Cote des Neiges City Councillor and member of the City of Montreal executive committee, and Pénélope McQuade, spokesperson of Museums Day.

## In other news...



During the 2010-2011 year, the Museum received over 14,000 visitors, an increase of 8%. 12,000 Montrealers and international visitors this past year also had the unique opportunity to hear the testimony of one of 60 survivor speakers.

A successful event was held on May 31st for the members of the Centre's President's Circle. The film, The Last Survivor, attests to the importance of education about genocide and engagement for genocide prevention and to combat prejudice. The film will be shown to a public audience to launch our Holocaust Education Series on October 26th



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