INTERVIEW WITH SANDRA GASANA

Archives vivantes des Rwandais exilés au Canada suite au génocide et aux violences antérieures / The Living Archives of Rwandan Exiles and Genocide Survivors in Canada / Ubuhamya bw’Abanyarwanda bahungiye muri Canada Jenoside n’itotezwa ryayibanjirije

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Name of interviewer: Jenny Montgomery (J.M.)

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Transcribed by: Odile Sanabaso

Translated from French by: Charlotte Doane

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Question: OK, what is your name?

Answer: My name is Sandra Gasana.

J.M: When were you born?

S.G: I was born on December 5, 1980, in Ethiopia, Addis Abeba.

J.M: And what was your father’s full name?

S.G: So, my father’s name is Oscar Gasana.

J.M: And your mother’s?

S.G: My mother’s name is Suzanne Nyinawandori.

J.M: OK, do you have brothers or sisters?

S.G: Yes. So, I have three sisters: Solange, Sylvie, Stéphanie, I have one adopted brother, his name is Raoul, and I have a half-brother named Yan.

J.M: And how old are your brothers and sisters?

S.G: OK. So, Solange is 35, Sylvie recently turned 31, Stéphanie is 20, 20-and-a-half. Raoul is turning 18 next year, my adopted brother. And Yan is turning 10 soon, yeah, he’s 9-and-a-half.

J.M: Do all your brothers and sisters live here?

S.G: No. Oh, it’s very complicated in my family. So, my eldest sister Solange lives in Ottawa, Sylvie and Stéphanie live here in Montreal with me, I mean, in the same city as me. Raoul, right now, he lives in London. And Yan lives in Ottawa. Yes.

J.M: OK, are you married?

S.G: Yes! I am married, very, very recently; it’s been two months. It was two months yesterday. Yeah, already.

J.M: And when did you get married?

S.G: So I got married on June 12, 2010, on Île d’Orléans in Québec City.
J.M: And what is your husband’s name?

S.G: My husband’s name is Neal Santamaria.

J.M: Do you have children?

S.G: No, no, but we would like to one day, we don’t know when. But for now, no children.

J.M: OK. Can you tell us about your mother’s parents?

S.G: Yes. So, my mother’s parents… Both her parents are originally from Kibuye, which is East of Rwanda. I met them for the first time when I was maybe five years old, I went for my first trip to Rwanda. So that was the first time that I met that side of my family. I also saw them in ’86, ’87, so I was really, really young, I was five, six, seven. And I have very, very fond memories of them. They unfortunately died in the genocide, but when I was young, I remember that they were very, very beautiful people, they were beautiful. My grandmother looked a lot like my mother. My grandfather was a very tall man, really, really beautiful eyes, always wore a hat. He was sort of the… the village “wise man,” and um… yeah, so I still have very, very fond memories of them. Unfortunately I didn’t know them very well, because the three or four times I went to Rwanda, I was too young. So I still have memories of being very young, and after ’94, well, it was too late to… to get to know them.

J.M: And your father’s grand-parents, could you talk about them?

S.G: My father’s parents?

J.M: Oh, yes, sorry.

S.G: Yes. So, I didn’t know my paternal grandfather because he passed away when my father was very, very young. He drowned in Lake Kivu, an accident when he was coming home one night, the boat capsized. So, I didn’t know him, and my father didn’t really know him either, but I knew my father’s mother. Her name was Rachel… Rachel, I think, and she unfortunately
passed away of old age in 1990. She was… she was very old, and I still remember vacations in ’85, ’86, ’87, when I spent some time with her. She lived near Kigali, and yeah, I would spend my whole vacation, actually, instead of playing with the neighbourhood kids, with my friends, I preferred to spend my time with her. And I don’t know how we communicated, because she didn’t speak French, and I didn’t speak Kinyarwanda, but after spending two or three months in Rwanda, I think I started to catch a few words here and there, and we were able to understand each other. Anyway… well, I don’t remember having trouble… maybe in the beginning, having trouble understanding, but by the end of the vacation, it’s like through talking to her, Kinyarwanda words would come to me and we managed to talk. Yeah, I have very, very fond memories of her from then.

**J.M: What languages did you speak?**

**S.G:** Well, at home, with my family, French. We spoke French, because we went to French school, so very, very early on, we spoke French. But before French we spoke—well, before we started school, so when I was very, very young, I spoke Amharic, the language of Ethiopia, because I was born in Ethiopia. So first, I spoke Amharic, then French, and then with my sisters, at home, we would speak French, well a mixture of the two, really. French-Amharic. Yeah… different.

**J.M: Do you remember other family members? Your aunts, uncles…**

**S.G:** Yes. I remember many, on my father’s side and my mother’s side. On my father’s side, they were mostly in Kigali. I remember his sister Marthe, for example, Marie… his brothers, there’s one brother who’s still alive today… On my mother’s side as well, I remember her sisters, like one sister was named Rose, who I actually met in Kibuye, when we went there. Her brother, so there’s one brother who’s still there, Cyprien is his name, and she had another
brother, too, named Léon, who died during the genocide. And… yeah… no, we had… We had a big, big family, anyway. Aunts who also had children, so we had a lot of cousins… and unfortunately, a large portion were killed in ’94. Yeah.

**J.M:** Could you talk a bit about the relationships between your father and mother, and your grandparents, and the family?

**S.G:** Yes, so I remember that my father was very, very close to his mother. So, when we went on vacations, you could really see that they, like they had a very strong bond… And since he didn’t have a father, either, from a very, very young age, he felt sort of responsible for his mom. They really had quite an interesting relationship. But, on my mother’s side, yeah, my memories are a little more vague. I know she was very close with her parents, but since we only saw them two months a year, and since we didn’t know them for very long, we didn’t know them all that well, so I don’t really remember anything other than… other than those vacations, when we would spend time with them, but no… I couldn’t tell you about their relationships exactly, how it was. And it’s all through a child’s eyes, so… they’re vague memories.

**J.M:** Could you tell us about your mother, her personality—did she show her feelings?

**S.G:** Yes. Oh, yeah! My mother showed her feelings. As much as she was very… No, she wasn’t strict. When we were little, she was a bit strict, but only to a point, but… She was someone you could always talk to. Even today we have a very close relationship because we confide in her, so for my sisters and me she’s really like a friend, you know, our mother. And we tell her everything, when we were young, we would tell her about our friends, she would give us advice, and she was also a really, really cool mom, you know? She gave us a lot of freedom when we were young, but at the same time… It was things like, one example that comes to mind is… Our friends, when we were teenagers, they would sneak out to go to the clubs. So while their parents
were sleeping, then they would go out. They’d sneak out of the house and meet up with us in the club. But not us; my mother would drop us off at the club! You know, she’d go drop us off. And everyone would look at us like, “What is this? What? We have to sneak out…!” But she’d drop us off, and she’d pick us up sometimes too, five in the morning! She couldn’t sleep if we weren’t home. So, we were spoiled that way, everyone was jealous of us, “oh wow, I wish we had a cool mom like yours!” So, our relationship was really… you know, like friends, and at the same time, we confided in her, and honestly it saved us a lot of trouble and bad experiences. Very open, very affectionate, too, you know, she expressed her feelings, she wasn’t a closed-off, cold mother, no… She’s adorable.

J.M: Did she work?

S.G: Yes, when I was young, yes, she worked. Yeah, both my parents worked actually, when we were young. Yeah. She worked in… She was a secretary at the United Nations. I remember, there was a department at the United Nations that was, or still is, in Ethiopia, called the ECA, the Economic Commission for Africa. She worked there. And my father also worked when we were… when we were younger. He worked at another company, called ILKA, I couldn’t tell you exactly what that stands for, but anyway, it’s another international organization.

J.M: Were they ever unemployed? Your mother, your father?

S.G: Were they unemployed?

J.M: Yes, ever?

S.G: In their lives?

J.M: Yes

S.G: Well, unemployed, yes, my mother was unemployed, but it was sort of an intentional unemployment. Because the first time we left Ethiopia—so, I was born in Ethiopia in ’80, and
we left Ethiopia for the first time in ’88. So when I was eight, we moved, we moved to Libya, because my father got a job there. He had already been there a year or two, so my mother had to quit her job in Ethiopia so that we could go and join my father. So in Libya, she didn’t work at all, because… Yeah, we arrived in ’88, she stayed in Libya for two years and didn’t work, and she took care of us, she was a stay-at-home mother, but it was intentional, yeah. And my father, was he ever unemployed? Well, yeah… Probably in the beginning, when we arrived in Ethiopia. Because we arrived as refugees, so we didn’t have papers, we couldn’t really work for that first part, but after that… And during that time, he went to school, and after that he could get a job and all that. But at first, when we arrived in Ethiopia, I think he must have been unemployed then, probably.

**J.M:** And can you tell us about your father?

**S.G:** Yes, my father…

**J.M:** His personality…

**S.G:** Yes, my father, my father, my father. So… we’re very close, him and me. We lived together, well… the first years of my life. In Libya we were also very close, especially after ’90, because my parents got divorced in ’90, and me and one of my sisters stayed with him in Libya. So it was just the three of us, it was me, my sister Sylvie and my father. So then our bonds got even tighter, you could say. And he’s also a very, very open kind of person. Compared to some Rwandan fathers, who are very traditional, and their children… They don’t spend a lot of time with their children, etc. He was more… He was more present. There were periods of time when he wasn’t there, he travelled a lot, but when he was there, he was available as a father, you know. You could talk to him, you could confide in him, too. Not like you confided in your mom, but you could still confide in him. Very open minded, because of course he had lived abroad, so he
had all these experiences that he took with him. He was someone you could have really, really deep discussions with, he was a real intellectual. Personally, I admire him for all his ideas, you can talk to him about anything, and he’ll know how to... engage in it with you. Very intelligent... very, very sensitive, too. Often, fathers... They try to have thick armour, but he isn’t afraid to say that he is sensitive. Very, very sensitive. He made a very touching speech at my wedding, and oh la la! It was really beautiful. Yes.

**J.M: How did you see your parents being perceived by others?**

**S.G:** Hmm, good question. Well, it’s funny you ask that, because I asked my father that question when I interviewed him for this project. And he told me something I didn’t know, but apparently when we were in Ethiopia—well, we arrived as refugees, so we didn’t have a whole lot of resources, but slowly, he... found his place, you know, so he found work after not too long, and he was going to school at the same time, all that. And the way he was perceived by the Rwandan community in Ethiopia, for example? Not very well! Not very well, because they would say, “Hey, who’s this young kid? Now he’s got a job at the United Nations, he’s got all these internships, who does he think he is?” So there was maybe a little bit of jealousy towards us. But why towards us in particular? Because we were Tutsi, and there was a majority of Hutus in the Rwandan community in Ethiopia at the time, so yeah, there was a bit of... There were people who envied us, because we started at the bottom, but slowly, you know, things were going well for us. And my mother, no, I think it was more associated with my father, so in the end... In the end we were all kind of in the same category.

**J.M: Hmm. OK, so, it was nearly all... Hutu there? And there was some tension... between the Tutsi and...?**
S.G: Exactly. There was a Hutu majority, there were Tutsis, but there was a Hutu majority, especially since… Well, at the time it was the Hutu who were in power in Rwanda. So at the Rwandan Embassy in Ethiopia, it was the Hutu who were in charge there, so. We were, uh… There was a small Tutsi community, and Rwandan, Burundian, too. But we felt that, especially when there were events at the Embassy, for example. When the president would come to Ethiopia, there were events that were organized. And so we would go, because we were all invited, but you could tell that there were people they didn’t like as much… There were people who were sometimes suspicious of us, you know. They’d be like, “Wait, who are those people?” And one time, even, my father had gotten a job, or what was it? A job or a scholarship or something, and… I think the Embassy called his office to ask, “why did you give him that job,” or something like that? So it was really, like… As if they were saying, “Who are those people?” And every time something good would happen to us, it was weird. Yeah, we weren’t very… very well perceived, let’s say. Yeah.

J.M: And do your parents belong to any religion, Catholic or anything?

S.G: Yes. They are both Catholic. Yeah, yeah both.

J.M: Practising?

S.G: Practising? Yes and no. Sometimes, I mean, it depends. They have phases. So sometimes, at one point, my father was less practising, but now I’d say he’s practising a bit more. My mother was practising, but now she’s been practising a little bit more than usual these past few years. So yes, they have sort of an ambivalent relationship with religion sometimes, but still, they’re stayed Catholic, and they go to church, well, mostly at Christmas, but once or twice a year. But for my mom, I’d say religion is a bigger deal to her. But my father, after ’94, he was a bit less into religion, because for him, it was like, “Religion allowed what happened to happen—no, that
doesn’t make sense.” But you know, he studied theology afterward, so there you go. So he rejects religion, but then he goes and studies theology? Yeah, they’re sort of ambivalent, they’re love-hate with religion.

**J.M: OK, could you talk a bit about, if you have a brother or sister who is your favourite…**

**Your relationship with your brothers and sisters?**

**S.G: Very interesting. So, my relationship is unique, but… different with each of my sisters. So the eldest, Solange, for example, growing up, she was like… like my hero, my heroine, let’s say. I… I was fascinated with her, I wanted to do everything like Solange. And even when you look at the many routes, the paths we’ve taken, her and I, there are a lot of similarities, a lot of parallels. But as much as I wanted to be like her, I also wanted to distinguish myself from her, it’s weird! It’s really, uh… it’s weird. When you’re older, you understand it all, but… So yeah, for a long time, I admired her a lot, and I still admire her today. Sylvie is… she’s like a second mother, because she’s the one who holds us together in the family. She’s the one who keeps our bonds strong. The rest of us might forget to call our sisters for a long time, but for example, Sylvie is the one who will always call, if you don’t call, she’ll call. She’s the one who likes to organize things, meet-ups. When my mother comes for a vacation, she stays with Sylvie. And it’s always Sylvie who organizes the dinners, the barbecues, etc. So she kind of has this little motherly role in Montreal. And then there’s Stéphanie, my little sister. She was separated from us, well, I mean… We didn’t live in the same country for very long. So, I lived with her from ’94 to ’97, so that’s three years. And then in ’97 I came to Canada. And she came to live in Canada not long ago, it’s been two years. So, you see, from the age of 17 to 28, I was separated from her. So I knew her for three years, she was just little, and now I’m sort of getting to know her again. And Stéphanie—so, we’re ten years apart, so I’m 30 and she’s turning 20, or she is 20. I’m
turning 30, she’s already 20, and oddly enough we’re really close. There’s a big age difference, but we’re a lot alike, in terms of personality, and also we have the same… tastes, there are a lot of things that… When I look at her, I see myself in her. So it’s strange, I was fascinated with Soso, but it seems Stéphanie is a bit fascinated with me. She wants to do what I do; she was studying translation, now she’s saying, “oh, I want to do communications, like Sandra.” So there you go. At the same time, we have a really, really special relationship, it’s like I’m rediscovering a new friend, a new best friend, you know? It’s really, really great. She got here right at the same time one of my close friends moved to Switzerland, so it’s almost as if she came to replace her. Her timing was really good. We call each other every day, we talk for at least an hour, hour and a half, every day. She tells me everything, I give her advice, so yeah! I’ve found a new best friend in my little sister.

**J.M: And she’s in Montreal?**

**S.G:** Yes, the last two years, it hasn’t been long, yeah. So it’s like we’re making up for lost time, you see. It’s like we’re getting back all the time that we were separated, like we’re getting that back now. Yeah, it’s really great.

**J.M: Do you live relatively near one another?**

**S.G:** We did before, but recently, in July, I moved. Before we were, not so so nearby—I was in NDG-Côte-des-neiges, and she was a bit more towards Westminster, a bit further West, but it wasn’t so far. Then in July I moved to Laurier, so now we’re far. It’s a bit of a ways, yeah. But we find the time to see each other, either she’ll come to Concordia, because she works on a lot of projects here, or we’ll meet up somewhere else, in town, yeah.

**J.M: Are the others married?**

**S.G:** My other sisters?
J.M: Yes …

S.G: Yes. Yes, my other two sisters, Solange and Sylvie are both married. Yes, Solange has been for five years, she celebrated their fifth anniversary this year. And Sylvie has been married four years. Yeah.

J.M: OK. Do you remember your first home?

S.G: Oh, wow! Oh my God, good question. Oh, yes, yes… So our first home must have been… Yes, I remember. It was in a neighbourhood called Arat Kilo, Arat Kilo means four kilos in the Ethiopian language. And why is it called Arat Kilo? Because, I think somewhere in the city, there’s a landmark, a point of reference, I think it’s in the centre. And it’s four kilometres from the middle of this neighbourhood, so they called it Arat Kilo. And we had... we lived in an apartment. So it was this housing block with several… little apartments inside, that was our first home.

J.M: Could you describe it?

S.G: Yes, oh la la! Yes. So there were two bedrooms, I think, one for us, the children, Solange, Sylvie and I slept in the same room. And a bedroom for our parents. It was on the second floor and you had to take an elevator—or the stairs, it might have been stairs. And so, you’d go in, and there was a living room, I think on the right, uh, it’s funny, I’ve never… I’ve never thought back to this. You’d go in, you had the living room on the right, you had the two bedrooms—I don’t remember what order, our room, and our parents’ room. And then there was a bathroom all the way in the back. Where was the kitchen? Oh, OK, the kitchen was before the living room. It was the kitchen first, then living room, two bedrooms, bathroom in the back. And in the middle there was this sort of hallway, like… there was nothing in the middle. And all the… I think… But now
I don’t know if I’m confusing it with another house, if I’m getting mixed up, you know. But I think it was like that. Yeah.

**J.M: How many years did you live there?**

**S.G:** In that house? Hmm… I think it was eight years. I was born in ’80, and we were already in this place, I think. Then we left in ’88 for Libya.

**J.M: So that was home, in Ethiopia.**

**S.G:** Yes, exactly. I came back later, I came back to Ethiopia, but we didn’t live in that place anymore. But my early years, I lived in that same house, I don’t remember moving, no.

**J.M: And who made the decisions at home?**

**S.G:** Hmm! Good question. Well, I think it was my mother. It was my mother, because my father travelled quite a bit, too. He travelled and also, at one point he went, he left to study at Oxford. So he was gone for a little bit, maybe a year or two, I don’t remember. And so my mom was the only one there, she made the decisions at home, whether it was what we had for dinner, or homework, she helped us with that too. Yes, it was definitely my mother who did that, because she was always there, you know? Like, my father would come and go… So, he sometimes didn’t keep up with what was going on, but yeah, my mom did that.

**J.M: Was he able to come back and see you over the holidays?**

**S.G:** Yes, yes. It’s just that he was gone a lot, I remember there were a lot of trips he would go on, but yes, he would come back. He would come back for a little, then leave. Sometimes he would come back for longer, it depended. Yeah, he moved around a lot.

**J.M: Could you talk about the first time you remember feeling at home?**

**S.G:** The first time I remember… Well, I would say it was in Ethiopia. My first memories are of Ethiopia. Home, for me, that was my reference point because it was all we’d ever known. When
we left in ’88 to move to Libya, I missed my home, so I was missing Ethiopia, because Libya was this new environment. Yeah, so my first time feeling that would definitely be Ethiopia, but after that, it changed.

J.M: Did you have a place, a space that was just for you?

S.G: Just me? Or me and my family?

J.M: You, when you were little.

S.G: At home, in my house?

J.M: Yeah, just your own space. Or somewhere outside?

S.G: Just for me? No, I didn’t. Because I shared a room with my sisters, so right away it was always the three of us. And then outside I was usually playing with the neighbours, a lot of them. I had a lot of neighbours that I played with, we would run around outside. No, I didn’t have my own little corner… to be by myself, no.

J.M: What were your responsibilities as a child?

S.G: My responsibilities?

J.M: Did you have things you had to do?

S.G: When I was… when I was young? … Well, the responsibilities came a bit later. That started shortly after we moved, when we moved to Libya. Because up until I was eight, we had a maid, a cleaning lady who lived with us, who cooked for us, took care of us and all that. And when my parents were at work, she was the one who took care of us, that’s how we learned the Ethiopian language so quickly.

J.M: And what was her name?

S.G: Oh, the first, the very first one was Burke, Burke, yes. And it’s funny because, even now, when we go to Ethiopia, we see her sometimes. She comes to see us. Yeah, she comes to visit us
and she tells everyone about how she took care of me when I was two… Yes, Burke, Burke is an Ethiopian name. And yeah, she’s still there, we’re still in touch. She always comes to see us because… Yeah, she watched us grow up. Me and my sister, the one just before me, Sylvie, she basically watched us grow up. Yeah.

**J.M:** *Were there others who lived with you?*

**S.G:** No. She was the only one.

**J.M:** *Just her?*

**S.G:** Yes [laughs], it was just her. Sometimes we would have company over, it didn’t happen very often, but occasionally. Not when we were young, but later, we had cousins who would come for vacation for two or three weeks, or a month.

**J.M:** *From Rwanda?*

**S.G:** From Rwanda, one time. A cousin came from Rwanda, but that was much later, when I was 14 or 15 years old. But that was basically it. At home, it was Dad, Mom, three sisters including me, and the maid, Burke.

**J.M:** *And what languages were you exposed to in your childhood?*

**S.G:** I would say French, because of school, but Amharic was always there too. So at school I spoke French, I came home and we’d speak Amharic with the neighbours. So let’s say, for the first eight years, it was French and Amharic, but it was really 50/50. Yes.

**J.M:** *And was Kinyarwanda later… with your grandmother?*

**S.G:** Yes, that’s right. Really, we only heard Kinyarwanda on vacations… But that wasn’t enough to come back… after vacation, come back to Ethiopia and speak it… Maybe early on we spoke it a bit, but gradually it went away because we didn’t practice it, we didn’t practice at home. Later on, that was something we regretted, we said to our parents, “How could you not
teach us your language?” And they said, “Well, because it was complicated! We were both working, we didn’t have time to come home and… You already spoke French and Amharic, we didn’t want to add a third language. So we thought, OK, look, it’s not a priority right now, we’ll teach them later.” Later, later… It never happened. In the end we sort of taught it to ourselves. So now I speak it, but I don’t speak it very well, I understand it but only because I’ve heard it a lot and I’ve never had much practice. So I can’t write properly, I can’t speak without making mistakes, but that was my parents’ mistake, I think. Yeah.

J.M: Is that a bit strange for you, to not be able to speak as perfectly as you’d like?

S.G: Yes, it’s… it’s a shame, really. It’s too bad, because… we have friends here who were in the same situation as us, maybe not in Ethiopia exactly, but in other countries, but who were refugees in another country, for example. And a lot of them speak really, really well, so we can see that it’s possible, you know? But you have to make the effort, I think, you have to make it a priority. So it can’t be just once in a while, here and there, it has to be consistent. And yeah, that makes us sad sometimes, when we go to Rwanda and people talk to us, but we can’t respond right away, and even when we do speak they sort of laugh at us. It’s like, “Oh la la, listen to them, they talk like white ladies!” You know. Yeah, that’s what they say. Like muzungus, that’s what they call white people. So yeah, I think it’s too bad, but at the same time, well, that’s life, right? And we speak lots of other languages, you see… And that’s also what’s sad, is that we speak all these other languages, but not the one that’s, you know… Not our own, really, that’s kind of sad.

J.M: And do your parents speak French together, just between the two of them?

S.G: They do speak French, but also a lot of Kinyarwanda. A lot of Kinyarwanda, between the two of them. That’s why our comprehension developed, because we’d hear it, but they also
spoke French. But they spoke more Kinyarwanda than French, especially when they didn’t want us to listen, they’d speak French—no, Kinyarwanda, between the two of them, so they were sure we wouldn’t understand. But when we were all together, it was French… It was French, because my parents don’t speak the Ethiopian language all that well. So it was really French, that was our… our common ground.

J.M: If you were to describe your neighbourhood, what would you say about that?

S.G: Hmm, my first neighbourhood, in Ethiopia? Well, it was a very… normal neighbourhood, not especially rich, not especially poor. Really a middle-class neighbourhood. I would say, yeah, middle-class, there were lots of Ethiopians, there were some foreigners too. In our building, it was mostly Ethiopians, there was an Ethiopian majority in the building, but in the neighbourhood, it wasn’t far from… we called it Piazza. Piazza is like, a shopping district, there are a lot of stores. Not really downtown, but it’s… where everything was going on. We weren’t far from there, we were a 10-15 minute walk from Piazza. It was really nice, there wasn’t a whole lot to do in the neighbourhood, so what we’d do is we’d stay around our compound, our building. Because there was a yard outside, and all the kids, from the neighbourhood, from the building and the one next-door, they’d all come play in that yard. What else was there… There was a church right next-door, an Armenian church, because there’s a big Armenian community, in Ethiopia. There was an Armenian church, there were a few Armenians in our building too. Yes, yes… Armenians, half-Armenians, half-Ethiopians, there were mixed couples too… What else was there? There was a florist just underneath us, a flower place. And we weren’t far from the school, either, the French school. I don’t know if that played a role in… choosing that apartment. But it was a good neighbourhood, simple, modest.
J.M: Could you tell us a bit about that school, and all the other schools you’ve attended, and at what ages?

S.G: So… In Ethiopia, when I was three… we started preschool at three, very, very young. So at three I went directly into the French school. It was a Lycée, it’s called the Lycée Gebremariam. It’s the only French lycée in Ethiopia. So, I finished my… It was called—at there were three years of preschool, kindergarten, starting at three years old. There’s first year, second year and third year. So you’re three, four, five years old and after third year of preschool, you go to primary school. So first year primary, and so on. So when I was in third year, well… I did my three years of preschool there, until… oh yeah, the French school system is something else, so you start going backwards, meaning you start in eleventh year, then tenth, ninth, down to third year of primary, I did that in Ethiopia. After that I moved to Libya and did my fourth, fifth… and sixth year of primary there. I did my first year of secondary, second year secondary, third year secondary and then that’s it, then I left Libya. And I went back to Ethiopia.

J.M: How old were you?

S.G: When I left… so, I left when I was eight to move to Libya, I left Libya when I was 14, so I lived in Libya for six years. At 14 I came back to Ethiopia and I did the rest of my secondary, except for the last year. I did everything else, first, second, third, I did my fourth year secondary, fifth year secondary, sixth year secondary and seventh year secondary. So seven years. And then, I came to Canada to finish it, to do my final, final year before university.

J.M: And you moved with your father?

S.G: Yes… So… The first time, it was with my mother, with everyone, the whole family moved to Libya. We arrived in Libya in ’88, we stayed, me, my father and my sister, for six years. But my mother left in ’90, that’s when they got divorced. And when we came back to Ethiopia in
'94, it was just me and my sister, because my mother had already gone back to Ethiopia, so we came to join my mother and my little sister Stéphanie, who I’m very close with now. Yeah, it’s a lot, right? [Laughs]

J.M: Yeah… [Inaudible]… And were there teachers, professors, who really influenced you?

S.G: Oh yeah, I had a lot of good, good teachers, but the teachers who really stood out to me…? Yeah, I had one really interesting teacher, this was in Libya. A history and geography teacher, his name was Sébastien Deleau. I still remember his name. And he was a really, really cool teacher, and not strict, really the kind of teacher who makes you want to learn and really get good marks. So he was a teacher who stood out. He didn’t really influence me… although, I suppose, he was my history teacher, and now, today I’m doing historical work, so maybe he did influence me subconsciously. But uh… yeah, there was him. But in Ethiopia, oh yeah, there was one teacher I really liked. I didn’t like his subject much, but I liked him as a teacher. He was a biology teacher we had. His name was Franc Dubosque. He was another teacher that, when you got a good mark from him, you felt really proud. Because he was very strict, and he set the bar very, very high, so when you did well in his class, it was like, wow, you were proud of that, to see he was pleased, you know. Franc Dubosque. And who else was there? Oh, there was an English teacher I liked a lot too. Mr Petit [fr: Little] was his name, it was a funny name. Mr Petit, and he really confirmed my passion for English, because I loved that language, and he was a teacher who… oh yeah, and he had us—he was the first teacher who had us sing songs, you know, in class. He’d take the lyrics and take out some of the words and we’d have to fill them in. Oh, we thought that was the best, I loved that. Mr Petit.

J.M: When did you start English in school?
S.G: We started English some time in primary school, if I’m not mistaken. Toward the end of primary, yeah. And then in secondary we had English classes, almost daily, maybe, maybe not every day, but a lot of it, anyway. And as you move up, there’s more and more English. The system is good for that.

J.M: Did you study other languages as well?

S.G: Yes, so in the French school system, when you’re in… third year secondary, you have the option to take another foreign language in addition to English. I took Spanish. And uh… we had that from fourth year secondary, fifth, sixth, seventh, we had Spanish classes. So by the end, when we were getting ready to go to University, we already had a good foundation in Spanish. And other people took German, or Arabic, etc, but we took Spanish, and that helped me too.

J.M: And what did you do after secondary school?

S.G: So after secondary school, when I arrived I had… I had just one year left. I was in Ethiopia, and the reason I left Ethiopia before I finished was because my sister, Sylvie, who is a year older than me, had finished. And she was to come to Canada afterwards. So I said, OK, if Sylvie is going, then I’m going too. And my mother said, “Why would you go? Finish school here, and then it’ll be fine, that way you’ll go with a diploma and…” But to me, being apart from Sylvie was inconceivable. Because our whole lives, we’d been together, you know? So I said no, no, no, if Sylvie is going to Canada, I have to go to Canada too, blah blah blah! I insisted. So they let me go. And I came and I did my last year here. And it actually went really badly, because of course it was my final year, I knew… you know, there’s the baccalaureate diploma at the end of the year, and I had too many courses, so it went really, really badly, and I ended up redoing the year over again. And then I regretted it, I said, I should have stayed in Ethiopia. I knew everyone, I had friends, I had my mom and everything, but I was excited… When you’re so excited to
discover a new place, one more year is unthinkable. So that was that, I came here, I did my final year, eventually, and I went to university. I started university.

**J.M:** **Was that in Cégep...**

**S.G:** Yes. Well, actually it was the equivalent of Cégep, but in the French system, it isn’t separate. You know, it’s like all one thing. So you have…

**J.M:** **So, you were in the French school system here too.**

**S.G:** Yes, that’s right. So I transferred, really within the same system, but the thing that was difficult for me was, yes it was exactly the same system as there, but here, in the final year you also have Cégep courses, to prepare you for... And for me, the Cégep courses were courses I had never, ever seen before, so I found that really difficult because I had to not only prepare for my final exam, but also do courses I knew nothing about. I was really overwhelmed, I was like, oh la la... This is going to be a tough year! And then, yeah, I did the year over and it went much better, and I was able to go to university.

**J.M:** **OK, and what did you study in university?**

**S.G:** Well, that’s a good question. So, I thought about it a lot, I wasn’t sure. When I finished my diploma, I asked my father to sign me up wherever he wanted me to go because I really had no idea what I wanted to do. It was weird because there wasn’t really any subject that fascinated me, that I said, wow, that’s what I want to do. So I said to my father, “Listen, just sign me up wherever you want!” And he enrolled me in mathematics and computer science at UdeM. I was like, “why?” And so I went there, I took courses in math, computer science, and I did pretty well in some courses, and really, really bad in others. After one year I said... No! This is not what I want to do. This is really not me, no thank you, I know it’s my own fault, but yeah, I switched. And then I was just an undeclared major, you know, to find myself, I wanted to see, what’s going
on in Sandra’s head, what will be her passion. And then I went to UQÀM. I did one year as an undeclared major at UQÀM, and there they let you take courses kind of all over the place, as long as there’s space. So I took courses in marketing, journalism, history, law, anyway I really dabbled in everything. And then I said, I’m really interested in journalism. So I enrolled in that a year later, and I did my Bachelor of Journalism at UQÀM. And that was me, I found myself in that, I was thriving, I loved my courses and… It took me a year, year and a half, but in the end I found my path.

**J.M: Did you do a work term?**

**S.G:** Yes, yes I did two work terms. The first one I did was right after, well it was my last journalism course. It was an internship with Canal Vox, which is a TV network, I don’t know if you’re familiar with it. It’s a public access network with different shows, really community-oriented, and I was assigned to a show called *L’équipe du grand Montréal*. And what I had to do was, I had to go out in the streets and do vox pops, and then come back and do a little editing with the editor, no, it was a really interesting internship. Really… Each week I had to go into a neighbourhood and ask people questions around a theme, and talk about that neighbourhood. And then, there would be a little three-minute clip on TV the next week. That was really good, that was my first internship in the field of journalism. But the second internship I did wasn’t in journalism, this time it was in information technology and communications. And for that, I did an internship with Alternative, which is an NGO based in Montreal, and with that internship, I went to Brazil to do… to work with a partner organization of Alternative, and I updated their website, I worked… It’s a very environmentally-conscious organization. So I worked on little radio shows, radio programs about the environment, texts about the environment. Anyway, it was a really, really good… a really good experience. So three months of internship here, to
prepare for it, and then three months on the ground in Brazil. Those were the two big internships I did, I think.

J.M: After university did you do anything else?

S.G: No.

J.M: A master’s, or…?

S.G: No. I didn’t do a master’s. I… thought a lot about doing one, in the past few years, the past two years, but I’m not sure yet what subject I want to do it in. At first I thought of journalism, of course, I’ll keep going, but then it was like no, no, no—why? I think I’d had enough with my bachelor’s. At one point I thought, oral history, with this project and all, but in the end I was like, “Is this really what I want to do?” So right now I’m really re-assessing things, but that assessment takes time, because it’s been two years and I still haven’t decided. So now, I’m thinking about maybe going to L’INIS, do you know L’INIS? It’s L’institut national de l’image et du son [the national institute of image and sound]. And they do intensive programs, four or five months, and they teach you everything, you work with professionals, cameramen… to make films, documentaries, etc… And I want to go there for documentary filmmaking, the documentary program. It’s five months, full time, but I don’t know, I have to see if it’s doable.

J.M: As a director? A researcher?

S.G: As a director. I’d like to direct documentaries, yeah. They have the directing stream—in documentary filmmaking there are two streams, directing and producing. So producing is really more the fundraising side. I like directing, so putting it all together, filming, editing… yeah.

J.M: And could you talk about… from your time in university up to now, working jobs, how did you get them? How did you get here?
S.G: OK! Well. It was a bit of a journey. So I finished my journalism degree in 2004. I left for Brazil, I did my internship in Brazil in 2005. In 2005 I finished with Brazil, I came back from my internship, and I couldn’t find a job. I decided to go to Ottawa, my dad lived there, and I said, “I’m coming to Ottawa.” He had told me about this little… He was a French teacher at that time, in Ottawa. And he said to me, “You know, they’re looking for instructors at my school. So if you want, come to Ottawa.” So that was good timing, I was at a point in my life where I was still searching, so I went to Ottawa, I became an instructor. I taught French classes to federal government employees. It was great, I liked that a lot, but I was in Ottawa, living at home with my dad, at 25, 26, you know? No, I wasn’t happy with that. So I stayed there for six months. In mid-2006 I left Ottawa, I came back to Montreal because I decided it wasn’t really the city for me. I came back to Montreal, I transferred from the school in Ottawa—I found out there was a school in Montreal, so I transferred. And I found a job here, perfectly happy. So I was in Montreal and working, it was cool. But I was working as a French teacher. And that wasn’t my… my field.

J.M: For anglophones?

S.G: For anglophones, here. Now I was teaching… teaching courses here, at an École de langues de l’Estrie, it’s called. And I was teaching the same courses, exactly the same as in Ottawa, for the government employees. I did that for, well, quite a while, anyway, because it was until 2008. Two years, two and a half, I did that. But since it wasn’t full time, I had the ability to do other things on the side. And what I did was, I heard about this project in 2007. Yeah, so I started out teaching courses, at one school, then at another, for a while, and I heard about this project. I came here in 2007, the end of 2007, in November, I remember. Yes, I met Steven in 2007 and started a little internship, no, a little research contract. Really not much, eight hours a week at
first, and I loved it. I loved this project, I thought, wow, Life Stories, my God, my God I want to keep working on this! And so, gradually, my hours, the time I was spending here increased, and my hours for the French courses decreased, until I stopped teaching and came here full time. And it was the best, a little contract, then more contracts, then I became the interview coordinator, so that was already a little more stable, and since February I’ve been working at the Centre [for Oral History and Digital Storytelling] and now I’m the associate director of the Centre for Oral History. And yeah, I love it. And... yeah, no. And I know I’m getting further away from journalism, but I don’t know. I managed to find something here. But it’s sort of related to journalism when you think about it, the interviews. It’s not the same type of interview, but everything to do with editing, you know, post-production, it has a little to do with what I learned in journalism. So I figured, this isn’t so bad, this is pretty good, it’s not journalism really but it’s not far off. So I was satisfied with that, I was really, really satisfied. And there you go, I’ve been doing this full time since February, but I’m still doing interviews with the African Great Lakes group for the Life Stories project. So I’m still involved with the Life Stories project.

J.M: And how many years have you been with the Great Lakes group?

S.G: Oh, yeah! I did—was it at the beginning? I started in 2007, I think I started as a coordinator in 2008, mid-2008, halfway through 2008, I think. So it’s been about two years now that I’ve been a coordinator.

J.M: And, to jump topics a bit, could you tell us how you met your husband?

S.G: Yes, ah la la! That is a very... very good story, because it was a real chain of events, actually. So I met a friend of my husband’s, whose name is Karim. And I met him in Seychelles while on vacation with my family. And we kept in touch, Karim and my family, and a year later, when I went to France, I went on a little trip through Europe with a friend, and Karim let us use
his apartment. So yeah, we had stayed in touch since Seychelles, we wrote to each other and all that. I told him, hey, I’m coming to Paris with a girlfriend, he let us use his apartment. And while we were staying in Paris, he said, “I want you to meet a buddy of mine, a friend of mine,” you know. “I think you’ll get along well.” We were like, OK. But the first time it didn’t work out, we had to leave for our Europe trip, we came back and in the end it worked out. We met his friend, and that friend was Neal Santamaria, who is now my husband.

**J.M:** When was that, when you met Neal?

**S.G:** Karim or Neal?

**J.M:** Neal.

**S.G:** Neal was in 2005, I can tell you exactly, May 2005. Yeah, I still remember, because it was the end of that trip.

**J.M:** And you had a “long-distance relationship”? 

**S.G:** Yeah, exactly. For... well, when we met, it was the day before I left. So we met, yeah, yeah, very nice, but nothing more. And then a year later, I went back to Paris for a friend of mine’s wedding, a childhood friend. And when I got to Paris, I got in touch with Neal, but we were talking via e-mail, long-distance, but long-distance friends. And when I came in 2006, I wrote to him and said, “Yeah, I’m in town for a wedding,” etc. So we got together, and he went to that wedding with me, so that was always a good sign. And then, by the time I left, we were... we were together. Long-distance for a while, but in 2007 he came to live here. Yeah, in 2007 he came to live here, and it’s been almost three years that he’s been in Canada.

**J.M:** Could you tell us a bit about your husband?

**S.G:** Yes. So Neal, well, I told you how we met. I also think, the reason why he... why it worked and we’re married today, is because he was also ready to leave France. He was born there, until
he was 30, lived his first 30 years there, so it worked out well because he wanted to go somewhere else. He was a little tired of France and all that, and so I came along just as he was looking to leave. So when we met and it wasn’t really an option for me to go and live in France, yeah, things worked out… it worked out well because he was ready, and he came here. At first he was very hesitant about the idea of Canada, because his idea of Canada was the cold, oh my God, I can’t go where it’s cold. He visited in March, and there was a snowstorm, this much [indicates height] the day after he arrived, but he loved it! He was like a little kid, having a blast in the snow, hearing the sound it made when you walked, so I said, “Well what do you know, the one thing holding you back was the snow and it turns out you love the snow. So you’re going to love the summer, if you like the snow, you’ll love the summer.” So he came back in summer 2007, and loved it even more, and he said to me, “I’m going back to France and getting all my papers in order and I’m moving to Canada. Yes, really, I want us to make it work.” And he went back to France, after summer 2007, and he came back December 11, 2007, with his papers and his big suitcases. And we’ve lived together ever since, and it’s been really, really great.

J.M: Did he apply as a worker or as your spouse?

S.G: No, he came on a temporary work permit. So to get a work permit, you have to already have a job offer… a job that… You need the employer to confirm that they couldn’t find anyone else to do that job. And he got really lucky because he sort of fell into a job, at a company called CACTUS, CACTUS Montréal. And this company, it’s an organization that helps people, with drug addictions, homeless, people in vulnerable circumstances. And they do lots of work, lots of events to help them, you know, fill their days, get them involved, and lots of empowerment, so yeah. He got really, really lucky because it was one of the first jobs he saw, he applied, he told them he didn’t have papers yet, but they were willing to help him get his papers. They went
through the immigration process with him to speed it up… I mean, they really did everything to expedite the process. He left with his permit. In France, that part took some time, but still, six months later, here he was with his work permit, which they renew. You have to renew it every year. And while he had his temporary work permit, he also applied for residency. And he finally got permanent residency in October… October 2009, so he’s been a permanent resident for about a year.

**J.M: And what does he do? Is he still working for the same company?**

**S.G:** Yes, still, ever since. Because when he got permanent residency, he said, “Well, I don’t have to work for them anymore.” Because when you’re on a temporary work permit, it’s for a specific position. So he said, “Great, I have my residency, now I can go looking elsewhere.” But he hasn’t found anything yet. And I think he’s still really quite attached to this job, because it was his first job in Canada, and mostly he’s really, really well liked at work. I went to his coworker’s wedding and I met some of his work colleagues. And when I see him interact with people from work, you really see… He fits in, and now he has a lot of experience. He’s one of the most, most senior people at his company, so… No, he’s integrated well, I think he’s kind of afraid to leave them to go start from the bottom at another organization, another company. So yes, for now, he’s in no rush, he’s doing well there. The work is… it takes a lot of energy, and like, emotional energy, too. Sometimes he comes home, and he says to me, “I had a bad day.” I think that when he says he had a bad day, it’s actually because someone else’s story really affected him, and it’s like, my God, he can’t separate his work from his feelings, you know? So… But, you know, he’s passionate… He loves people, he loves humanity in general, so yeah. He’s there for the moment, but I know if he finds a better opportunity… He wanted to be a university professor, he’s doing his doctorate, so… If he ever finds something else, he’ll leave,
but he’s not in a hurry. So all in all, that’s that. What else can I say about him? Yeah, really open, and we really have a lot of things in common. We have a lot in common that we both discovered, and really early on, as well. Common interests, hobbies, passion for film, for documentaries, we’ve made two or three documentaries together, music, travel, I mean we are really just a perfect match. Oh, yeah. We’re good.

J.M: Anything else?

S.G: Anything else… Oh yeah, I met a lot of his friends, too, and his family, I met them. They all came to the wedding, we had like 20 people that came, around 20 of them from France. And… even that really says a lot about him, because I can tell that friendships are very important to him. He has friends from way, way back, that he’s stayed in touch with, and when they heard he was getting married, all of them, no question, said, “We’ll come, we’ll come, we’ll pay the airfare, it doesn’t matter, we can’t miss Neal’s wedding.” And so he’s someone who really loves his friends and who cherishes his friendships. No. That’s all, I think, or I’ll talk about him for hours! [Laughs] Oh, la la… Yeah, that’s all.

J.M: Could you explain, a bit, about the reason why your family left Rwanda?

S.G: Hmm. Well, my father had left Rwanda at one point when he was very, very young, he was nine years old, he talks about it in his interview, it’s interesting. He left for… the Congo—across the Congo border—with his uncles, his cousins, his brothers, really this big wave of men and children, boys, young boys. They left for the Congo because, there were… There had been clashes, some tensions in Rwanda, at the time. And so that was the first time he left. But he came back.

J.M: What year was that?
**S.G:** That was in the ‘60s. Well, he left in ’59… No, he left in ’60, because he was nine. In the ‘60s, he went to the Congo for a few years, then he came back to Rwanda, and then for a period of time he went back and forth between the Congo and Rwanda, Congo, Rwanda. And my mother stayed in Rwanda, she didn’t move right away. That was in ’73, when tensions were rising, there had been more massacres in ’73, and that’s when they both decided to leave Rwanda for the Congo, for Bukavu, where my two sisters, my two older sisters, were born. They left, it was really a pretty difficult time. I know my mother had to flee, she fled her village, she was almost killed, even. She stayed with a family who hid her during the massacres of ’73, and that’s how she survived. And my father as well, where was he in ’73? I know they left together, for the Congo. And that was another wave, there was ’59 and ’73, there were these really big, periods of people leaving to find a better life somewhere else, and that’s what they did. First they went to Bukavu, in the Congo, from ’73 to ’79, the end of ’79. Then in ’80—end of ’79, ’80, that’s when they went to Ethiopia, and I was born in December of that year. So they were very vulnerable, they feared for their lives, but even just the discrimination on all fronts as well. Even at work; my mother was a teacher, and that was often a job that Tutsis could get, because they didn’t want them taking more, more important jobs, in the government, etc. That wasn’t available to them, so Tutsis would often have the job of teacher. My mother was a teacher, but while she was working, while she was teaching, that’s when ’73 happened. And well, they saw that their lives were really in a lot of danger and they decided to leave.

**J.M:** When did they get married? Was that in…?

**S.G:** No, they got married… So if they left in ’73, they got married in ’74. Anyway, a little bit after… ’74, yeah, yeah, they got married in ’74. And then Solange, my sister, my eldest sister, she was born in ’75. So they left—actually I’m not sure if they got married—did they get
married in Rwanda or the Congo? No, no… it was in Rwanda. They got married in Rwanda because I remember my father saying that his brother put a lot into his wedding, he threw a big party and everything, and they really liked it. Yeah, they got married in Rwanda. But, God… Did they come back for the wedding then? Yeah, it’s a period of… I’d have to ask them exactly when.

**J.M:** And how did they meet? At work, through family…?

**S.G:** No, through family. They lived in the same village and they had known each other since they were very, very young. They knew each other, the families knew each other, I think, so yeah. So they grew up in the same area, they’re both from Kibuye. And it was like… you know, at first they were friends, then gradually it became something more, and then that’s it. They started… They knew each other, they were actually childhood friends. Yeah.

**J.M:** And you were in Ethiopia during the genocide?

**S.G:** Ah yes, during the genocide…

**J.M:** No… Libya?

**S.G:** Yes, Libya, exactly. In ’94, when it happened, I was in Libya, but then afterwards, when it was over… So it ended in July, roughly, the genocide, and that was when we left Libya to go back to Ethiopia to live with our mother. So we arrived in Ethiopia, maybe July of ’94.

**J.M:** Could you tell us a bit about what it was like to be in Ethiopia during that time, with the… yes.

**S.G:** Yeah. Well, it actually started… I’ll start by saying what it was like in Libya, because it was just me, my father and my sister, it was just the three of us. And so as it was happening, we heard about it on the news, but I don’t think I… I didn’t grasp the… OK, something very, very serious was happening in the country I was from, I understood that. But I didn’t really know that
country very well either! So, yes, I felt the impact, but at the same time I had this sort of distance? It’s so strange! But I do remember one thing… well, I remember that, suddenly, overnight—Rwanda was never talked about, you know. Before, I would tell people, I’m form Rwanda, and they didn’t know where it was. You know, it was very little known. But all of a sudden, what bothered me was how, suddenly, everyone everywhere was talking about Rwanda, all over the news. And it bothered me because I thought, well they’re talking about Rwanda, but they’re only talking about these horrible things! Like, if people everywhere were talking about Rwanda and saying good things, OK, that’s fine, but suddenly everyone had heard of it, Rwanda equals genocide, oh, the massacres! “Oh, you’re from Rwanda, oh, that’s where all those people are dying! Oh, that’s where…” I was like, “OK, that’s enough, stop talking to me about the bad things happening, there are good things that happen, too.” So, I remember having sort of a weird relationship with it. But I also remember my father, going through this basically… alone? I mean, he was with us, but we were too young to understand what was happening, really, I was 13, and Sylvie was 14 and a half. So I was still young. But I remember him telling us, “oh, this is bad, this is bad!” And we were like, “What do you mean?”—“Oh, I can’t get ahold of my family, I tried calling them…” I remember him talking on the phone a lot. There were a lot of phone calls, a lot of calls at night because there was a time difference. So we could feel that something serious was happening, but at the same time—yes, it hurt, yes, it affected us, but at a distance. We weren’t aware of the gravity, you know, you see things on TV, you see… “Oh, it’s serious, I’ve never seen anything like it,” but at the same time, I don’t know. For me, it was… It was later, it was years later that I realized. So the more years that went by, the more people kept talking about it, I realized, yeah, it really was a serious thing that happened. And then, there were commemorations, there were events. And I grew up as well, and I learned things, and I realized,
oh my God, now I understand what my father was saying back in ’94. So we tried to be there for him, to help him get through it, but… It was a very, very difficult time. And then after we left Libya, so while it was happening, we moved, we went back to Ethiopia. And we saw that my mother was also completely destroyed, she’d say to us—but, at the same time, they were trying to protect us, because they couldn’t tell us, couldn’t tell kids, you’re not going to tell a 13-year-old, “Oh, here’s what they did, here’s how it happened.” They didn’t give us all the details. They tried to spare us some of the details, really, but you could feel that… And in Libya, with my father, and in Ethiopia, with my mother, they were both completely destroyed. And we felt powerless, powerless, we couldn’t do anything, we’d say, “OK, this is what’s happening, what can we do?” There was nothing we could do. We had to wait, it was a difficult time. But I didn’t feel it, I didn’t feel how difficult it was myself, at the time. Not until later, and still today, I still feel it. Yes.

**J.M: Are your feelings still changing in relation to that time?**

**S.G:** Yes, a lot. Because, well, through the years—so, in ’94 it happened, and in ’95 we went to Rwanda. For the first time since I was just little. So in ’95, we went back to Rwanda. It was one year after the genocide, it was still very, very palpable, you could feel that there was something there, you could still see the holes in the walls, you know, the bullet holes in the walls. You could see… yeah, you felt it. It was still very present because they hadn’t cleaned everything up. You’d sometimes see blood stains, here and there, you know. You get there and you’re like, OK, this is really it, OK, everything I saw on the news, this is where it happened. But even then, yes there was that very hard part of being there, but on the other hand, we were still on vacation. So we were there, we were 14 years old, we were going out a lot, we were spending our days at the pool, we had friends, so we were in this sort of… paradox. We realized what had happened, but
it was like we didn’t want to see it. We did other things, we had fun, it was a vacation for us. We weren’t there to cry every day. In ’95, we went there, in ’96 we went back to Rwanda again, and that’s when it hit me. I felt it myself, then, but people were talking about it less. In ’95 a lot of people were talking about nothing else, everywhere you went, no matter who you talked to, at some point the conversation would turn to the genocide and people would tell you about it. I remember in ’95 a lot of people would talk about how this person’s dead, that person’s dead, all the details. At first we were like, oh we don’t want to hear that, we’re children! But less so in ’96. People were talking less. It was like, OK, let’s try and forget it, let’s try and move forward, but it was less omnipresent in ’96. And in ’97 I came here to Canada. Yeah, in ’97 we arrived, and then, gradually, we became sort of part of the community, we got involved in the Rwandan community here. And how did we get involved? At first, through dance, there was a dance troupe that my sisters were a part of. We would perform, do shows, etc. And then we did plays. Then I ran a community newspaper, *Hobe Montréal*. It was… you know, we were steeped in it, we were in the community. It was like… And it was really through that… I think it was through all those experiences here, that… I don’t know, that we got closer to our Rwandan culture. Because in Libya, yes there was a Rwandan community—I mean in Ethiopia, yes, there was a Rwandan community, but… We weren’t very involved in the Rwandan community in Libya—in Ethiopia, sorry, oh boy I’m mixing up all my cities. In Ethiopia, we had our friends at school, we were really in an environment with a lot of expats. That is, foreigners who lived in Ethiopia because their parents worked for the same organizations and all that, we had mostly Ethiopian friends. So we weren’t very connected to Rwandan culture. It was when we came here that, suddenly, we were seeing all these Rwandans, all the Rwandan diaspora, and we were less involved in the Ethiopian community in Montreal, really not at all, which is weird… You know,
we could have been in the Ethiopian community, because we were from Ethiopia. But no! We were very pro-Rwandan, we were involved in everything and we loved it. And through all that, I taught myself even more, I learned more about what happened in ’94. Here, we would hear about it at commemorative ceremonies, and since we’ve been here, I think, we’ve realized even more—at least I realized more, what happened in my country. Because people talked about it, there were things happening to do with it, so yeah, my desire to be engaged came out here. It’s really here that I got involved, where they were holding protests against the perpetrators, having commemorations, doing all these things that made me think, oh my God, all this time, it’s like I never realized… And now I’m waking up, I thought, God, I want to do something too. [Laughs]. Yeah, it’s really in Canada that I got in touch with my Rwandan culture.

**J.M:** Is it strange for you to not be connected to Ethiopian culture here? Or is that normal?

**S.G:** Well exactly, it’s strange. It worked out that way, possibly because, yes, there is an Ethiopian community, but it’s not all that big in Montreal. If this were Toronto, maybe we would have been closer to the Ethiopian community. But there wasn’t much of one here, that’s one thing. The other thing is, I don’t know, it just happened naturally, because we had a lot of friends who we met in Rwanda, who we met on vacation, and ones who we met in Ethiopia, who were Rwandan but who ended up here in Montreal. So when we got here, it made sense, we all got together and that was it. It happened naturally, but at the same time, I think, it was because of the numbers too, the number of Ethiopians just wasn’t that high. Yeah, it’s interesting.

**J.M:** Did you travel much to other countries? … Could you tell us which?

**S.G:** So, just travelling to visit, or to live?

**J.M:** Both…
S.G: OK, well, Ethiopia, of course. Rwanda for vacations. Libya, to live. Oh, when we lived in Libya, we went to Tunisia a lot. So I’m quite familiar with Tunisia, because one of my sisters, when she finished school in Libya—there was no Cégep in Libya, but the equivalent of Cégep in Libya—so she moved to Ethio—to Tunisia. And Tunisia is right next to Libya and we would often drive there. Why did we drive? Because Libya was under sanctions. The United States had adopted sanctions against Libya so there were no flights, the airport was closed, so there were no flights for several years. So what did we do, we took the car, we would drive all the way to Tunisia and back. We would spend the weekend, we’d go on vacation there. So I’m quite familiar with Libya and Tunisia. Oh, another place we spent a lot of vacations was Malta, in the Mediterranean. Because it’s not far from Libya, we would go there a lot for summer vacation. What else did we do… Oh yeah, Seychelles and Mauritius. The Seychelles, and Mauritius Island, we went there, we would go there for vacations with my mother. So while we were living in Quebec, in Montreal, my mother was still in Ethiopia, so every four years or so, we’d organize a trip together, to spend time with her but also just really nice trips. And in 2000, we went to Mauritius Island for two months. That was really, really nice. And in 2004, we went to Seychelles, and that’s when we met Karim, who introduced me to my husband. So that trip was very important, you could say. What else did we do? Well, I went to Brazil for my internship. Italy, I did my little Europe trip with my friend, France, Belgium, Spain, Amsterdam, what else did we do? Cuba, yeah. Not bad, a little of Europe, a little of Africa, East Africa, mostly, really only. I don’t know West Africa very well, I’d like to go. And then Latin America just a tiny bit, just Brazil, and it’s a fascinating country.

J.M: In Montreal or elsewhere, have you ever felt unsafe?
S.G: Not in Montreal. Honestly, in Montreal, no, I’ve never felt unsafe here… Other places, though, for example in Brazil, people scared me before I went, be careful, blah blah, people carry weapons, etc. And it’s true that safety isn’t the same in Brazil as here, but thank God, I didn’t have any trouble, nothing bad happened to me. But that said, I heard stories all around, from people that had things happen to them, so every now and then I was like, hmm. It really is a beautiful country, but the safety issue is pretty scary. But at the same time, it’s so beautiful that you’re like, hey, you know what, you try to stay out of trouble, you try to avoid anything happening, but that can’t stop you from living in a country. So yes, when I went to Brazil everyone kept telling me to be careful, be careful—everything was fine, for me at least. Where else have I lived and felt… Libya, in Libya I felt safe because I was, we were with our family, we were home and all that, we were… But it’s true that every so often, well you can’t just go out whenever, especially when you’re a girl. You don’t go out whenever you want, at night, etc., out in the streets. You don’t dress however you want, either; I had a lot of friends, a lot of my neighbours all wore veils, so I felt a little odd. Everyone wore veils, and I was the “no veil girl,” so that was different. So we didn’t go out whenever, wherever, however we wanted. In Ethiopia, no, I never felt… I always felt safe in Ethiopia. Because we were very protected, we were either at home, at school, or at a friend’s, there wasn’t much… No, all in all, it was good, I never had a bad experience.

J.M: Before you came here, how did you imagine Montreal, or Quebec or Canada?

S.G: Yes… So, Canada was always a part of our, let’s say, our universe, because ever since we were young, even when we were… in Ethiopia, and even in Libya, my father talked about Canada a lot. He would always say, one day, we’re going to go to Canada. One day, I’ll bring you to Canada. One day, we’ll live over there. But I was like, why Canada specifically? And I
don’t know, he’d say, well, it’s a country where all the problems we’ve ever had, we won’t have them any more there. It’s a country where everyone has opportunities. You can study, you can work, you’ll be OK, you won’t have any troubles, you won’t have to worry. Everything that they [his generation] had experienced growing up, all the danger, the violence, well, Canada was the solution to everything. So for us, when we were growing up, we saw Canada as like, wow, El Dorado, you know? A perfect place, that kind of thing. So we really idealized it, we had a very nice image of Canada. Even though we had never seen photos, we had never seen videos of Canada, we really had, we came here with a good image of it. When my sister finished her Cégep and came here, and I came with her, my first impressions were, wow! You know… The highways! I don’t know… It’s really a different world, a different way of seeing things. Even the way the city is built, it’s completely different. I actually found it really beautiful. I have really, really good memories, we arrived in September, so it was the beginning of autumn, and I remember the leaves were starting to change colours, it wasn’t too cold yet, it was still really nice out. The timing of when we arrived was really, really nice. But it was the winter that was tough. [Laughs]. That wasn’t so fun. Especially because my first winter here was the year of the verglas. I’m not sure if you’ve heard about the verglas, or if you were here for it, it was the Ice Storm. The winter of ’97-’98.

J.M: Yes, I was away on vacation, in December.

S.G: Really?—ah, OK in December, and then you left? OK…

J.M: But, there were other storms… [inaudible].

S.G: Right, yes, and then in January the Ice Storm really hit. So I saw that, and I was like, “My God! Mom, I wanna come home!” I said, “Send me a plane ticket,” because I thought it was always like that… You know, I thought every winter, there were ice storms like that. But they
told me, “No, Sandra, this is the first time, it’s rare, no it’s really not a normal thing.” So then I was like, OK, so when does it end? One month, two months, three months… No, winter, that first winter was beautiful to look at, it was new, but all the other winters, I find it difficult. I find winters in Quebec difficult, to be honest. But other than that, I love the summer, I love the spring, I love the fall. So it’s just the one season that I don’t like.

J.M: And how do you think your feelings about your community have changed since childhood?

S.G: Hmm, since childhood? Well, yes, it’s changed… And again, when you say community—the Rwandan community? Which community? … That’s the thing. Growing up, so, I knew I was Rwandan, but I lived in Ethiopia. Then after I saw, after ’94, it was like, yes, you’re Rwandan, but you’re Rwandan and so your family has gone through this awful thing. You know? So then it’s like, OK, I’m Rwandan, but I’m also Tutsi, and… look at what happened to us, etc. And then there’s the phase here in Montreal, where it’s like I’ve embraced the community, I wanted to be an integral part of the Rwandan community. And that’s the community I identify with, I actually identify myself as being in that community. And that happened very gradually, I started at almost nothing, not even feeling affected by Rwanda when I was young, and then this whole story happened. So it ends up being, not your whole identity, but… I wonder how I would have felt if there hadn’t been the genocide. Because the genocide came to add so much of a—how can I say this—another layer to your identity. There’s Rwandan, and then there’s what your people went through. And then these past ten years that I’ve felt so Rwandan, but I’ve set aside my Ethiopian experience just a tiny bit. I still have it, because I still go back there, my mother is still… She lives there, so I go back there, but I don’t know. It’s as if… It would be interesting to see, you can’t turn back time, but if there hadn’t been a genocide, I don’t know if our belonging, our
identity, if all that would be the same. I don’t know, I don’t know. It’s as if after that, there’s this need we have to do our part in all of it—how can I change things, how can I get involved, how can I make a difference. And that’s a very important part of my life today. There you go.

J.M: Do people here talk about being Tutsi or Hutu as one? Like, I know in Rwanda, it’s not talked about officially, it’s like, “I’m Rwandan”… [inaudible]. So here, is it the same, or is it a little different because you’re removed [inaudible]?

R: Yes. So here, we avoid talking about that, but we do talk about it. We do talk about it because, well, it’s sad to say but there is still a certain segregation—not segregation, but we are separate, we aren’t all unified. Yeah, we’re not. You know, there’s the Tutsi community, and there’s the Hutu community. So it’s true that there is sometimes… a mix, there are people who are in one or the other, but we don’t share events. There are the events that we organize, there are the events that they organize. So amongst ourselves, when we’re amongst ourselves, you know, we don’t say, like, I’m Hutu, I’m Tutsi, we don’t say it exactly like that. But at the same time, it’s something we’re trying to stop, it’s really—there’s this movement now, more and more, when someone asks me, “So like, what are you? You’re from Rwanda, but what are you, what group are you in?” And I try to say, “No, we’re trying to stop that,” try to say, “no, don’t ask me that, because that’s what we’re trying to end.” So all those years that we were separated, now, just see Rwandan. That’s all. So it’s something we’re trying to do here, and even more so in Rwanda because that’s where it happened, but here, more and more we’re trying to avoid going by those names like that.

J.M: So is your dance troupe mixed, or is it mostly…?

S.G: Most of the dance troupe is Tutsi, yeah. Most of them, the majority, the large majority, really, I’d say. Yes.
J.M: So, there is a divide. But also, in Montreal, do you notice other divisions, other people?

S.G: Oh, among Rwandans here?

J.M: No, just here in Montreal.

S.G: Well, the only divide I notice is really the English, or the anglophone/francophone one. Sometimes I even see it in the neighbourhoods where I live. I lived for a long time in the West of Montreal—NDG, Hampstead, those areas, and now I’m all the way to the East, and now I see it, I totally see it, I hear it, my neighbours, you know, it’s very French in my neighbourhood. And at first I didn’t notice that. At first I didn’t know, I arrived in Montreal, I went… You know, you’d go to the neighbourhoods, you’d hear a bit of both languages spoken sort of everywhere. But over the years, you really see that there is a divide. Not the same divide, not based on ethnicity or whatever, but a linguistic divide. But other than that one, no… I haven’t really seen that in other communities, no.

J.M: What is home for you, now?

S.G: What country?

J.M: What place, what…

S.G: …is home?

J.M: …idea, I don’t know.

S.G: Hmm. Wow, that’s a really good question. Well… I know that, well, these past few years, these last 13 years I’ve been in Montreal, I feel like I’m putting down roots. So I’m really starting to put down roots here, I see myself always having a home base here, always, because my sisters are here, my father, there’s a good portion of my family here, so… Yes, I feel more and more at home here. That said, even though I feel very, very comfortable here, I also feel
incredibly Rwandan. So Rwanda… But at the same time, I don’t feel at home when I go to Rwanda, because I only go for vacations. So I go there on vacation, I see a side of Rwanda that everyday people don’t necessarily see. So it’s not like, “Ahh, I get to Rwanda and I feel at home, you know, it feels right”—no. That wouldn’t be true, because I don’t know the place. But… It’s really, really interesting because, at the same time, I feel… In terms of identity, I feel very, very Rwandan. And finally—so that’s my relationship to Canada, my relationship to Rwanda—on the other hand, when I go to Ethiopia, I feel at home. I feel at home because I speak the language, I know the places, I was born here, I went there… It’s where I spent a good portion of my life. For a while, it was where I’d spent the most of my life, but now Canada has surpassed Ethiopia. So I’ve spent 13 years in Canada and 11 years in Ethiopia. So you can see, that might be… Yeah, the number of years definitely plays a role. So I could put it on a scale, I’d say, today in 2010, I feel at home in Canada, because this is where I live, and this is where I’ve spent the most time out of my life. Second would be Ethiopia, because, well, I have a very special attachment to Ethiopia, you know, from my experiences. Then, there would be Rwanda, which… Which is a very, very important part of my life, because even here, I’m constantly involved in things to do with Rwanda. But something is missing—living there, really, that’s what’s missing. Yeah, that’s what I’ll have to do some day, live there. And then I’ll have an experience of Rwanda, I can say, “Yes, I’ve really lived in my own country!” But I haven’t had that yet, and well, it’ll happen when it happens, but I know it’ll happen one day. Yeah.

**J.M:** Are the two of you OK to move somewhere else?

**S.G:** So, moving somewhere else, yes. Me and my husband? Yes. We’re very, very open to that idea. We’ve even looked, we’re starting to realize, there are places we’ve always wanted to go and live, but every time we decide against it, we say we’ll do it some day, we’ll do it some day.
But… Yes, more and more we want that day to come, we want to make our dreams reality, our plans. And we’ve thought about—one of the places we’ve considered is Brazil, we’d like to go and live there one day, we don’t know when. The other place we want to live, for my husband, it’s Senegal. I don’t know why, there’s a fascination he and I have with that country. He’s been there on vacation, I’ve never set foot there, but we know that one day, we’d like to live there. I’d like to go to Rwanda with him, I’d like for him to discover Rwanda. I’ve already shown him Ethiopia, now I’d like to show him Rwanda and see if you know. I’d like to at least experience it, maybe just a few years, and then we’ll see. And yeah, so we’re very, very open to it. Now that he’s a permanent resident, we have more flexibility, and now that we’re married, if we want to start our life and then go travel and see the world. Yeah.

**J.M:** Are there physical things that you find comforting?

**S.G:** Physical… that I find comforting… Hmm, objects? …Yeah, so for example, when my mother, she’s from Ethiopia, she would often bring us—they’re called gabis. Gabis are these, these blankets, made of wool, Ethiopian blankets. They’re handmade, they’re very, very thick, and they’re really warm, they keep you warm especially in the winter. So those, right away, they bring me right back to Ethiopia, they bring back the smells of Ethiopia when I get them, because she goes to buy them at the market right before getting on the plane, so they’re still very… Oh yeah, that’s very, very comforting. What else? Food, I would say food. That’s not really a physical object. But food, Ethiopian food, that can… There’s one traditional dish, actually it’s the dish, by definition, in Ethiopia, it’s called injera. Injera is like a pastry, a kind of pancake. And you eat it with different sauces, and vegetables and meat. So you take your little piece of pancake and you go and pick up the little, little toppings—so good. That’s the thing that, when
we land in Ethiopia, we have to go straight to a restaurant. We go and eat Ethiopian food right away.

**J.M: Do you know how to make it?**

**S.G:** No, so the dough is really complicated, you need a machine to make it. It’s this big kind of machine. And even the flour, it’s not exactly the same flour, there’s a similar kind of flour you can get here, but it’s not quite the same. But you can find the dough in grocery stores, there are two or three grocery stores that carry it. But the sauces, yes, I know how to make some of them, but not a lot. No, it’s very complicated to make, it takes a long time, too. But yeah, that, I’d say give me a good gabi, and a good injera, and I’m good. But again, you can see it’s Ethiopian things that I find comforting. Hmm, I’m trying to think of something Rwandan that could be… Rwandan music. Rwandan music is really, really good, really… Even though I don’t understand everything they’re saying. Rwandan music, yes, that’s something. Yeah, that’s not bad.

**J.M: Is there a colour you associate with home?**

**S.G:** Which colour? Well, I naturally really like bright colours, I like orange, yellow, I like summer colours, warm colours. But there isn’t one colour in particular that takes me back… no. Those colours, I do see them, I’ll go to Ethiopia and buy clothes and I look for the colours I like, you know? I try to adapt my colours… But no, there isn’t one particular colour that reminds me of home.

**J.M: How would you define the term ‘refugee’?**

**S.G:** Hmm… Well, a refugee is someone who… Someone who leaves their home, their “home,” as you were saying, because of… either because of violence, instability… Yeah, someone who is forced to leave home. Yes, because you often don’t decide to leave just because you want to,
unless, well, you want to travel and all that, but it’s someone who is forced to leave their home, their little cocoon, their family.

**J.M:** And how would you define the term ‘Québécois’ [Quebecer]?

**S.G:** Hmm… That’s right, I’ve always… For a long time, I associated the term Québécois with… someone who has lived, who has lived in Canada, in Quebec, for several generations, what we call *Québécois pure laine*. And then one time, I don’t know who I said this to, who I was talking to, but we were talking about an anglophone who lived in Montreal. And, I don’t know, when we were talking I said, “But no, he’s not Québécois,” and the person said, “Well, why not?” I was like, “No, he’s not Québécois, he speaks English.” And it’s the same, as I said it, I thought, well why, is that true? Does Québécois necessarily mean speaking French, having great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents who were born here, who grew up here? Or is Québécois simply someone who lives in Quebec? And that’s what… [inaudible]. To me, for a long time, Québécois was the pureblood francophone, all that, the Québécois. And the rest were Montrealers, you know? But no, “Québécois,” I think, now I would define it more broadly, Québécois are the inhabitants of Quebec. Yes, there are immigrants, but I think that immigrants become Québécois too, at a certain point.

**J.M:** When?

**S.G:** Aha, that’s the question. That’s the question. That’s it, is there a date, is there a number of days you spend in the province to become Québécois? Is it one year, then you become Québécois? That is the question: when? And… because, Montrealer-Québécois, that’s… Yes, it was, it took me some time, but I don’t know why I made that direct connection, an anglophone who’s been here for years, his family is here, and both his parents, why wouldn’t I call him
Québécois, you know? So yeah, no, I learned along the way and now, that’s it, a Québécois is someone who has lived here for some time, a resident of Quebec. [Laughs].

**J.M: Do you consider yourself first and foremost Canadian, or Québécoise?**

**S.G:** Hmm… Well, given what I’ve just said, I would have to say I consider myself Québécoise, but I don’t know if I do. I should, I’ve been here for thirteen years now, I should be able to say, “Yes, Sandra, you’re Québécoise.” But I don’t know. When people ask me where I’m from, it’s not the first word that comes to mind. I don’t say I’m Québécoise, I say I’m Rwandan. So I say Rwandan, born in Ethiopia. Or Rwandan, moved to Canada… I always have this… Like, in my head, it’s still…! And even Canadian. For a long time, I didn’t… I’ve been a Canadian citizen for about six years, since 2004, but I don’t know if I feel entirely Canadian yet. And when do I feel that? I feel it, for example, when I watch the Olympics, and Canada’s playing. When we win—now I’m saying ‘we’ win, but when Canada wins, I don’t feel affected by it. I don’t feel like, “oh my God, my country won!” No, I say Canada won. But if I’m watching a Rwandan team, or an Ethiopian team, oh my God! I’ll be like, “oh la la!” I’m happy because, you know, they did it, and all that… But, yeah… So honestly, I’d say I consider myself more of a Montrealer than a Québécoise or a Canadian. Maybe in the future, when I’m travelling with a Canadian passport, but I’m not there yet. I haven’t reached the point where I feel completely Canadian, like… I don’t know, like Steven Harper feels Canadian [laughs]. I haven’t reached that point—I should have picked a different example [laughs]. Yeah, I’d say Montrealer.

**J.M: Your friends: do you have francophone friends, anglophones? Who are your friends?**

**S.G:** So I have anglophone and francophone friends. I have both. I really have a bit of both, I have Spanish-speaking friends too, more and more, because of my husband, because he has a lot of Latin American friends here. So yes, I have a bit of everything, I have some francophones,
most of them, I’d say, mostly francophones. Because I’m friends with a lot of Rwandans, so we
normally speak more French, but other than that I have a lot of anglophone friends too.

**J.M: What do you think of ‘reasonable accommodation’?**

**S.G:** Hmm… Well that’s a whole other story… But it is interesting to see, because it sort of
allows people to express themselves. And that’s always a good thing, even if what they say isn’t
always very… ‘smart,’ very well thought out, but at least they have a place to express it, that’s a
good thing. Now that it’s come to this, and especially the whole situation that started it all, I
do n’t know. I find it all a bit extreme. But at the same time, will it stop people from feeling the
way they do? I don’t know. Is making accommodations going to help integration? Is it… We
do n’t know yet, it’s still too early to tell. But… But yeah, I’m all for giving people a voice, but at
the same time, it has its limitations. Sometimes you hear these things, and you think, oh my
God… All this time, that’s what they really thought, that’s how they really felt, that’s it… But I
think it’s something that comes along with Canada, you know, it’s a country made up of
immigrants, etc. I think it’s something that was inevitable. But it’s the circumstances, the way it
all went, everything that happened, everything that came after, well, that wasn’t ideal either, but
yeah. But some good has come of it, there are many really good solutions, good ideas that came
out of it, and that’s good. But you know, it’s a double-edged sword.

**J.M: What would you say to newcomers, if you had the chance?**

**S.G:** Hmm, to newcomers? Well, first of all, to be open to the culture, to be open to Montreal, to
not let themselves be ghettoized in little communities, in the communities you already know. I
would tell them to be as open as possible, to learn how to get to know your coworkers, if you
work, learn to get to know your classmates at school, to really have a thirst for knowledge, when
you arrive in a new country, to really… What other advice would I give? Oh yeah, also to
educate yourself, because there are so many resources when you first arrive. We have access here to resources for immigrants, so many, and we often don’t even know. So to really educate yourself, and not be afraid to ask questions. Go talk to organizations, that’s what organizations are there for and you often don’t know about them. So why is it that we don’t know? Maybe because we’re too closed off, we’re afraid to get informed, no, I’m telling you, be as open as possible. Try to learn about others, whether it’s Québécois, someone of some other background, whatever, but really open yourself up and things will work out. Because you don’t close yourself off by coming here, on the contrary, we are lucky.

J.M: And what would you say to Quebecers, given the chance?

S.G: Well, I would tell Quebecers to be tolerant, to be welcoming, because they live in a country, really, that welcomes a lot of immigrants. To not be afraid of immigrants, to… put them at ease, really. To welcome them, but truly. The people of Quebec are already known for being welcoming, so we’re already off to a good start. But you also sometimes see cases where… yes, you have the impression of being welcomed, but at the same time, you know, there’s like a double play. To your face, they show you how welcome you are, but behind your back, hmm… It’s like, we keep our distance… So to really put that person at ease, especially the person who has just arrived, who left everything behind, who left a whole life behind and is coming here for whatever reason. Not necessarily difficult reasons, but still… It’s still difficult to arrive in a new country. So if on top of arriving in that country, they don’t feel welcomed, they don’t feel comfortable and they’re being subject to discrimination, racism, etc., well that makes things much more difficult. So I’d really tell Quebecers, you know, welcome them. Diversity is a strength. We can learn from one another, not be afraid of each other, that’s what I would tell them.
J.M: What does culture mean to you?

S.G: Culture, hmm… Well it involves, it encompasses many things. It encompasses language—personally I think language is the most important element of a culture—it’s language, it’s customs, food, habits, eating habits… Culture… Really, it’s everything that defines you, and that’s been passed down to you. It’s often very hard to pin down, it’s really very abstract, but I think that it’s a combination of all of that, the culture, the language, the traditions, the typical customs of a country or a culture, yeah. It’s one word, but it encompasses many things.

J.M: How would you describe, or define yourself?

S.G: Me, how would I describe myself? Well, I would say that I’m a woman, I’m Rwandan, born in Ethiopia, I’ve lived in Canada for 13 years. Basically that’s how I define myself. But I could also define myself by saying, I’m also a citizen of the world, I’d define myself as that. Sometimes I define myself as a journalist, because that’s where my education was. But sometimes I also feel I can’t define myself that way. I also define myself as part of the Rwandan diaspora. I define myself as an immigrant. I also sometimes define myself as a visible minority, by the standard here. How would I describe myself? I’m a very, very curious person by nature, passionate, a traveller, with a bit of an artistic soul, too. I have a little artistic side inside myself, although it’s very dormant, but I do have a little… I have this fascination, I love music, I love guitar, yeah. Yeah, I, yeah I’m uh… Yeah, that’s pretty much how I would define myself. Those are the main things.

J.M: And… when you say you’re a ‘visible minority,’ have you experienced, noticed a difference here, or experienced anything because of that?

S.G: It’s not something that happens every day, it’s not something… It’s not like, you know, I’m a victim, or—no, it’s not a common occurrence, but there are very specific situations where that
has happened. One example that comes to mind, for example, is apartments. When we arrived in Canada, in ’97, we went looking at apartments with my dad, my step-mother, my sister, and I remember, there was one apartment where we called, we said we were interested, etc. Everything was going fine, they were happy too, because over the phone, they didn’t know who it was. But the moment we showed up at the place, ah, just so happens, it’s already rented! So that has happened several times, and we did take legal action against that person. But, what have we noticed… Yes, you don’t feel—you don’t feel it every day. Really, here, I find that, you know, people make you feel comfortable, it’s really just “where are you from? Etc.,” but there are times, every once in a while, you know, it’s really insignificant, maybe once a year, or something like that. When you get in an argument, with a neighbour, for example, you get in a fight and a neighbour is mad at you, the first thing they’ll say to you is “go back where you came from.” Yes, that has happened before, and it’s funny, it wasn’t even to me, they said it to my husband, Neal, who is—he’s half French, half Dominican, sure, he is pretty dark-skinned, he looks… well, people often think he’s Arab, but anyway. This neighbour, one time, she was mad, in a bad mood, “Ah, go back where ya came from!” So a lot of the time, it’s when there’s some kind of disagreement, or a problem, that’s when that side—not racist, but well, not very open, that’s when it comes out. Another anecdote, that happened more recently, was when we moved into a new apartment. And we had this neighbour right next door. We had a little ‘get-together,’ a little, little party, but really very small, with friends, that kind of thing. It was ten o’clock, a Friday, and my husband was talking to a friend of his, in front of the door, like, on the balcony. They’re chatting. But they’re chatting in English. It’s ten o’clock. And the next-door neighbour yells, “Hey! Stop talking!”—what did he say, at first he said, stop talking, I’m trying to sleep. OK, fine, we’re new to the neighbourhood, so we don’t really know what people are like and
everything. OK. But it’s ten o’clock on a Friday, it’s not like… OK. But what bothered me was what he said after, he said, “Stop speaking English! Hostie, stop speaking English, speak French!” I was like OK, that’s really weird. So we’re in our own home, in our apartment, but the problem wasn’t that we were being loud, he had—he was more mad that we were speaking English. That just blows my mind. We can’t speak whatever language we want in our own home? What? And that friend, he speaks French, but he doesn’t speak it very well, he’s anglophone, you know? So whenever we see him, we speak English. So that really shocked me, you know, that made me think, wow, that means our next-door neighbours are not very open, not just to anglophones, but maybe they don’t like us very much either, who knows. So there are little incidents here and there when sometimes people sort of show their true colours, but in general, honestly no, we have no complaints. We have no complaints. When my husband tells me about living in France, there’s no comparison, none at all, really it’s a paradise here. Over there, it’s bad, over there you hear it every day, it’s everywhere, the racism is really omnipresent, oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, really. I don’t know, it’s really two different things, so—but yes, here there are little incidents, but yeah, it’s everyday things, but it’s rare. It’s honestly really rare.

**J.M: Do you notice a difference between the city here and the province?**

**S.G:** Hmm… Life [misheard] here and in France?

**J.M: No, no. Just here, in Quebec and the… landscape [countryside]?**

**S.G:** Ohh… Yeah. Well, I’m not familiar with many of the cities here, but I’ve been to some of the ones in Quebec, anyway I know the big cities, Toronto, Ottawa, those ones. But in Quebec City, for example, I’ve noticed that there aren’t as many immigrants as here in Montreal, so people have less exposure to immigration and diversity, so in my experience, people were a little less warm. They were a little less warm than here in Montreal. In the surrounding areas, I’ve
been to Tadoussac, Malbaie, Trois-Rivières, Joliette, all those places. Less… yeah, I like them well enough, but you can tell it’s different from Montreal. People look at you sometimes, like who are you—you know, they’re already small towns, so people know you’re not from there, so they look at you a lot, and when you’re not the same colour as them, they look at you even more, but that’s never bothered me personally. To me, looking at me isn’t a problem, but coming and talking to me and saying things that aren’t OK, that gets to me. No, we’re really far ahead in Montreal, oh yeah.

**J.M: Where do you feel the most comfortable?**

**S.G:** I would say in Canada, in Montreal.

**J.M: Is there a particular place?**

**S.G:** Oh, where I feel comfortable? I would say, in my family home. We have a house, my mother bought a house a few years ago and that’s where I lived for a few years, four or five years. And every time my mom comes back, that’s where she stays, that’s where my sister lives now, so it’s kind of the place where we always all get together. And that’s really where, I think, if there was a place that symbolized our attachment, our roots in Canada, it would be that house. It’s really the first home we had here, not a rented home, but a real home. I would say that would be it.

**J.M: What do you think of Bill 101 and the language issue?**

**S.G:** Yes, that’s another particularity of Montreal. At first I didn’t get it, I didn’t understand all that when I arrived, but afterwards… you know, you hear things, you hear people complain that the English isn’t big enough, the French isn’t small enough, anyway… So we realized that it really held—that it was important, when we got here, but you don’t notice it at first, when you arrive, no. And I was young, too, but at first you think it’s all good, everything is bilingual, but
after a while, you know, you learn where it comes from, too. Then you sort of understand why they feel that French is threatened, for example you… Yes. But at the same time, I find it sometimes goes too far. It’s becoming too controversial. Yes, it’s true that there are things that need to be done, it’s true that we need to protect French because well, we are the only province, blah blah blah—but we also shouldn’t waste, spend too much time on it, you know? Sometimes they make a big deal out of little things, but at the same time I think maybe I would react the same way if I were in that situation. I mean, if I felt threatened, if I felt that my language were endangered, but I don’t feel affected by that, to me, the two languages are just as beautiful, just as important, I speak them both. I don’t feel affected, or feel like, oh la la, the French I speak will disappear at this rate! No, I think it’s part of globalization, too. You know, we live in a world where things are changing, and English is starting to become… And I have sort of a unique relationship to it, but I’m understanding the issue more and more and why it’s important here. And I respect that, I really do, but we shouldn’t spend too much time on it. Yeah, there are other more important things. [Laughs].

**J.M: If you had one wish for the future of Quebec, what would it be?**

**S.G:** My wish for the future… well, it’s a wish, but it’s also a reality, that the future of Quebec will be very, very mixed. Mixed together, really. A mix of everything, I think that 10, 15, 20 years from now, we’ll have a mix of everything here, and it’s already beginning. I meet people, couples, and it’s incredible, I’ve never heard of some of these mixes. It’s just in Montreal, in Quebec, that you see them. Now, that’s specific to Montreal, that mix of cultures might not, might not go beyond Montreal, into the rest of Quebec, but for Montreal, talking about Montreal… What I wish is for there to be so much mixing that we stop talking about Quebec, *Québécois pure laine*, y’know, versus everyone else, you know? Because that’s a beautiful thing,
we’re so lucky to live in a city like that, where you meet all sorts, really all sorts everywhere, and
I’d like us to benefit from that. I’d like it to be a strength, not a problem. Yeah, I think that in 15,
my God, maybe 50 years, 50 years from now, the Quebec population, or at least the Montreal
population, will be completely different and that will be a beautiful thing. Everyone will be so
mixed that you won’t know anymore, we’ll all be… well, citizens of the world, there you go!

J.M: And if you had a wish for the future of Ethiopia, what would that be?

S.G: Ethiopia? Oh, it’s such a beautiful country. It’s a beautiful country, one that’s developing
quickly, very quickly. What would be my wish for Ethiopia? Well… for it to stay at peace. The
past few years, it’s been very calm, there were some little tensions in the ’90s, in ’91, between
Eritrea and Ethiopia, there was a small war, but recently it’s been going really well. Yes, there
are some tensions with Somalia, but that’s nothing too serious. But I’d like for things to stay
peaceful, to develop the right way, for no more drought, too, because you have to watch out for
that, especially in certain parts of Ethiopia. For that beautiful country to be spared any disasters
that could happen, for that not to happen, yeah! And for it to stay beautiful, oh yes, for its history
to be preserved as well, because it has such a rich history, Ethiopia, but people often don’t realize
it. We only hear about the negatives, we hear about famine, we hear about the problems it’s had,
when we hear Ethiopia we hear *We Are the World* by Michael Jackson. We only see that when
there’s so, so much more than that, there are years and years, centuries of cultural and historical
riches and nobody talks about that. So my wish would be for people to hear more about the
beauty of Ethiopia.

J.M: And for Rwanda?

S.G: Uh, for Rwanda…Well, of course, to be safe from everything that’s happened in the past.
Are we really safe, I don’t know, but I hope that what we went through in ’94, and even before,
never happens again. That we’ll find a way to live together, without killing each other. And that we continue to develop, the economic development, all of that is going really well, I hope it goes on like that. And that… one day, when someone says, “I’m from Rwanda,” that the first thing you think of won’t be the genocide, that it’ll be other things, you know? Because that’s how it often is now, you say Rwanda and it’s like, “Oh yeah, where were you in ’94?” No, I’d like that to be different. That’s what I’d wish [laughs]. I’m getting emotional.

**J.M:** In Rwandan history, are there silences in the history—things that aren’t said? Are we talking about the history honestly enough?

**S.G:** Well, no, you know, we don’t talk a lot about—we haven’t talked a lot about history. There are a lot of people who say, when ’94 happened, they didn’t know what was behind all of that. There are people who were surprised by ’94, younger people—the older people knew, they could tell, but it wasn’t passed down like it should’ve been to the younger generation, to later generations. And oftentimes that’s why, a lot of people were like… what happened? And they asked their parents about it later, after the massacres, and then they’re saying, “But how could you never have told me that, how could you never have talked about what you went through, etc.” So it wasn’t passed down enough, but it is now, more and more, so that it doesn’t happen again, so that we don’t start all over again. So it’s only now that we’re talking about our history, I was always fascinated when a friend of mine would know about their own history. And like, know it well! They knew the details… you know, the really important dates in the history of their country, and then I sort of felt self-conscious about that, because sure, I knew the basics, but that was it. I didn’t know the details, sometimes friends would ask me questions about my country, hmm, I would answer them but very vaguely, you know. And now, now I see where that comes from, it’s that there was no… Our parents had experienced violence and didn’t want to pass on
that violence, the stories of violence, to their children. They wanted to spare us. You know, they’d say, “No, you don’t need to know what I’ve been through,” but we do, we do need to know, because that’s a part of our history too. So yeah, I would say, there are a lot of silences, silences that have been dangerous, but it’s something we’re trying to change. And that’s actually why I find projects like life stories, oral histories, they’re crucial. It’s so, so important to keep doing all of this, to do so much, on different themes, to get people talking. And another things is that in Rwandan culture, we don’t talk very much. We’re a people… We talk a lot about others, but we don’t talk a lot about ourselves, about how we feel, we’re not a very expressive people, no… There really are a lot of things unsaid, even in the culture, even in proverbs, even in… You never know what someone else is thinking, because they will put up a façade, as if everything is fine, but you don’t know what’s behind it. And that’s a problem too, and so projects like this, oral history projects, where people have a chance to—where they’re given the opportunity to tell their life story, we need that in Rwanda more than anywhere else. Yes, we need to learn to talk more, and to talk to each other. Yes, yes I’d say so.

**J.M: What do you think of the image in the media of survivors of the genocide? … films…**

**S.G: Mhm… Yeah, films, films…** Well, it depends, there are some films… There are really two types of films: there are the sensational type, the Hollywood type, that present an image that’s very simplistic, very black and white, very easy, I think. The good guys versus the bad guys. And then in them, there’s always, somewhere in the story, there’s going to be a Westerner in the movie, who sort of comes and saves the day, or who helps, anyway. It’s often painted that way. But besides that, there are more and more films being made, in Europe, Rwanda, that show other aspects of the genocide, that are a bit more well researched, more well made, that are educational. You come out of them feeling like you’ve learned something about history. But
it’s… Those kinds of films, I’m all for them, I think there will be more and more of them. The other thing that happens a lot is, I was just talking to a friend about this recently, but there are Westerners, mostly Americans, who come to Rwanda and steal ideas for screenplays written by Rwandans. So there are Rwandans who don’t necessarily have the means to make a film, to finance it and everything, but who write screenplays. An American will come and read their screenplay, and steal it! They’ll take it, and then what happens is the Rwandan will give it to them without a fight, because they’ll think, “Oh, well they know better than me, they can do a better job than me. They have better resources than me, so I’ll just give them my screenplay…” And then, the other thing is, the screenplay changes, of course, because it has to be adapted for American audiences. And that’s something that’s happening more and more in Rwanda it seems. And it’s a shame, because Rwandans should be allowed to tell their own stories, because… Who else knows them better? You know? They’re in the best position to know what happened. So yes, more films made by Rwandans, for Rwandans. In the media, they don’t talk about it enough yet, except when they’re talking about commemoration, when they talk about elections, so when there’s a big event, they’ll talk about it, but no, in that respect, the media really doesn’t do a very good job in general. I mean there are some sources, you have to go and find them, but in general there’s still a lot of work to be done.

J.M: Are there songs, lullabies, proverbs, anything like that that remind you of home?

S.G: Yes. Yes, there are a lot.

J.M: Could you share some of them?

S.G: Yes, for example when I listen to Cécile Kayirebwa, she’s a very well-known Rwandan singer, Cécile Kayirebwa, when I hear her music, it takes me straight back to Kigali. It reminds me of vacations. When I listen to really, really popular Ethiopian music, or like, Ethiopian
classics, that takes me straight back to Ethiopia. Yes, music is very, very powerful for doing that kind of thing. Lullabies, yes, there were a lot of lullabies my mother would sing to us, that we sang to my little sister, y’know, that have been passed down! Mostly Ethiopian lullabies, but when we were little, that’s where we lived, for our early years, so a lot of Ethiopian lullabies. Proverbs…

J.M: Could you sing one of the lullabies?

S.G: Sing a lullaby? Yes, actually, one lullaby, the one that comes to mind is—it actually doesn’t even have any words, you know, it’s called Ishur. So the way it goes, it’s when the baby’s sleeping, and you sing, [sung] “Ishuru rururu”. And we would add “baby,” I don’t know if that was in the song, but we put it in. And then, we would sing it to my little sister, and we’d go, [sung] “Ishuru rururu… Ishuru Stéphie,”—so we’d say the baby’s name—[sung] “Ishuru rururu… Ishuru baby”—so you repeat that for a long time and it lulls you right to sleep. After a while of that, you go and sleep—like a baby. Yeah, that’s the one that comes to mind. There are many others.

J.M: Could you do that again, but without stopping in between?

S.G: … Yeah, OK. [Sings] “… Stéphie,” that was, that was the baby, she was really small. There you go. That’s pretty much it. [Laughs].

J.M: Do you have other poems, other lullabies, or… stories, maybe? Legends, or a story or something?

S.G: Hmm. Well, the first one that comes to mind is, there was this, this TV show in Ethiopia. A gentleman named Abeba Asfaw, Abeba Asfaw. And he had this TV show, I don’t remember if it was on Saturdays or Sundays, but it was, uh… It was like our church, it was—we couldn’t miss it. So he would come on screen, and he’d talk like, from the TV, like he was talking to us, and
he’d come on and say, “Well, hello children! Today, we’re going to talk about this story, I’m going to tell you the story of this or that.” And it was always these lovely children’s stories, that you, you’d watch and you’re waiting to see what happens next! And then what he’d say was, before he began he’d say, “OK, now you, you over there, move over to the right,” and we’d do it, there in front of the TV we’d move over to the right! He’d go, “OK, you there, back up a bit, OK you, the tall one, sit down more.” So he was talking to the camera but we were convinced he was talking to us. So when he said to the right, we’d all move to the right, we’d get up, he’d tell us… we did whatever he said. And then, he’d sit us down—“OK, are you ready for the song?” Yes, we’re ready for the song! “Ready for the story?” Yes, we’re ready for the story! So—“Once upon a time…” He’d always start the story the same way, and he was an older gentleman, he’s still alive today, now he sells DVDs of his show at the airport [laughs]. Last time, when I arrived in Ethiopia, I saw him, and I swear, it was like meeting a celebrity for me! It was like, Abeba Asfaw! I saw Abeba Asfaw at the airport! You know, and it was, it was magical. Those moments, oh, those stories… And what was it called? Abeba Asfaw… I feel like his show had a name. I don’t know if it was just his name, I forget. But those were the most wonderful stories, and he told them with such passion, he has drawings sometimes and everything. Wow, I was obsessed with that.

**J.M: Are there… legends that talk about home, or searching for home? Ideas of “home,” or leaving home, but coming back?**

**S.G:** Wow, that’s a good question. I know my mom would often recite proverbs to us, but I can’t remember them because they were in such complex Kinyarwanda that even if I managed to repeat them once, you’d forget it right away. Because it’s, the words are, especially with proverbs, they’re very, very refined, very elegant. But I know she’d recite them, there were
certain ones she’d recite in certain situations, you know. And she’d say, “Ah, you know, in Rwanda, we have a saying…” and it would be the same proverbs we’d hear on a regular basis, and often we’d even end up knowing them when she’d say them. We can’t recite them ourselves because they’re very long, but we recognize them. And my mother would often do that, and she still does even today. Even today, while we’re on vacation, she’ll recite two or three proverbs here and there, and she’ll say them at, uh, very… They come at just the right time. There will be a specific situation and she’ll say, “Ah, my God, well in Rwanda we would say this and that, because…” And I love all these little… even if I can’t remember them. So every time, I say, mom, next time, write it down for me, then I’ll see it and I’ll learn it. But it’s never a good time, you know, it’s blah blah blah… and I’m like, OK! But yeah, she’ll often pull those out and they’re these really, really powerful proverbs and they’re often hard to translate, because they’re ideas that don’t even exist in French. They’re… It’s really hard to translate and she actually, she can’t translate very well, so she’ll translate them into French for us, like the French equivalent, but it’s never exactly right. Because that’s where you really see the richness of a language, when you can’t translate certain things, that’s… Yeah. So, my mother’s proverbs, but is that—that’s not necessarily a reference to home, they’re really just proverbs in general, but nothing comes to mind at the moment, nothing really tied to belonging and home. Maybe something will come to me later, I’ll let you know…

**J.M: Is there anything else you’d like to add?**

**S.G:** Hmm! What would I like to add… Yes, if there’s one thing I’d like to add, it would be to get young people involved in, at the heart of the diaspora we have here in Montreal, I think there are so many things we can do, because there are many of us and all that. But, well, it’s always the same people getting involved, it’s always older people. But we have to find a way to get our
youth involved and to find things that will be interesting to them, because with them, it’s all about video. Videos, interviews—a project like this, for example, is perfect for youths. And I think for us especially, for people who were lucky enough not to be there in ’94, we still have a role—not a role, a duty, that’s even more important. Why? Because, some would say that we are still survivors, even if you weren’t there, you’re a survivor, and why? Because you lost everything, because if you had been there, you would have been dead too, or, massacred. But because, the people that did live through it, we can’t ask too much of them, because it’s already hard for them. So for example, the commemorations and all of that, there are people who are very, very involved, who are there every time, every year—they get involved every year, and it’s people who lived through it. So imagine how hard that must be for them! And then there are people like us, who were lucky enough not to be there, and some of us do nothing. And I find that, it’s on those people… Because we don’t have nightmares, we don’t have, in April, when April comes around, we don’t have psychological trauma—there are some who have psychological trauma, but you know, since we don’t all have that, we have an even more important duty to support them through the difficult times. And not even necessarily just in April, but all year round. I think that every Rwandan who is lucky enough to be alive, to have been far from Rwanda during the genocide, has to contribute, has to help, has to be there, has to organize all the commemorations, even. All the events should be… Really, we have even more of a role, because of the fact that we were so lucky. It’s not luck, but at the same time, you know, we have to… So that’s it, my message would be, look, if you were lucky enough not to be there in Rwanda, think of all the people who were there, and how difficult it is for them to constantly relive that time, and everything, not to be able to sleep for a month. Think hard about that. We have to be present for those people, and help them get through it, and—yeah! Because we all
have our strengths, we weren’t directly affected, so we have a bit more of an ability to… you know, shield them, help them, do things, be there. That’s what I would say. There, that would be my message.

J.M: Anything else?

S.G: Hmm… Anything else that comes to me… A message of peace, a message of love, a message of…

J.M: Maybe a hope for Life Stories Montreal? Something about the project?

S.G: Hmm! This project… has, I wouldn’t say ‘transformed’ me, because, well… Before working on the project I had already been somewhat conscious of… what happened and all, but this project has taught me a lot about my country, about my people, about myself, about my family, I did an interview with my father about… And this project fell at a really, really perfect moment in my life, I was trying to find myself and I got into oral history. Will I stay in oral history? Maybe, will I go back to journalism? I don’t know. But for now, all I know is it’s been three incredible years. Really, really great years of my life. And yeah. I wish it a long life—well, the project is ending in 2012, so that’s not really a long life, but I hope that it will turn out really, really well, that we’ll meet our goals, and that it will leave a legacy. That this project will leave such important riches to the Montreal Rwandan community. Because it’s really, really—the 500 interviews we want to collect, the impact and the value of those interviews, it’s unimaginable. So I’m really, really happy to have come this far, thanks in part to Lisa Ndejuru. Lisa is the one who told me about this project, the first time, she told me, “Yeah, I’m involved in this project, it’s called CURA…” I was like, OK. “If you’re interested…” so she put me in touch with Steven, I came in, but I didn’t know I’d stay for three years. I really didn’t know, and I thought, wow, I’ve
learned so much about my country, but also about others: Cambodians, Haitians. Really, it’s a really, really great team, and I’m happy to have been a part of it.

J.M: And?

S.G: And the final word? Well, thank you, thank you for conducting my first oral history interview. And it’s strange to be on the other side of the camera, like I said, usually I’m the one conducting the interview or filming it. And it was a good experience! Yes, I really liked it and maybe—because, you know, I was really comfortable with you, I’m sure that had a lot to do with it. Thank you very much, Jenny!

J.M: Thank you very much.

End session 1 of 2.
J.M: I’m so excited to conduct the second part of your interview, and I’d like to just talk a bit more about your childhood, and maybe sort of come back to the memories of your childhood environment, and in particular how your childhood was different from a boy’s, for example. Girlhood, boyhood…

R: … interesting! Well, my childhood, like I said in the first session, I spent it, well, I spent a good part of my childhood in Ethiopia. So, I was born there and I left Ethiopia when I was eight. So then, how was my childhood different from a boy’s? That will be hard to say because I only had sisters. I had two big sisters so, we were raised more or less the same way. But if I compare that to the boys that were around us for example, our neighbours and such… We didn’t really have a typical childhood as girls, so I played with the boys a lot when we were young… I think I also said this but I was a real tomboy until I was about 12 or 13. Really, really, I pretty much convinced myself I must be a boy! And so I’d play with the boys a lot, my big sister, the oldest, she was like that too. Maybe I copied it from her, my sister Solange. So yeah, I wasn’t, well I did play with dolls, I remember, but I also liked to, you know, be rough-and-tumble, ride bikes, play marbles, ah what else? No, I had, you could say a girlhood, but also with a big tomboy side. Yeah. And our parents had no problem with that, they let us go out, I mean at a certain time we had to come back in. When it started to get dark out, you know, we couldn’t play outside, but we didn’t always obey that rule either, so sometimes I remember getting a smack because I hadn’t come home on time. So yeah, not too bad.

J.M: So it was… the word that comes to mind is an [inaudible] childhood.

R: Ah, yes, that’s exactly it, yes.

J.M: Um… In school—you’ve already talked a bit about your education, your first job, leaving home, you’ve talked a bit about that. If you… I’m wondering, in relation to that, at
work or in the community, you left home when you were... You’ve travelled, you weren’t…

What was that like? If we could go back to that, because it may not have been clear, you left your family for school, or… What was that like?

R: Um… So, my close family, so you mean, my parents, my immediate family? Uh, I left my family home very late. Well, yes and no, it’s kind of complicated. When I came to Canada, I was 17 years old. So, I lived with my father and step-mother, with my sisters. So from 17 to 21, 22, I lived with my father, but I spent weekends with my big sister, who already had an apartment. And so during the week, Monday to Friday, I was at Dad’s, and weekends I was at my sister Solange’s. So that’s how I gradually started to sort of move out. And then in 2002, when I was 22, my sister got a bigger apartment, and then me and my sister Sylvie went to live with my sister Solange. So it was maybe at 21, 22 that I officially left my dad’s house. I left my mother’s house at 17 when I came to Canada, so that was already done. And so from when I was 22, I lived with my sisters. Sure, I wasn’t completely independent, but it was much cooler than being at my Dad’s, we didn’t have—well, there were some rules, but we could go out on the weekend, we could stay over at friends’ if we wanted and all that, so it was really chill. Then when I got my own apartment, that’s when I really became independent, and that was at 26. That’s when I left my family home—because at first, we had an apartment for the three of us, and then my mother bought us a little house in Montreal, so we all moved in there, and that was convenient for when I was in school, for example, or when I was working full time, or rather, studying full time. And in 2006, I left the family home to move into my apartment. I was 26, I was proud, some people thought I’d taken too long to move out, 26, they thought that was late, but I felt like I was ready. That’s when I was ready to, you know, support myself kind of. So when I was 26, I left not only my family home but also my sisters.
J.M: Yes, so… You were already here, in Montreal?

R: Yes, exactly.

J.M: Do you remember… Because here, the way it’s worded on the questionnaire, it’s like we’re sort of asking, the community—clubs, associations, the neighbourhood—in Africa, like if there was all of that in Africa… In Africa and then here. What was that like? So, you left Africa when you were 17?

R: Yes, exactly.

J.M: To come and live here with your father?

R: Yes.

J.M: And then you moved in with your sisters, and then…

R: Yes, exactly, that’s right.

J.M: So then, do you sort of remember your environment, your neighbourhood, what it was like in Africa, what it was like here?

R: Yes. So in Africa, well, there were two stages of Africa. So there was the stage in Ethiopia, where I lived from ages 0-8, and then there was Libya, where I lived from 8 to about 14, and then back to Ethiopia. So it went Ethiopia, Libya, Ethiopia. So that would be my life in Africa. So, my memories—well, first in Ethiopia, at first, well it’s very vague, I was eight when I left, but I remember, you know, we had a good life, in a neighbourhood that wasn’t necessarily wealthy, but not really poor either, middle-class, very middle-class. The neighbourhood life was very present, we knew all our neighbours, whether they were Ethiopians, but also a lot of Armenians. I remember there were a lot of Armenians. And now I know that, you know, there are ties between Armenia and Ethiopia, but I remember there being a big Armenian community. And others that lived above where we lived. And yeah, we played together, there were Hindus
too, there were Russians—yeah, you now, there was a Russian family that lived not far from us. So we all knew each other and we played together, the kids played together. We had this kind of yard, because it was an apartment, a building, and we had this yard in front, so all the kids from the building would be out there. No, I found we had a nice little quiet life, we went to the Ethiopian French school, so we had our school life. But at home it was also a lot of fun, I really have good memories. It wasn’t like everybody for themselves, in their own apartment, it was really—we all lived together…

**J.M: The parents too?**

**R:** Yes. Did the parents live together?

**J.M: Did they have a community like that?**

**R:** Well, you know, for me—because both my parents worked in Libya—in Ethiopia, sorry, so my father knew them, but he didn’t spend very much time with the other parents, so they probably saw each other on the stairs and that kind of thing, but they didn’t spend much time together, it was mostly the kids. My mother also worked in the beginning, so she also didn’t have much time to socialize. In Libya, it was different, because in Libya we lived in this sort of compound, so like a sort of… how do you say compound [in French]? A sort of… How do you say that, yeah. We always said ‘compound,’ anyway, it’s a sort of zone with several houses. But everyone that lived there worked at the same place as my father, so it wasn’t like an all-expats thing, but almost. So we weren’t mixed in with the Libyan population, you could say. And we lived there for a while. It was only after living in Libya for two or three years that we left that place and all got our own houses, outside. At first, everyone lived together, we had… and my father even worked next to that place. So, you know, there was this little section of houses, and then there were offices, so we were really confined to that place, we got along well with our
neighbours, the kids and the parents, who worked at the same place as my father. And later, later when we left that little spot, and we really got integrated with the Libyan population, then we had another relationship with our neighbours. Because the girls our age—I was about 11, 12, 13—they couldn’t just go out whenever they wanted, you know. Most of them wore veils, a lot of the time we could go and play, but only at their houses, we couldn’t go and play in the street. So we were outsiders, we didn’t wear veils, we wore shorts, which was rare there. So we were seen as sort of weirdos, because not only were we not Libyan, we were also black, which was rare in our neighbourhood, so yeah, we were kind of the strange family, like oh I don’t know, they’re not from here. And we wanted to go and play with the neighbourhood girls, we thought, well that’s ridiculous, we’re not going to just keep to ourselves. I lived with my sister Sylvie at the time, and I found that sort of hard because you had to really jump through all these hoops to be able to go and play with… with the girls our age. So yeah. I remember we’d spend a lot of time in our neighbour’s rooms, because oh, her brother was there and we couldn’t come out, or as soon as the father arrived, we had to stay inside there, you know. So we had, we had kind of a strange relationship, yeah. But there were still places where we could hang out with other foreigners. I remember one place that was called Regata, and it was a nice, a good spot and there was a beach there too. So we spent almost every weekend there, with other students from the French school, for example, you know, so we really sort of had to hang out with foreigners to have fun, and be free to do what we liked. With Libyans, it was different, yeah. Yeah. And my father didn’t like us going over to the Libyan neighbours’ houses. You know, he’d say, “Well, if they can’t come over here, well, just try and do something outside,” but you know, he didn’t understand that the girls couldn’t go out, so yeah, no, it was complicated, really complicated.

J.M: So there were places, like… Where you would hang out with friends?
R: Yes.

J.M: Were there people, places you had to avoid as well?

R: Uh… Yes… well, yeah, no, my father didn’t really like us going over to people’s houses, really, to other people’s houses, other families that he didn’t necessarily know himself, on the pretext that we couldn’t go outside, so we’d go to their houses. He didn’t like that so much, because he had less control over us when we weren’t there, when he couldn’t watch us. So often what we would do was invite them over to our house and we’d have fun either at our house or theirs, but there you go.

J.M: Well that’s interesting, because it’s written here as if you were an adult there, but you were a child. And so, when it’s asking about the work you were doing there… It wasn’t you that was working, it was your father.

R: Mhm.

J.M: You talked about your studies in the first interview?

R: Mhm.

J.M: In Ethiopia as well as in Libya, did you talk at all about your father’s work? What he did?

R: Yes, in Libya and in Ethiopia?

J.M: Yes.

R: Yes, I talked about it in the first interview… So basically, how we ended up in Ethiopia. So at first, we had refugee status. And then gradually, my father started going to school there, and we got our papers, we became—we got our passports, I remember being five years old, I think, when I got my first Rwandan passport. Before that, we had refugee papers, laissez-passers or, temporary cards, anyway. And… you know, after a while, he also got a job in Libya, at ILKA—
by the way, I remember in the first interview, I couldn’t remember what the acronym stood for, but I remember he worked at a place called ILKA. He worked there for a long time and then after that we went to Libya. And there, he worked for CAFRADES [African Center for Applied Research and Training in Social Development]… something like that. And then at the African Center, so he stayed there up until ’94, and that’s when he left that, when we left Libya, actually, in ’94. Yes. Some time after the genocide. The summer of ’94.

**J.M: Anything to do with the genocide?**

**R:** Well yes, at the time I didn’t know, but I found out through an interview I did with my father. So yes, apparently, the genocide had affected him more than he, well, more than he could’ve imagined, to the point where he couldn’t work, so he took a break from work at after that he completely—and at the same time, it came at a time when that Center was closing. It was about to close, so he said, “You know what, I think this is a good time to start a new chapter and do something else.” And then that’s when he came to Canada, in ’95, to live here. To start a new life.

**J.M: So in ’94, you were with him in Libya?**

**R:** Yes.

**J.M: You didn’t go back to Ethiopia?**

**R:** That was after, that was during the summer of ’94 that we returned to Ethiopia.

**J.M: And then in ’95 you came here with him?**

**R:** No. We came here in ’97. We stayed in Ethiopia for two years, with my mom, after the genocide, and then we came here in September ’97, to finish school. So from ’94 to ’97 we were in Ethiopia with my mother.

**J.M: And do you remember much from that time?**
R: Yes, yes, yes… ’94? Yes, I remember—so I didn’t really realize what had happened, I was 13 years old. Yes, I remember that they weren’t sleeping much, there were late-night phone calls, it was on the news a lot, I remember. But actually… I think I said this in the first interview, but what bothered me was that suddenly everyone knew that Rwanda existed. And I went from, you’d tell someone, I’m from Rwanda and they didn’t know anything about it, and they didn’t ask questions and it was much better that way. Ah—“Oh my gosh, you’re Rwandan, oh my God, your country is where there was that, oh!” And I remember that bothered me, because all of a sudden it was like Rwanda was associated with that, and people would always ask you the same question, but you know, even at that time, in ’94, I don’t think I realized the magnitude of—of the thing, I knew that, OK, something very serious had happened there, that my father was struggling to deal with it, but nothing more. It was later that I felt the magnitude of the thing, and I think he also wasn’t giving us all the details of his phone conversations and everything. So we knew something was up, but we didn’t really know why.

J.M: I have… it’s strange, this list of questions… If we could go back to the subject of work. For example, your first job, your work up until now maybe, I’d like if you could tell me about a typical day at work, the people you’ve worked with, the work environment, do you know…

R: From my very first job up until now?

J.M: Yes.

R: Ayayay… Do you have enough time? [Laughs]. No, no, actually I haven’t had—well, I’ve had a few jobs since then. So my first job was when I lived with my sister Solange, in an apartment with my other sister, Sylvie. I worked in a pizzeria, so I was like a cashier, a server. I did that for at least a year, a year on and off. Because I lived right above the pizzeria, so it was
really, really convenient. I’d go down ten minutes before, [gestures]. I did that, and then… That was in 2001, 2002… Oh yes, I was a receptionist as well, at an insurance company, general insurance, at La Personnelle. I was a receptionist, I remember I would say: “La Personnelle insurance, bonjour!” See, it’s still in my head. I did that for at least two years. After that, I did little mini-jobs. I worked at Fondation de l’UQÀM too, where I called former UQÀM students and asked if they wanted to make donations. Customer service, I know I did training with Bell Canada, and that didn’t work out anyway, that annoyed me, but oh well… I didn’t pass the test… What else did I do? So receptionist, pizzeria, was it after that that I went…? Oh yeah, wait, in 2004—so I did UQÀM, Fondation de l’UQÀM, and in 2004 I finished my bachelor’s of journalism at UQÀM. And I was looking for a job, and I couldn’t find one at first, so I said OK, well I’m going to go on a little Europe trip with a friend and then when I get back hopefully there will be something. We went to Europe for a month, and when I got back I applied for an internship with Alternatives. And that’s when I went to Brazil for three months for a TIC internship, so IT and communications. So there, it was pretty good for me to get some experience with IT, websites and all that, and when I came back from that internship, I still couldn’t find a job in journalism in Montreal so I applied for a position teaching French as a second language in Ottawa. So my father already worked there, and he told me, “Yeah, you know, we’re looking for people if you want, give it a try.” And that worked out well because I was trying to find myself. I was in Montreal, trying to find myself and all, and I thought well, why not, it sounds good, I’ve never done teaching, but I’ll give it a try. With my journalism too, they’ll see, OK, I know how to write, I can speak French, so that should work. I went to Ottawa, passed the interview and it was good, I stayed there for six months. So I taught French courses. After six months though, I was like, ugh, this city is not made for me. You know, when you live in Montreal, it’s hard to get
used to other places. So I looked into it and I learned that there was one of the same schools in Montreal, so I transferred, right away. I thought OK, this is good, I like the job well enough, but at least now it’ll be in Montreal. So I came back here, and that’s when I moved into my apartment. You know, so there was that job, and eventually I said, I think now I’m capable of providing for myself and I moved into my own apartment. I was a teacher for three years, some part time and some full time, I went back and forth depending on what I was doing on the side. And so for 2006, 2007, I did that. In 2008—no, 2007, that’s when I heard about the Life Stories project, through you, actually, Lisa Ndejuru [laughs]. And so yeah, I started out as a research assistant, then I did post-production, as interview coordinator for the Life Stories project, coordinating all the Rwanda interviews. After that I became the associate director of the Centre for Oral History here, for a year, and now today I’m doing interview coordinating for the Life Stories project and also working at Université de Montréal as a project officer at the francophone Research Network on Peace Operations (ROP), since last September. So there you go, so now I’m at Concordia and Université de Montréal at the same time, as a coordinator and also doing a bit with the oral history centre that just opened.

**J.M:** And is—what is a typical day like, a typical week? Is it uh… wearing many different hats?

**R:** …Exactly. So yeah, I’ve noticed that, in my… maybe not at first, at the beginning of my working life, but the older I get the less I like routine. I don’t like nine-to-fives, where I’m doing the same thing every day, nine to five for a year. I don’t think I could do that again. And as life would have it, that’s not what’s happening. So I’ll get interested in something, I stick with that for a few years, I’m involved with—I like to get involved with multiple facets of the same job… My typical week, what would that be? Oh OK, for now—because in a year I might not have the
same routine. But for now, a typical week is, what—Monday-Friday, I’m usually at Concordia, with Mamadou, who is operating the camera… So yeah, I come to the Centre de documentation, and I also take care of other things to do with Concordia. So I’m working from home, I’m in house, you know, I really organize my day depending on priorities. And from Wednesday to Friday, I’m at Université de Montréal, and I work on my files there, I have certain projects I’m working on. And then on weekends, well, I try to have weekends, but sometimes on the weekend I do other things, interviews, for example. Life Stories interviews, I try to do them on the weekend, when I can. Yeah, so I don’t like routine, I like, you know, doing different things.

J.M: How would you describe the people you work with? Do you find them easy to talk to, to get along with?

R: Yes. Actually, I’ve gotten really lucky again because everywhere I’ve found myself working up to today, I’ve worked with people who are just as motivated, just as dedicated, who like the job, who like the type of thing we’re doing, and I find that not a lot of people can say that. Can say that, you go to work and you’re around people who share the same values, you know. And that’s the case at Concordia, that’s why I’m reluctant to leave Concordia because, I thought, am I going to find that kind of atmosphere anywhere else? And at Université de Montréal, it happened that yes, the people there are cool too! [Laughs]. You know, it’s not the same sort of thing we’re doing there, but it’s still a great team, dynamic, we’re working on peacekeeping operations so that’s a different wing, but no, no I’ve been really lucky as far as jobs, as far as work goes, I’ve really been lucky.

J.M: A question, maybe it’s not polite, but do you feel that you earn a fair wage?

R: Ah, that’s a good question. So, in the field, in this field, or even in academia in general, it’s not the way to get rich, it’s not the place to, like, “woohoo,” get those “seven digits,” some day,
as they say—academia is not where you’ll do that. But, some people keep asking me, “But academia doesn’t pay well, why are you still doing that?” You know? But I don’t think it’s about the money, I keep telling them, it’s not… It’s not the salary that’s gratifying in this type of work. It’s what you’re doing day to day, the people you meet, the networking in that world, and especially what you learn. Working at a university, that’s sort of what’s interesting, too, that you’re in a place of knowledge, of learning, constant learning, you know? And you don’t find that in private companies, right? So no, it’s—I think it’s good, and also the field is just like that, you know. So, it’s not going to change overnight, but I like this field. And I’m prepared to take the whole package. The salary isn’t, ‘wow,’ but it is reasonable, and you can live off it. So, as long as you can live—I’m able to put some money aside, I try to, although I have a hard time with it—I think that’s all that matters. You only live once, right, shit [laughs]… Edit that out! [Laughs].

J.M: Speaking of which, do you remember… well, you’d remember, but what do you think of your bosses?

S.G: My bosses? My directors, my [En] ‘bosses’?

J.M: Yes.

R: So, in general, or right now?

J.M: In general, I think.

R: In general. Yes, so in the past I’ve had, well, I think I’ve had every kind of boss. I’ve had super cool bosses and I’ve had super annoying bosses, really. And the ones I couldn’t stand were mostly at private companies, at the insurance company, for example, I didn’t get along so well… But I also didn’t see much of them, you know, it was more supervisors. We had supervisors and then there was the ‘boss’ who you’d never see, who was somewhere in the office. I generally had
a good relationship with my supervisors because we saw one another on a regular basis, we would do follow-ups and all that. But the big directors, I almost never saw them, and... Again, at universities, it was different. Your bosses are also professors who are in the same field as you and so, it’s very accessible, and the boss I had and still have at Concordia, who’s on sabbatical right now, but you know who I mean, really great. Someone you can really talk to, someone who listens, you know, who’s accessible, so there isn’t that gap, like oh, can I go and see them about this or that? Really, they’re very accessible. The one I have at Université de Montréal, yes, he’s accessible, but he has a certain kind of a coldness. A cold side, a strict side, so everyone is afraid of him even though we don’t actually know why. So, I think that really, he might be a nice person, but he acts so cold that he’s not that accessible. You’ll really only see him when there are really important things happening, but the rest of the time you try to figure things out on your own, you know, your own way. So, you know, I think I’ve seen it all, but yeah, no I can’t complain, anyway, there’s been worse.

J.M: The reasons you left [your country] were not really—it wasn’t really a safety issue, it wasn’t because you didn’t feel safe, it was more to do with your parents... What were, what were your reasons for immigrating?

R: So, when I was born my parents had already emigrated, they had already gone through an emigration, because I was born in Ethiopia. And my parents had left Rwanda in about ’73 and gone to the Congo. That’s where my sisters were born, in Bukavu. And so when I came along, in Ethiopia, well, I didn’t know, I didn’t know what had happened before, but they explained it to me later on. So that was another period of violence, safety [concerns], so they decided, we’ll try and see if things are better in the Congo. And it was better in the Congo, but it wasn’t all that, because at one point there were so many Rwandans that the Congolese got a little sick of it too.
So yeah, when I was born, there had already been a first migration. When I left Libya—Ethiopia, for Libya, it was simply a matter of work. My father had a job, so we went with him. When we left Libya, to come back to Ethiopia, it was—now I know that it was the genocide, even though we lived kilometres away from Rwanda, it affected my father to the point that, you know, he said, “I have to stop, I have to”—yeah. So for three months, for April, May and June, things were really bad. We left in July, him too, we went to go to Rwanda—no, Canada first, then Rwanda, in ’95, to see what was left. No, no, sorry—we left in July to go to Ethiopia, he went to Rwanda in December ’94, that’s it. He saw what was left, he saw what was there, what wasn’t there, etc. And in ’94, at the end of ’94, that’s when he decided to come and live in Canada. But we saw each other again in Kigali in ’95, over the summer, and… where was I going with that? Right, so I left Libya in ’94, in part because my father didn’t want to stay in Libya anymore. We went back to Ethiopia and I left Ethiopia in ’97 for Canada because my sister had finished school and I wanted to go with her. And together we came to join my father, who was already here. So for him, there were several migrations, but for me personally it wasn’t because of my personal safety, it was work, school, you know.

J.M: Do you have—do you have any reflections about politics, the government, anything like that?

R: What kind of reflections?

J.M: Were you—since it wasn’t related to safety or anything like that, but were you… Were you aware of the violence, the politics, things like that?

R: So, when did we start to become aware of all that? Maybe… After ’94, we knew something serious had happened. We arrived in Ethiopia, we rejoined my mother, who had been living alone in Ethiopia, alone with Stéphanie, who was three years old, so—but she didn’t talk to us
much about it. I remember that she didn’t talk to us much about what that was like for her, because, we had just arrived, we were still young, so it was hard, I think. But then, ’95, when we went back to Rwanda, when we talked to people, family members, our family told us in detail how so and so died and all of that. And then, you start to realize the magnitude of the thing, but even then I don’t think we realized. In ’96, ’97, we arrived in Quebec, and then we met, we found a Rwandan community that was pretty big. We also met young people, through Isangano, and it’s as if, after arriving here, it was through the community, through our involvement in the community, that we really realized what had happened. That we understood a lot of things that had still been very vague to us. But as far as politics and all that, even then, we weren’t very aware of what was happening. Even in ’97, ’98, everything that happened after, the migrations to the Congo, the refugees and all that, it’s like we weren’t following that, after ’94 it’s like we stopped following current events in Rwanda. It’s really as if it stopped there. We knew something bad had happened, but after, you know—I didn’t exactly look into it. But it was really much later, 17-18 years, when I was more grown up, older, that I got much more involved. And by getting involved I understood more about where I came from and everything my country had been through, etc. Yeah, it was really much later, I really came to terms with it late, much later.

J.M: And you were very young, too.

R: Well yes, exactly.

J.M: So when… you decided to come to Canada… when your sisters came to live here and your father was already there.

R: Yes, he was already there.

J.M: Do you remember the process?
R: Yes, I remember the process, but it was my mom that did it, she took care of all that. So she took care of that from Ethiopia, my father was here, so it was easier because, there was somebody checking up on the file. So I remember, yes, I remember going to the Canadian Embassy, filling out forms, they told us yes, it’ll be ready on such and such a date and sometimes there were delays, there was one form missing that we needed, oh la la! I remember during the summer of ’97, it was pretty stressful because up until the end of the summer, we didn’t know if we would really be coming. And we came on a student visa, so we had to do the CAQ [Québec Acceptance Certificate], and then the student visas, all of that. And I remember it really took a long time, we had to start school late because we arrived mid-September, in mid-September, instead of the end of August like we were supposed to in the first place. But it was all good, I think there were two to four documents missing at one point, but honestly having someone here, following up, that really helped us a lot.

J.M: And that was your dad?

R: It was our dad and my step-mother as well, she sponsored us because she was Canadian. So that too, that helped things. So we had our student visas and everything, to go to school, but then on top of that, we had already started the sponsorship process. She had been a Canadian citizen for ten years at least when we arrived, so yeah, that helped things.

J.M: … Do you… Do you know Canada well? Do you know things about Canada?

R: Oh, not much. I actually learned about Canada from what my father told me. And he, even before, even before ’94, he would always tell us about Canada, he’d say, “Oh yeah, I’d love for us to go to Canada some day, for all my kids to be in Canada,” because, I don’t know. Because he had already been here, so he had seen what life was like here and he said that feeling got even stronger after ’94. He’d say, “That’s the country for us, I know my children will be safe there,
yes, I know, if things go South one day, it’ll be fine.” So you know, Canada had always been in our imaginations, but I had never done research before, really. And at the time, there was no internet in Ethiopia, so I had never used Google, you know, I had never Googled Canada, but I imagined it as a Western country, where everything is fine, life is good. I was told once about the cold, but that didn’t put me off, in fact I thought OK, we’re going to see snow! We’re going to see… yeah! Canada was always there, we just talked about it for so long and then, finally, it became real. Yeah.

**J.M:** And… so we talked a bit about immigration, your experiences with immigration services. Was the Montreal Rwandan community—how did you meet them? Did they help you?

**R:** Did the community itself help us? Once we arrived [yes], but they didn’t help us get papers, paperwork and all that, because you know, like I said, we had someone here, we had a parent here, we had a Canadian step-mother, so all the processes at the beginning, all that—poof! We talked about it at home—the metro cards, the SI cards, later on bank cards, we really had everything we needed. But the community, when did we really get involved in it… It was through Isangano, I think. It was really Isangano, the dance troupe, that made us, you know, made us feel a sense of belonging. We thought, look there’s a dance group here, we’ll do dance, Sylvie and I had already done Rwandan dance in Ethiopia before coming here. That’s right, we forget sometimes, but we didn’t do it for very long, maybe for one summer, maybe six months or something like that. Then when we arrived here, to see that there was another group doing dance here, we signed up right away. That was the first thing that got us into the community. Then, for me—yes, there was Isangano—but there was *Hobe Montréal*, a newspaper that got started some time after. So that was—I liked dancing, but it wasn’t my favourite thing, it wasn’t my raison-
d’etre, unlike my sisters, who were really obsessed with it. So I tried to find the thing that I liked, so I would dance from time to time, when I felt like it, but the rest of the time, I preferred *Hobe Montréal*, the newspaper, because I was in journalism at the time and it was a way to put my journalistic skills into practice, so yeah. So the newspaper, the dance troupe, what else was there? And then after that there were the Dusangane, the meet-ups we did once a year with the North American diaspora… What else… Right, yes, the cultural events Isangano would organize, we were pretty involved in those. And then, we got the bug and… the bug’s still there, really [laughs]. Yeah.

**J.M:** So you made new connections, you built a network?

**R:** Mhm. Oh, yeah.

**J.M:** Did you… OK, there’s a question here that’s strange. I don’t really understand it.

**R:** Mhm, go on.

**J.M:** Are there divisions in the Rwandan community regarding violence?

**R:** Divisions in the Rwandan community regarding violence?

**J.M:** Did you notice violence at home?

**R:** Hmm. Well, I admit I don’t really understand that… So, are there divisions in the community? Yes, it’s true that in the Rwandan community of Montreal, there are different groups, there are certain groups we work with, certain ones we don’t know, yes. As far as violence, I admit I don’t really understand the question. [Laughs].

**J.M:** Well let’s stick with the divisions themselves, are there—what would you say those divisions are?

**R:** Well yeah, sometimes I hear about other Rwandan associations, for example, but that aren’t necessarily involved in the Life Stories project, like Isangano, like PAGE-Rwanda, like for
example groups like Amitié Rwanda-Canada, which I know it exists, but it’s one of those groups we don’t work with directly, we’re not really in contact, but we know they exist. And there are certain groups we work with, I’m thinking Urumuri, the women’s association, for example, I’m thinking PAGE-Rwanda, the association of parents and friends of victims of the genocide. The CRM, which I know exists, there’s that, there are several evangelical youth groups, there are prayer groups. I know all that exists, but there are certain groups I don’t know as well, or don’t know at all. I’d imagine there must be more like that. Amitié Rwanda-Canada, there’s other names, but yeah, there are divisions.

J.M: And have you—when, let’s say, with regards to people and how they get together, like you said, in different groups. Have you kept the celebrations, the traditions of your home country?

R: Celebrations and traditions? Well, there are fewer and fewer celebrations. Before, we had lots of celebrations, with a traditional flavour, you could say, but now we have less of that. The only times we sort of come back to tradition are when there are weddings, for example, or engagements, there’s a really nice traditional aspect that’s still there. But other than that, celebrations? Well, there was the independence day that we celebrate in July, but no, no, I find that that aspect is not really as present as it was a few years ago. A few years ago I felt like we were really in direct contact with the culture, whether through dance, or we did lots of plays, we had… Dusangane, that’s also that kind of thing, getting everyone together for big cultural festivals, we had discussions—debates, even—I remember, in the Dusangane. But now I find that, no, we don’t have time for that, instead we’re involved in other projects like the Life Stories project, or the Centre de documentation, or… The cultural centre we just started up at one point. No, I think maybe we should do that again, do more cultural, traditional activities, like before.
J.M: Did I hear you say it’s because you don’t have time?

R: Yes.

J.M: Are there other things that have changed?

R: Exactly. We’ve gotten older, too, when you’re 20 you have the time, you do all kinds of things. At 30, it’s like, well now I have to choose, I can’t be as involved in this, you have to make choices. And I hope that that changes. The youth, they’re the ones, they’re the ones that have to do that, to bring those things back into our routine.

J.M: If we could talk about how—do you have an idea of the different waves of immigration that took place, in the community… [inaudible]?

R: Yes… Well, yes and no, so I know there was a big wave after ’94, I think there were a lot of people that came at that time. There were also many who left in the ‘90s, starting in ’93. Well, from ’90-’94 I know there were a lot of big waves. Now, the ones who came after ’94, after… You know, we came in ’97, but the ones who came after us, in the 2000s, that I know less about. I know they’ve kept coming, but I’m less up to date on the numbers, how many there are, but I know it’s still happening because sometimes I see people in the street and I’m like, “My God, I’ve never seen you before! That’s a new face”—you know, when you see a new face? Yeah, that happens to me from time to time.

J.M: If we could talk a bit about, I’m thinking—there’s the community here, but there’s also the destination community here. How were you—a minute ago you said the community didn’t help you with paperwork or anything like that, but that you like, found a community of belonging, with young people. How did other Montrealers outside of your community treat you?

R: Treat me?
J.M: Treat all of you.

R: So Quebecers? Other Montrealers… That’s a good question. It’s something some of our friends sometimes hold against us, friends we went to school with in Ethiopia, who also ended up here in Canada. And in Ethiopia, well we were super close, we saw each other all the time, we all went to the same school. And after coming here, some of them arrived almost at the same time as us, maybe like a year or two after. And I think they expected to have the same relationships we had in Ethiopia, you know, to be as close as we were there, but we had a tendency to—sure, we sort of kept in touch with them, but we were really spending all our time with the Rwandan community. So they would say, “Oh, those Gasana girls, when they came to Montreal they forgot about us.” They’ve said that to us several times. But no, I don’t know, it’s not that we forgot about them, it’s just that here there was such a big Rwandan community, and they came from various West African countries, or East African, or South—anyway they really came from all over, and they didn’t have a big community like that, with people from the same country. And we had that, and it was like, natural to fall in with that community, because—well, because we didn’t have that in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, we had a tiny Rwandan community, but really just a few families from the embassy, some from the African Union and that kind of thing, but not many. We got here, and we saw young people like us, and some that we already knew from Rwanda, who we had met on vacation and stuff, we saw the group forming. And so, we were happy to find Rwandans, we spent all our time with them. And maybe that was a mistake. Maybe we could have managed our time better, but it’s like our feeling of belonging, our feeling of being Rwandan… It wasn’t born here, but it really flourished here, because—and I actually said this in my first interview session—how is it that I didn’t become part of, or you know, associated with, an Ethiopian community? Because that’s what I knew, I spoke the language, I had a lot of
Ethiopian friends and everything. So logically, I could have maybe gone into an Ethiopian community and been involved there the same way I am now. But no. I knew some Ethiopians, some of them that I met after, but there was never a question of getting involved in the Ethiopian community. It was like we had finally found our community, far from Rwanda, far from Ethiopia, but there you go, it was really love at first sight and we stuck to it like magnets. Yeah.

**J.M: When do you… Do you feel at home?**

**R:** In Canada? Yes, very at home.

**J.M: Very at home?**

**R:** Yeah.

**J.M: When do you feel the most at home? When and where do you feel the least at home?**

**R:** Wow… Well, hmm… ‘At home’… At home in the sense of… right… Racism. Racism, yeah, we’ve experienced that before, actually a bit when we first arrived, when we were looking for an apartment, for example. We had the thing where you call, they tell you yes, it’s available, you get there and it just so happens it’s not available anymore, but then you notice afterwards it’s available again, so you know, huh, they didn’t really want black people in their apartment. Yes, so we’ve had situations like that, some racism here and there, but nothing huge. Honestly, again, maybe we’ve just been lucky, but really, I haven’t experienced racism on a daily basis, or… And in Canada, I don’t think many would say they experience it on a daily basis, you know. Maybe Quebecers are particularly… I don’t know, anyway they don’t show it all the time. So that was… That was good, because you know, you’re a Rwandan in Canada, at school or university, but you’re fine, you go about your life, nobody bothers you. When have I been uncomfortable in Canada…? Maybe in situations at work, where you sometimes aren’t—you don’t necessarily get along with your coworkers. Yeah, sometimes there were coworkers, certain coworkers, it’s
definitely rare, but there are coworkers who show you that they really don’t like you very much, either because of race, or because, I don’t know, maybe they feel sort of threatened in their job, or they think you’re going to come and take their job. Anyway, there are people who feel insecure sometimes around you, but I will say that there haven’t been many cases of that. And I think that everyone knows one or two people who don’t—you don’t get along with at work, who it’s like… But to the point where I really feel uncomfortable, to the point where I’m like, no no no, I want to leave? No, never. The only thing that makes me want to leave is the temperature! [Laughs]. I think it’s really not the people, it’s the temperature. If I ever leave Canada, it’ll be because six months out of the year I’m too cold, but that’s really it. Honestly, the rest of it, if it weren’t for that factor, I’d live out the rest of my days here.

**J.M: But with that factor?**

**R:** With the cold factor… mm. After 14 years now—I’m celebrating 14 years in Quebec—no. I don’t think I’ll stay for another 14 years.

**J.M: Do you feel you’ll leave soon?**

**R:** Yes. Yes, really, and it really is because of the weather. Yeah, because of the temperature. It’s too bad, eh? When a little detail like that makes you want to leave, but it’s just that. Because, the rest of it, I think you integrate easily, the schooling is good, it’s not excessively expensive, life is good, the people, the culture, the Montreal summer, there’s nothing… There’s nothing like it. But that’s the thing, the winter is too long, two months, I could take, but five, six?! Yeah…

**J.M: So are you thinking of going back?**

**R:** Going back…

**J.M: To Rwanda?**

**R:** [Laughs] Oh, to Rwanda! Well, yeah, I mean, exactly.
J.M: Or elsewhere in Africa?

R: Yes, anyway I know that, that’s been one of my dreams, to go back to Rwanda, but I was younger, I was 22, 23, and I remember going to Rwanda and meeting with people, giving them my CV, you know, sure that I had all this experience. And well, no, I had barely finished university and had no experience at all. But I said, no, I’m going to go and find work in Rwanda and I’m going to stay there at least a year, to have a Rwandan experience. And after my interviews, my job interviews there, they told me, they could tell that I had a lot of hope and that I was passionate about Rwanda, but they told me, “That’s really good, OK, but come back with ideas, concrete ideas—a project, that’s already up and running, really ready to go—and come to us with something concrete. Don’t come to us saying, OK, let me work for you, give me something to do. No, come with something to bring to the table.” And I remember being frustrated then. I was like what is this? I’m ready to come here and work in my country and they’re not taking me seriously? Fine, I’m going back home. I went back to Quebec, came back here, and finished—well, I’d already finished my bachelor’s by then, but I got all my experience, a little teaching, a little of—everything I’ve learned at Concordia, all that. And now, maybe, if I go back, they might take me a bit more seriously, but actually, now I think I’m sort of better equipped to think about having some life experience there. I mean, I wouldn’t leave tomorrow, but I am ready to start preparing for that eventual return, to go back one day. Yes, because in the meantime, you know, you never know what will happen, maybe something else will open up and take me somewhere other than Rwanda, but I’d really like, I’d like to experience at least a year there, or six months, and see what it’s like day-to-day, a routine in Rwanda, getting up and going to work in Rwanda. Not getting up and going on vacation, I’ve been there a lot on vacation, but
to have a daily life there. But I’ll also have to convince my husband to come with me [laughs] and there’s no guarantee of that either [laughs].

**J.M:** He wouldn’t want to, he doesn’t want to go to Rwanda?

**R:** Well, I don’t know, we’ll have to see. This will be our first time there, we’re going in August, so he’s going to discover Rwanda for the first time, and we’ll see. After this first time I’ll see what he thinks, and I’ll also see what I think myself, because it’s been a long time since I’ve been back, and maybe after that we’ll decide if that’s in the cards or not. But I’d like that.

**J.M:** Just now we were talking a bit about, eventually going back or eventually leaving. Are there others in the community in Montreal who went back, do you know people, have you heard anything about that?

**R:** Oh, yes, many, many people I know have gone back. A lot of them stayed, they liked going back, they’re still there today. Some of them went back and didn’t like the experience and came back to Montreal or elsewhere in Canada. So I’ve seen both points of view. Some of them, because their return went the way they imagined it, it all went well over there, and going back to Kigali went well, integration in Kigali was all good. But others… They were glad to have had that experience, but, there was something missing, and they said, “I’m much better off in Canada, I’m going back to Canada, Rwanda is not for me right now,” that kind of thing. I’ve really seen both.

**J.M:** Both sides, you’ve seen both and did that influence you?

**R:** Yes, yes very much. Very much, because you think, “Ah, I could—OK, it’s possible, it can be done, so I’m not the only one that’s wanted to do that, I see that there are others.” You know, it’s good to learn from others. For those that came back, I’d often say to them, “But why didn’t it work out?” What didn’t you like, exactly? What didn’t you like about Rwanda? And you know,
everyone had their own reasons, sometimes it was the mentality, the Rwandan mentality that isn’t necessarily like our Canadian mentality, the way of doing things, the relationships with others, socializing when people know everything about you in a small country like Rwanda. Here, you do your thing, people don’t keep up with you, you have your private life. That’s the thing, the private life/public life there, some people don’t like that so much. So yes, that’s influenced me, but it hasn’t discouraged me, that is, I tell myself to have my own experiences, my story, my journey, and then we’ll see. So I do like being inspired by others, seeing what did and didn’t work for others, but besides that I think, OK, I want to have my own experience and learn my own lessons.

J.M: Speaking of stories, memories of the country, stories of the country, etc. In the Life Stories project, there’s a lot of… You talk a lot about your country, about Rwanda, since you’ve moved to Montreal. So who do you talk about Rwanda with? In what situations? And are there others who talk about Rwanda in the community? Other people, like storytellers? What do they talk about?

R: Yes, I talk about Rwanda a lot. Actually, I’ve noticed that Rwanda was present, even in the beginning, even in school, so in university…? Yeah, my bachelor’s of journalism at UQÀM. Every time there was an assignment to do, a text to write, an article to prepare—we’d sometimes write reports in the form of an article, but more in depth—three quarters of them, if not all, had something to do with Rwanda. And why, because that’s what was accessible to me, you know, oh, write an article about this or that and I’d find a way to plug Rwanda in there somewhere, you know. We had to interview an artist, and I arranged to interview a Rwandan artist. There was an article on, it was the Mugesera trial, Léon Mugesera, in Ottawa, I managed to plug that in one of my courses. Uh… basically, every time, I noticed, and it wasn’t even on purpose really, it was
just that, well, it was the first thing that came to mind, that was accessible to me, I had the
sources, so I would do it. So by the end of my bachelor’s, my classmates at university, every
time they had to talk about Rwanda, I became the class expert, you know. So even when
somebody else in another class would talk about Rwanda, they would say, “Oh, go talk to Sandra
in the other course, she knows all about that, she’s the community resource person.” But you
know, it was through those courses and all, the assignments, that they noticed that. So yes, I
don’t know, either I talked to people directly through work, like with the Life Stories project, or I
was doing courses on it, doing assignments on it, but I felt like Rwanda followed me, really all
my time here. And even more so the last three years, because the Life Stories project has allowed
me to go even deeper, to learn even more about the history that… I know more about the history
of Rwanda after three years than I did when I started with this project, for example. Through
other people’s life stories, but also through the people I’ve met. So, because I’m involved in this
kind of project, I’m getting interested in other projects on the same theme, so I talk to people
who are also working in that sort of area. So these past few years, these last three or four years,
it’s been even more, I’ve become even more involved, and around me, I feel like I’m surrounded
by people who are interested in the same things, and who are working on the same things in one
way or another. Yeah.

**J.M: What do you talk about? Or, what are things people talk about?**

**S.G:** What do we talk about… Well it depends, it depends on the person, so if they’re involved
in an archival centre, if they do what we do here, for example. We’ll talk about what they’re
doing, potential partnerships we could have with them, for example. We had people who came
from Rwanda to meet us a few months ago, from the IRDP, for example. So that’s something we
want to continue, to have a relationship with them, they work with dialogue, on peacekeeping,
they work with life stories, violence, so yeah, there are always connections, you know, that you can make. So the theme that often comes back up, the common theme of all these discussions we have with all these people, the genocide is the basis for all that. That’s the basis for it, but after that there are many aspects now that come up around that, but I think that the common denominator we have is the genocide, all these people, all these centres, all of that. So then I wonder, if there hadn’t been a genocide, would I still be as involved in the community? Would I have worked for three years on a project like this? Yeah, no, maybe not, because there wouldn’t have been a Rwanda group, and there wouldn’t have been… But I don’t know, sometimes you say, all because of this, one thing can completely change… the course of my life up until now. It’s because of that, in a way, so if there hadn’t been a genocide, maybe I would be, I don’t know, in sociology, or in computer sciences and math, like I started out in.

J.M: Maybe you wouldn’t have left Libya.

S.G: Maybe I wouldn’t have left Libya. No, it’s crazy, but yeah, it’s incredible how that one thing, that one event has influenced the course of so many people’s lives who might not have ever gone on that course if it weren’t for that inciting event. Yes, yes it’s interesting.

J.M: How do the recognized storytellers in your community talk about the past?

S.G: Storytellers in our community… We don’t really have a storyteller, we have stories of Rwanda, we have stories of the old Rwanda, but we don’t have people who tell them here in Montreal. In Rwanda, maybe, but in Montreal, we don’t have any. But, even though we don’t, I find that we’ve developed different techniques for talking about it. One technique that comes to mind right away is ‘playback theatre,’ for example. It’s not storytellers, but it’s a cool kind of theatre, it’s original. And I find that a way of talking about it that’s not exactly traditional, playback theatre isn’t Rwandan, exactly, but I find it, yeah it’s sort of a more modern way. Yes,
it’s a modern thing, but it—how can I explain it? Playback is sort of unique, maybe that’s not a good example. But playback is one example, a way we’ve found of talking about it today, through art. There are plays, there’s the play Isoko that was produced recently. Yeah, it’s another way of talking about it. But it’s not necessarily traditional, it’s not an oral history that was told in the time of our ancestors, but yeah, I find it’s a good modern way to tell our history, with the tools available to us.

J.M: Do you have children?

S.G: No, we don’t have children.

J.M: Do you plan to have any?

S.G: Yes, I plan to have [laughs] many! Many. Yeah, I’d like that.

J.M: Do you know how you’ll talk to them about all this?

S.G: Yes, I’d like to talk to them about Rwanda, yes. I’d like to tell them about Rwanda, I’d like to tell them about Ethiopia, I’d like to tell them about Canada—well, they’ll know Canada. My husband wants to tell them about the Dominican Republic, for example, because he has Dominican roots—about France, where his mom was from. So yeah, I think we’ll tell them all sorts of things, the poor kids, they’re going to get confused at some point. They’re going to say, “Wait wait wait, where are we from, exactly? What’s our background?” Because it’s going to be such a brew. But I want to tell them about Rwanda, and about what happened, and—yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah.

J.M: Do you consider yourself a survivor?

S.G: Ayayay, that question… That question, I… I’ve asked it many times, but I don’t know how to answer it! So, do I consider myself a survivor… Yes and no, you’d think it would be a simple question, but well, the answer would be yes and no. Yes, because… simply because if I had been
in Rwanda, I would’ve certainly been killed, almost certainly, or perhaps I would have escaped, I might have been one of the lucky ones. But I think that… yeah. What saved me was not being there. But in another way, I also feel like no, because… A survivor who was there, in ’94, and who survived, I couldn’t compare myself to that person either, you know. So on the one hand, yes, I think, my God, if my parents hadn’t left in ’73, if, if, if… If I had been there in ’94, well. Even if I didn’t die in ’94, I would have probably seen things, I would have… you know! I would have survived the unimaginable. But on the other hand, I’m lucky enough to have been kilometres away from there. To be alive today. To have—not to have nightmares when April comes around. I’m lucky not to—not to have experienced the 100 days. And I could never compare myself to someone who went through that, because it’s, I mean, you can’t imagine what someone else has imagined—has experienced. So it’s a very, very difficult question to answer. I would say yes and no, for the reasons I’ve explained.

**J.M: Do you ever try not to think about the past, about Rwanda?**

**S.G:** No. Stop thinking about it, avoid thinking about it? No, no because I don’t really have any reason not to think about it. You know, someone who went through that, yes, I would understand if at some point they want to close that chapter, yes, I would understand if that person said, “Listen, I experienced this, I don’t want to talk about it anymore, I want, you know, a blank slate, and that’s that.” But for me, because I had that distance, because I wasn’t there, I have all the more reason to do everything in my power not to forget what happened. Because, well, psychologically, I have the means to sort of turn it off, if you like, if you know what I mean, you know, I can come home and say, “OK, now I’m done with that, work is over there, now I’m here, etc.” But someone who lived through that can’t just switch it off whenever they want, just
get back into the swing of things whenever they want, you know. And no, no, I don’t try to stop thinking about it, on the contrary, I think I’ll do what I can to make sure we don’t forget. Yeah.

**J.M:** What do you think of recent events in Rwanda? Do you have some idea of what’s going on in Rwanda at the moment? For example, I don’t know, the Gacaca [courts], the... commissions, [inaudible] continuation, a commission to control the genocide, commissions... Things like that?

**S.G:** Yes, so, yes. I am very, very aware of what’s going on in Rwanda, even more so these past few years. So I think that Rwanda is rebuilding itself, and really well. Rebuilding after what happened, and I feel that they’re doing pretty well, given the magnitude of the disaster, given the magnitude of what happened. To see that, you know, the country is rebuilding, the economy is getting better, the Rwandans are getting better... I mean, I’ll go and see for myself, but that’s what I’ve heard the past few years. But I get the impression Rwanda is doing better. But on the other hand, there are some things that I don’t totally agree with... certain government decisions; like, the government is still holding on tight, like, close off the country! But still, there are so many good things being done that, is that really what we need? To hold on like that for things to work, you know? I don’t know. But there are things I don’t agree with much, other things I support fully, the Gacaca, I think that’s a good thing, a good idea—you know, it’s a good alternative, given the number of people there are to judge, but at the same time I don’t feel that it’s the solution to every problem, the Gacaca. Yes, it can work in certain cases, in others... Yeah, it’s a delicate situation, it’s delicate, because sometimes people tell you what you want to hear so they can go free, and others have been attacked after testifying in Gacaca courts, so I don’t know. It has good and bad, it’s the alternative for the moment. Has it been successful? I’m not sure. There may be some things that could’ve been done better. I don’t have the solutions,
but there are some things that might’ve been dealt with differently, or done… But anyway overall, I’m happy with where Rwanda is today, how it serves as an example. A tiny country like that, for it to be an example for Africa, for countries to be looking to Rwanda as an inspiration for how things can work, how they eradicated corruption, all sorts of things that make you go, “Wow, I feel proud, I’m proud that we’re talking about Rwanda and saying good things,” and not necessarily just, oh, the country that had the genocide. But I think that, if we could have a little interview session when I get back, I think I’d tell you, I could tell you really well how I feel [laughs]. I could give you the, the ‘highlights,’ hot off the press.

**J.M: Do you feel that the causes of the violence in Rwanda have been explained?**

**S.G:** The causes of the violence have been explained? That I don’t know. I don’t know if they’ve been well explained… In schools, for example, I don’t know how they explain it to the children, to the youth. Here we have projects, we have programs, courses where we try to show, through the life stories we collect, but how is it done over there? Are these courses that we do here in Quebec schools, are they applicable over there in Rwanda? It’s something we could try and see, but no, I don’t know enough about that, to see how… How they’re telling young and not so young people about it in Rwanda today, I don’t know. I don’t know. But that’s something I could tell you in the next interview [laughs]. I’m getting myself into… into trouble now.

**J.M: There’s going to be a followup…**

**S.G:** I’m afraid there might be.

**J.M: What do you call that, in movies?**

**S.G:** A sequel…?
J.M: Do you... You’ve already seen, you’ve talked about this before, you’ve seen the community express itself artistically through film—what’s your reaction to that? What’s the community’s reaction?

S.G: So, there are certain films that are better than others, there are others that... There are certain films that are really inspired by reality, really well done, really well documented, you can tell the person did their research. But other films—not to name any names—they’re completely Hollywood, they’re trying to do it the Hollywood way, even though it was made in Kigali and it’s far from the Hollywood way, that I don’t like so much. But you know, unfortunately, those are the kind of films that get the most visibility and are more widely distributed, so that’s sort of too bad. But I think there are more and more documentaries, more so documentaries, I’d say, that are very, very well done. Again, you have to make the distinction between those that are well done and those that are a bit simplistic, but... Yeah, no, sometimes I’m disappointed by certain films, and others I’m like, wow, OK, now that’s good, and I try to promote them as much as possible in my circles, because of course I want them to be the closest to reality as possible. Not trying to sugarcoat that reality, which was very, very far from sweet, at that time. So yes, sometimes I’m disappointed and sometimes I’m pleasantly surprised, and in those cases, I say bravo.

J.M: And have you noticed reactions within the community?

S.G: In the community? No, but it’s often within the community that we watch those kinds of films, new ones, that come from all over. It’s often in the community, often it’s during periods of commemoration that we’ll decide to screen some film or other. So of course, that opinion is more or less shared by the community, at least the community I’m involved in, and so we often say, “Oh la la, what have they done to us now!” And sometimes we even decide not to promote them,
simply because we don’t find the film very realistic. But when we find good films, good documentaries, that’s when we decide to share them with larger audiences.

**J.M:** You just talked a bit about this, but how do you think your stories or your community’s stories can be shared in classrooms, in museums or theatres, etc.?

**S.G:** Well actually, that question, I actually think the Life Stories project answers exactly that question. In schools, there’s actually a group that deals with that specifically, and we work a lot with that educational group to try and see how we can plan our interviews, how we can touch on themes that would be relevant to the classroom. Theatre, the project also does, the project does that really, really well, with the plays we’ve put on so far, the playback I was talking about, etc.

You said, education, classes? Museums. Museums, we have done exhibits through this project. Last year, we had a big exhibit for the Congrès des sciences humaines de Concordia. And that…

Really this project, this kind of project like Life Stories, it has really allowed for a greater—an awareness, so we’re really trying to create public awareness through all these different mediums. But really, the public, I feel that afterwards, they know more about it, and not—that’s hard to show in just a movie or something. And to see it through people’s experiences, people who are here, who could have been them, or their neighbours—that’s what I think touches them as humans. When it’s simple stories, but lived by people, and told in different ways, I think that’s what touches them. So yes, the Life Stories project responds to all of those, all those points. We need more projects like this. Many more and on a larger scale, yes.

**J.M:** If I asked you, what would you like people—people outside of your community—to know about you, to know about your life experiences?

**S.G:** Outside of my community? Well, I’d like them to know… I’d actually wouldn’t want them to just remember the Rwandan genocide, I’d like them to know that besides that, there are other
things too. I’d like them to not necessarily stop at “OK, you’re from Rwanda, oh so what were you, Hutu or Tutsi? Were you the one killing or the one getting killed?” These kind of simplistic questions! But sometimes you think, OK, it’s the media perpetuating that, so you can’t be mad at them for asking that question right away. But, I don’t know, to know more about the country… And to be very… To make integration easier for Rwandans, in Quebec. And for that matter, not only Rwandans, but immigrants in general. You know, when you arrive in this country, it’s not always obvious, how to adapt and all that—but to make that adaptation easier, by trying to learn about others. If it’s a Rwandan, to learn about—to not limit yourself to that particular event, but to get the ‘big picture.’ And well, to listen. To listen, to show solidarity sometimes, with what we’re doing. Yes. I would say, to not limit yourself to one single event, and to help people arriving here with all that baggage, you know, to better integrate, to better fit in with the crowd and not be singled out because they come from Rwanda and because they’ve experienced a genocide. That there are other things too, you know!

J.M: That’s what you’d like people to say about your community and know about your community. And what would you like people on the outside to know about your life?

S.G: People on the outside?

J.M: Outside of your community, to know about your life?

S.G: Ah, me in particular? I’d suggest they watch my interview if they want to know more about me [laughs]. But basically, if I wanted, well, about my life… I mean, I’m… If they were to take away something from my life? Yes, I think I’d come back to what I was just saying when I said that, sometimes in life, there’s an event that might turn your life upside down, that sets you on some paths and not others because of that event. And well, I’d just like them to know that… And it’s hard to pin down one, one thing. But yeah, yeah, if I gave them one thing, it would be that, in
my experience, over the course of my life, I’d like them to know that, I am and will always be Rwandan in my soul, in spite of all my experiences, I’ll always carry Rwanda with me. And I think that I will… It’s a big word to say I’ll ‘defend’ Rwanda for the rest of my days, but anyway if there’s any link with me, if I ever cross paths with these people, it’s certain that and some point I’m going to tell them about Rwanda, not that, it would come up in the conversation, but I’d like to, I don’t know, maybe to pass on some of, some of my involvement, I would try to pass that on to people. Yeah!

**J.M:** One last little thing. You want to pass on your involvement, and if people—if I asked you the question, with regards to people [in your community]… What do you want them to know about your life?

**S.G:** Wow, that they don’t already know? Oh la la, that they don’t already know? Because they already know me, after all these years in the community, I think they’re done, but… What could I tell them? Well, it depends on which people in the community. I would say to the people who survived that we will always be there to help them, to support them during that, you know, time of the year that is the most difficult for them. And for those that were lucky enough not to be there, not to have been there in ’94, I would say to them, “It’s our duty. It’s our duty to…” And I mean, they’re almost all doing it already, but I would really emphasize that duty we have, because really we’re probably better equipped, we don’t have… Because of that distance, it’s our duty to always be available, at least during the mourning period. At least that period, to be available, to be there, to try to offer as much as… I don’t know. But often, what’s too bad is, the survivors, they won’t come and say to you, “Help me, this is hard for me,” etc. But we have to be there, we have to be one step ahead, we have to make the first move, we have to go to them. We have to give them a sense of—to give them support, let’s say. There!
J.M: Are there any other questions you’d like to have heard?

S.G: Oh, that you didn’t ask?

J.M: [Inaudible].

S.G: Ah, yes, OK [laughs]. A question… No, I think you’ve covered it all. What wasn’t asked was asked in the first session, so I think I’ve covered everything.

J.M: There’s more to come.

S.G: Well, there you go, I’ve sort of gotten myself into trouble there. But really, no, I think that would do me [good], yeah, it would be good to see… See my impressions as well. On the ground. Well, not on—well, anyway. Yeah! [Laughs]. My impressions after visiting, right after visiting. And then we can do a third session with you. Thank you.

J.M: See you in September?

S.G: See you in September.