

027 Sheldon Silverman

Please note that any items that were difficult to transcribe are marked with an [indiscernible] tag.

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: Okay. We're ready to go. So I'm sitting in the home of Sheldon Silverman, who has agreed to speak to me. You know that I'm on the Board of Directors for Harbord Village.

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: And we are collecting information about the history of our neighbourhood.

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: So that's what this is about. I'd like to just start by asking you to tell me how long you have been living – give us your address please, Sheldon Silverman. How long you've lived...

Respondent 1: I've lived at **[0:00:30]** 157 Major Street. I've lived – we moved in on Valentine's Day, February 14th, 1997. When we moved in here, we moved from a very large home on 96 Walmer Road in the Annex. We have three children, and our two oldest had moved away by the time we decided to scale down, and move, and our home was obviously too big on Walmer Road. Had eleven **[0:01:00]** rooms, three storeys, and very expensive, so we decided to downsize. Hélène, my wife, is a real estate agent, and I said to her, "We better start looking for a smaller home." And one day she said to me, "Oh, there's a house on 157 Major Street. Your old street where you grew up on"...

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: "...for sale." And so Hélène took me to 157 Major Street, which at that time was owned by Christina Innes, whose husband was **[0:01:30]** a Member of Parliament for the Liberals, Tony Ianno's home, and Christina, who's a lawyer, had three or four children, and

a nanny, and this house was too small for them. They were upsizing, and we were downsizing. They ended up moving to Kendal Avenue, the next street over from Walmer Road to a big home. And so we bought this home. It's a semi-detached, old Victorian home, which we love very much. It was fairly well renovated when we [0:02:00] purchased it. The major renovation we did was knock out a wall and built a fireplace. We built the fireplace, and when we lived at 96 Walmer Road, my late father, who's a real estate investor, I, my two sisters, also purchased 85 Walmer Road, directly across the road, which was a heritage home. And some years – well we rented it out. It was a five-unit home, and one day there was a small [0:02:30] fire with some problem with the fireplace on the second floor apartment, which had a wood mantelpiece, beautiful hand-carved wood mantelpiece, and so we were forced to remove the mantelpiece and build a brick type of fireplace mantelpiece. However, we had built a big garage on Walmer Road, and we put that mantelpiece in our garage and kept it for years. When we moved to [0:03:00] Major Street, we had it remodeled, we had knocked down the wall and put it in, and that is a heritage part of our home. The other part of our home, and let me start where I come back to the beginning of Major Street, I grew up on Major Street in 1941. My parents moved from 87 McCaul Street where I was born to 24 Major Street. They purchased that home for fifteen [0:03:30] hundred dollars.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: It was a three-storey home, semi-detached. I have a picture of it. And I lived in that house from 1941 to 1957. I went to Lansdowne Public school, and after that I went to Harbord Collegiate. We moved after fourth year of high school, but I continued going to finish my grade thirteen at Harbord Collegiate. I loved Major Street. One of the characteristics is [0:04:00] I'm Jewish, and I would say about eighty percent of the people around me were Jewish. We were close to Kensington. I remember my mother – we kept kosher. My mother's a kosher fanatic. And I remember as a child going down from 24 Major Street to Augusta, Kensington, and my mother buying a chicken and going behind the chicken store, and how was it slaughtered according to religious law.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: [0:04:30] And I remember my mother buying live carp, and it swimming in the bathtub, and made gefilte fish out of it for Friday...

Interviewer: And this was all from Kensington Market.

Respondent 1: Kensington Market.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Respondent 1: And I remember Kensington very well. And I remember as a child growing up, going through the laneway, almost very close to the lane that led directly to Lansdowne Public School, and there was a variety store just [0:05:00] beside the lane on Robert Street. And I was – and so it was very close. It must have taken me about a minute to get to school. It was an old school. It wasn't called Lord Lansdowne then. It was old, full of cockroaches, I remember.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: [Laughs] And especially in the washroom. And the people there mostly were Jewish. I grew up in a tremendously Jewish environment. My closest friends were Jewish. They – [0:05:30] we went – my closest friends are friends from kindergarten.

Interviewer: Now you mean? Still?

Respondent 1: Even now. They're both doctors. We were accelerated. We were put in – after grade three, I was put in an accelerated class four, five, and six in two years instead of three, and my closest friends were also with me. They're brilliant doctors, they went to Harbord Collegiate, and the nicest people I know. They're just brilliant. And one in particular is so smart, and one is a [0:06:00] silver medal winner in medicine, and the other one's even smarter.

Interviewer: In Toronto?

Respondent 1: They're in Toronto, but I'm used to very, very, very bright people around me, mainly from people from Major Street or Brunswick Street.

Interviewer: So these people came from fairly modest beginnings.

Respondent 1: Yes. My father – there's a terrific love story here. My mother came to Canada in 1929. She's about eighteen or nineteen years old. Her father, my grandfather, had died, [0:06:30] and her mother, my grandmother, remarried a widower with children.

Interviewer: And where did they come from?

Respondent 1: They came from Poland. My mother came from a little village called Drildz in Poland. A shtetl. And I don't know what happened. According to my older sister, who knows everything, my mother – maybe she was sexually harassed by step-brothers or something. Anyhow, she loved my father, but my great-uncles came to Canada, Toronto, in 1905. Wassermanns. And they brought [0:07:00] my mother to Canada in 1929. My mother worked in a Jewish restaurant on Queen Street as a waitress. Eventually she made enough money to bring my father over in 1933. They were married in August 6, 1933.

Interviewer: Oh, they didn't waste any time. [Laughs] Yeah.

Respondent 1: No. And so that's how – and I was born in 1940, seven years later. My sister was born exactly a year later, August 6, 1934. [0:07:30] My father and mother knew how to time the baby girls, anyhow. My younger sister was born October the 11, 1941...

Interviewer: Whoa.

Respondent 1: ...exactly, and my mother's born October the 11th. She was – I don't know exactly what year she was born. She never told the truth about when she was born. [Laughs] Anyhow, we grow up. How I came to Major Street, I was one year old. My earliest memory is listening to the radio to Foster Hewitt hockey. [Laughs] [0:08:00] Hockey Night in Canada playing the Toronto Maple Leafs. "He shoots, he scores." It's one of my earliest memories. Another early

memory is my parents packing boxes for my uncle in Paris and his family, who survived the Holocaust by being in Vichy France, in the south of France on false passports. And after the Second World War, [0:08:30] they weren't in really good – in a food way, you know? They were still suffering lack of food. So we had other goodies. So I remember as a child watching my parents pack food in cardboard boxes, big cart, and send them off to Paris to help my uncle and his family through...

Interviewer: Do you know what prompted your family to choose this neighbourhood?

Respondent 1: Well they didn't need any prompting. It was such a Jewish area. [Laughs] [0:09:00] This was natural. Just going here was such a natural thing. This was the area of Judaism around the Kensington, north of Kensington. It was the Jewish area, and you know...

Interviewer: So you were here – you were born in '40, moved here in '41.

Respondent 1: That's right.

Interviewer: And lived here until when again?

Respondent 1: 1957. Sixteen years.

Interviewer: Okay. So I would love to – a lot of our discussion today – and now you're back, which is quite wonderful.

Respondent 1: [0:09:30] Forty years later. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So when you came back, as you said, you were downsizing. But was there also an appeal to be back in this neighbourhood?

Respondent 1: Oh, I loved it. I grabbed onto it immediately because I've only ever left it psychologically. When my parents – around the late '50s, a lot of Jewish people were moving up north. My father was a shoemaker when he came to Canada. And I'll tell you what he did later on. But anyhow, [0:10:00] my parents looked to move north, like most of the Jewish people in this area in the late '50s and early

'60s, and they moved, they bought a house on Hillmount Avenue, a fairly new home. It was a two-storey home. Right now it's two houses next to the Spadina Expressway, but at that time Spadina Expressway didn't exist. And so they bought quite a nice home, however I hate it because I went to Harbord to [0:10:30] finish my grade thirteen. I had to take about three or four – we had quite a distance from Bathurst. I took the Glencairn bus, and another bus, and it took me a while to get back up to Harbord Collegiate. I used to walk there from Major Street. And so I hated when my parents moved up north. I didn't like it at all.

Interviewer: What do you think it meant to them to be moving up north?

Respondent 1: Well the typical Jewish nouveau-riche sort of thing to do, and...

Interviewer: Success.

Respondent 1: ...be with the crowd. [0:11:00] But that time – no, my father – I don't think my parents were that well-off at that time, but they started – my father got into real estate, and he was doing – he became the foreman of Fancy Footwear Company, and through my great-uncle he got involved in real estate speculation, buying old houses, renovating them, finance them, and selling them. Then gradually he got wealthier, and he left the shoe business and became an independent entrepreneur.

Interviewer: So for him, it was like getting out of the shtetl and that was a [0:11:30] measure of success.

Respondent 1: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: And for you, your heart and soul were always here.

Respondent 1: That's right.

Interviewer: In this neighbourhood.

Respondent 1: Yes. And also you needed a car for everything, and my father didn't drive. But I learned how to drive before my father, and I got my driver's – I remember we were still on Major Street, I believe, and I

learned to drive on Major Street when I was sixteen years old. And my father didn't know how to drive. Then he bought a big Mercury car [0:12:00] and I think around the same time we moved up to Hillmount, and I drove. My father didn't know how to drive. He learned later on, terrible driver, so I had to drive the family. Great big Mercury with no – it had, I think, either – yeah. It had power brakes, but not power steering, so every time you touched the brakes, it was terrible. And so I learned to drive on Major Street. Now I hated when my parents moved north. [0:12:30] I was married very, very young.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Respondent 1: I was married at twenty. I entered law, U of T law school when I was twenty-one.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: Yeah. I got a Bachelor of Arts degree when I was twenty-one years old because I was a year ahead, and I had marks in the top-third of my class. And I entered University of Toronto law school, the very first class ever entered U of T law on campus. We had a class of about a hundred in first-year law, and this was pre-LSAT. After first year they failed one-third of the [0:13:00] class, or they dropped out these kids, and we left about sixty-five students left, among whom came from that class was our Prime Minister, Paul Martin.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: Foreign Minister, Bill Graham.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: The Mayor of Toronto, John Sewell.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: All male, no females. [Laughs] None at all.

Interviewer: That's right. That's a change.

Respondent 1: A year ahead of me were none. I entered first-year U of T law school, was just being built, and they didn't have it distinguished between men's and women's – they hadn't put signs up yet. I entered the women's [0:13:30] washroom unknowingly because there weren't – no sign, but it didn't matter. There were no women. [Laughter] There were no women in law school the year ahead of me in my year. I think four came in the year behind me. So going back to Major Street, when I got married in 1963 in August, we moved immediately downtown and rented an apartment on Bernard and St. George Street, so I could walk to my third-year of [0:14:00] law school, and Hélène was working. My wife, Hélène, worked as a teller at a bank, I think, on Avenue Road and Bloor, if I remember.

Interviewer: But you have always been a downtown person.

Respondent 1: Yeah. I'm a downtown person.

Interviewer: Let me come back to when you lived here with your family. Tell me who lived here. Was it just your family? Were there some other people?

Respondent 1: No.

Interviewer: How many people lived here when you lived on Major Street?

Respondent 1: Well on 24 Major Street it was a ten-room house, and I have [0:14:30] two sisters and one brother.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: But we also rented. My parents were poor then, and we rented out most of the second floor to people named Shuster. One, the son was in the Canadian Air Force. I don't know his first name, but he was in the Canadian Air Force, and Shuster rented out part of it. I think one – they lived in one of the bedrooms, or my sister did. Eventually – and they rented out the third floor and part of the second floor. When [0:15:00] I was a little kid, I remember I think we only occupied the first floor.

- Interviewer:** So do a little math for me. How many – at the maximum, how many people were living at 24 Major Street?
- Respondent 1:** At the maximum? Maybe twelve, because my own family is six. I have about three siblings.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent 1:** Maybe five or six. Maybe another up to eight, and the Shuster family, I think, had four. And there were three on the third floor.
- Interviewer:** Wow. How many bathrooms?
- Respondent 1:** **[0:15:30]** We had one on the second floor and one in the basement, but only one bathtub. No shower.
- Interviewer:** So you were twelve of you living here.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. At the maximum, probably around twelve.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. And at some point did your family take over the whole house?
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Or did your family...
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. I think so. Towards the end, around 1957, I don't think there were any tenants anymore. I know I ended up living on the third floor.
- Interviewer:** Right. But that was very close to the time that you...
- Respondent 1:** We left, yeah. I don't think there were any tenants when we – by the time we left.
- Interviewer:** So you were **[0:16:00]** a lot of people living under this roof for most of that time.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah.

Interviewer: And that helped your father pay the fifteen hundred dollar mortgage? [Laughs]

Respondent 1: No rent. I don't know what the mortgage was. Yeah. That helped a lot, renting it out. All the tenants, I think, were Jewish. One was well-known. His name was Karl Marx. [Laughs] No, not the Karl Marx. And his wife was Bay Marx, and they're Jewish, and I – and he had the same name as Karl Marx. He was a very good capitalist. He got rich, and they're both dead now, but [0:16:30] he became a capitalist, not a – I don't think he ever was. [Laughs]

Interviewer: You mentioned several times that there were a lot of Jewish people.

Respondent 1: Was there.

Interviewer: Were there other – from what you recall, were there other children in the neighbourhood or families and in your school, from other...

Respondent 1: Yes. There was this black family, the Marshall family. I can't – yeah. The Marshall family. Black. Somewhere on Major Street. The two sons, one was George Marshall, the other one's Wally [0:17:00] Marshall. Now Wally Marshall must have liked me, protected me against the fights of other kids. And we got along well. His brother, George, was shot dead robbing on College. There's some dental place. I mean I don't know what he's trying to steal, but he was shot, I think, by police and he died.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: Yeah. He was a criminal. Now going back to Wally Marshall, last time I saw him I was a [0:17:30] prosperous lawyer and driving a Mercedes Benz, a 280S, and I had my car washed at Spadina and College, just south of College, and I had a flashlight, I had a magnetic flashlight underneath the dashboard, and I was having my car washed, probably wore my three-piece lawyer suit [laughs], and Wally Marshall was there, one of the car washers.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: And here I am, a lawyer, I drive a Mercedes Benz, and he's my car washer. **[0:18:00]** And then I'd gone through the whitely water part of it, and then they – you know how they wipe it at the end?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Well when I looked underneath my dashboard, my flashlight was missing. Someone had stolen it, so I motioned to Wally Marshall to come over to it and I said to him, "Hi." You know, I reintroduced myself too. He remembered me. I said, "Someone took my flashlight. Can you get it back for me?" He did. [Laughs]

Interviewer: And what was it like **[0:18:30]** for you and for him after so many years, and you had been equals, and he had protected you?

Respondent 1: Yeah. I don't know. It's strange, I guess. I don't know, I felt – but he helped me again. [Laughs] I'm grateful to him. I've never seen him since. I don't know if I would recognize him now.

Interviewer: And any other ethnic groups that you can remember at that time?

Respondent 1: Yes. Leo Panasek. He lived on Brunswick Avenue. Panasek. I don't know. Maybe Polish background, probably. **[0:19:00]** I remember playing baseball – I liked playing sports in the Lansdowne Public School, and once he was at bat, either he – I can't remember. Either I was at bat, or he was at bat when we were – he was hit by a bat, and I was almost knocked unconscious.

Interviewer: You were knocked...

Respondent 1: I can't remember who it was. Either I was...

Interviewer: One of you was knocked unconscious.

Respondent 1: Yeah. And Leo and I, we got along well. And we got along **[0:19:30]** well with the non-Jews. I had no anti-Semitic – you know, I never had an anti-Semitic matter on Major Street. The first time I ever encountered or felt it, believe it or not, when I was looking for an articling job as a lawyer. I had just graduated from U of T law

school, I graduated from 1964, then I articulated at Osgoode Hall '64 to '65, and after that I was looking for an articling job, so big-shot lawyer that I am, I went to the largest law [0:20:00] firm in Canada at that time, Blake, Cassels, & Graydon, and they were looking for articling students, and I felt they were condescending to me. I was wearing my three-piece suit [laughs] looking very lawyer life in a pinstripe suit, and they showed me their one Jewish lawyer. And I didn't feel comfortable there. I felt I was being condescended as a Jew. First time. Not anti-Semitic, but just being talked down to, which I wasn't used to, [0:20:30] and that was the first time as a Jew I felt something I didn't like.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: And I didn't take the job there. I was hired by – some connection in a way. One of my cousins married a lawyer, and this – when he was a young lawyer he articulated for another non-Jewish firm. The firm is called Keith, Gagnon, Bonnie, and Kee. Keith and Gagnon – Donald Keith was a General in the Second World War, and Gagnon was also in the Canadian [0:21:00] Army. Both of them were army buddies who went – after war, went to Osgoode Hall and became lawyers, and they were very pro-Jewish, they seem, and so they liked – they hired me and my ex-partner, Alan Posner, as law students, and we were treated well. And so I've had very little experience – no experience with anti-Semitism on Major Street because most of them were Jewish people.

Interviewer: And what percentage of the children at Lansdowne, or Lord Lansdowne were Jewish?

Respondent 1: Those days it was not called Lord Lansdowne.

Interviewer: [0:21:30] It was Lansdowne.

Respondent 1: I would say – I don't know. I can't tell. I would say about maybe seventy-five percent were Jewish. I really don't know. I remember one of the top students, Gloria Oris, and she was not Jewish. I don't know what nationality she was. There were – but there were often ethnic. There weren't that many Anglo-Saxons, I don't think.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: They were often ethnic.

Interviewer: But it was harmonious, I think is what you're saying.

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. We got along well. I don't remember any racially motivated [0:22:00] fights being at Lansdowne or at Harbord Collegiate. I have no memory of any racial at all, ethnic or – we got along well.

Interviewer: Did your family belong to a synagogue?

Respondent 1: Oh, that's interesting. My mother came from the little village of Drildz. There were three synagogues at the corner of Ulster and Markham in the 1940s and '50s.

Interviewer: Three at Ulster and Markham?

Respondent 1: Three.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: One was called the Drildzer Synagogue, where my mother – my mother's Drildzer. And a Drildzer synagogue [0:22:30] was there, that's where we went. That's where I had my bar mitzvah. The Drildzer Society still exists. It's probably the oldest continuous society maybe in – Jewish society – in Canada. In fact, we took our granddaughter who's four years old to – for the Hanukkah party at the Drildzer Society.

Interviewer: And so it's still there?

Respondent 1: It's still – not there. The synagogue's gone, but the Drildzer Society exists. It used to be called the Young Men's Drildzer Society. [Laughs] But they're all dead by now, I think. But the children and grandchildren carried on the [0:23:00] Drildzer Society. And we – I'm a member of the Drildzer. I pay a hundred and fifty – I just pay the hundred and fifty dollar membership due, and so it continues on

after – since 1920s, I think. My great-aunts were involved, and my great-uncles. As I said, they came to Canada in 1905.

Interviewer: But you formed strong connections. I mean you feel a connection to this neighbourhood.

Respondent 1: Very much so.

Interviewer: And this Drildzer Society.

Respondent 1: Yes. Yeah, I'm very connected. Yes, and my friends all from here. My friends came from [0:23:30] this area, and I still have my same friends that I had since kindergarten.

Interviewer: Right. Were there other shuls around here that you...

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: ...can recall?

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. Well I said there were three at Ulster and Markham, and one is the Rusishe, and there are three. Now there's only one left, and I don't know what – I think it's called the Dr. Joe Greenberg. [Laughs]

Interviewer: It's called the Shaarei Tzedec and Joe Greenberg. Yes, he has certainly kept it afloat.

Respondent 1: Yeah. He's seen throughout. David Greenberg's my doctor. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Oh really. That's his son.

Respondent 1: Yeah. His son, David, is [0:24:00] my doctor.

Interviewer: Was he your doctor? Was Dr. Joe your doctor?

Respondent 1: No, he wasn't.

Interviewer: No.

Respondent 1: No. No, he was never my doctor. I had moved up north and...

Interviewer: Yeah, right.

Respondent 1: And a client of mine, actually my doctor, Arnold Klarin was my doctor, and I was his lawyer for years until he died young actually.

Interviewer: And what about churches? Were there churches in the neighbourhood?

Respondent 1: Churches?

Interviewer: Yeah. Were there churches that you can recall in the neighbourhood?

Respondent 1: Oh certainly. I would bring back an incident. Well the churches – yeah, the ones that are here now. There was one, still there, out in – **[0:24:30]** I think it's a Korean church. Across right from Lansdowne on Robert Street is a little church.

Interviewer: Oh that's right.

Respondent 1: And I don't know what it is now. But I remember sort of a classmate of mine, bring back a – his name was Larry Reisman. I wasn't close to him at all, and he thought I was stupid. I remember walking. He was walking with me one day, and he sees a church and he spits. You know, the reverse – he's Jewish, and you know, he thought **[indiscernible 0:24:51]** church. Oh. [Laughs] So I remember that incident. It just brought back memories of him, but I didn't – **[0:25:00]** he never did well in school. I don't know where he ended up, but I didn't like what he did, even then. I found it disgraceful. Yeah, there are churches, but from what I was told – one of my – he's a lawyer. His name is Sheldon Robbins, and we went to school together at Lansdowne, but he reminded me that – and I forgot this – that we went to nursery school together at Knox **[0:25:30]** church. I think it's at Harbord and Spadina. In nursery school we were classmates at Knox. I forgot I was four years old.

Interviewer: That church is still there.

Respondent 1: Knox. It's still there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Yeah. We went there as a child, you know, as nursery school kids.
[Laughs]

Interviewer: Now in retrospect, were you – are you aware of class structure that existed?

Respondent 1: No, not at all. I had no sense of elitism of anyone.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: We were all [0:26:00] equals as far as I know. I never found anyone putting up airs or anything.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now you've been on Major now and what changes do you see on Major?

Respondent 1: Oh huge. [Laughs] Well when we moved back, as I said, on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1997, at that time there were...

Interviewer: So how many years was that from the time you left?

Respondent 1: Well about exactly – I left exactly [0:26:30] 40 years later.

Interviewer: Oh my god. That's great.

Respondent 1: About 40 years later. 40 years later.

Interviewer: Oh, I'd love to hear the changes.

Respondent 1: When we moved back. So the biggest change, there were only two old Jewish people left on the street that I know. It was eighty, maybe ninety percent when I was a kid. There are two Jewish people who are left. One – he's still there – Morton Greenberg, who's the brother of Dr. Joe Greenberg – he was born and raised in the house. [0:27:00] I forget the address. It's ninety-something.

Maybe 97 Major Street. The other person who lived across the road from me at 24 Major Street, she lived down – she still lived, but she died about seven, eight years ago. I forget her name now. Netty something. Kreigman. Kreigman was her name. Kreigman. Netty Kreigman. She died. She was an old widow, and mother, and she...

Interviewer: So from the neighbourhood that was seventy-five percent Jewish and then...

Respondent 1: Two.

Interviewer: ...just a few.

Respondent 1: [0:27:30] When we moved in in 1997. Now what has happened is become gentrified, the prices of these homes are six, seven hundred thousand dollars. The people – there are a fair amount of Jewish people here now who are professionals. There are about six or seven lawyers from Harbord down to Ulster. Number one is a lawyer, a woman, Leslie Mendelssohn, who comes from Winnipeg as a lawyer for the City [0:28:00] of Toronto. Another's a crown attorney, I don't know her name. Another lawyer further down, I know her very well, is – her last name is Katzman. Dobbie Katzman, work for Blake, Cassels, Graydon. [Laughs] Another lawyer, she may be retired now. Another lawyer's the head of B'nai Brith Council...

Interviewer: Oh my.

Respondent 1: ...is Marvin Kurtz. Is very nice man. His wife is a psychiatrist. So you have a lot of – [0:28:30] and then there's another crossroad of people who have moved in who are Jewish also who – I think father comes from Calgary, but you get in situations where parents help out their professional children, buying these fairly expensive homes. There's one up the street, a dentist moved in. His father was my dentist one time on Karr. He's a dentist, and his wife and two kids – they bought a home, and never paid for it.

Interviewer: Do you have any awareness of who was here in [0:29:00] those years that you were gone? The forty years that you weren't here. As the Jews were moving in, who...

Respondent 1: Yeah. A lot of – recently it was Hungarian, some Hungarian in 1956. You had a fair amount of Hungarians. But mainly it was Portuguese. A lot of Portuguese people. Next door neighbour, the husband is Portuguese. Wife is Slovenian. And what you get – when we first moved in, we saw a lot of very old people and they died. I would say about seven or eight people. What you also see here, [0:29:30] as I said – my wife is a real estate agent – and I was curious when we moved here, being a real estate lawyer primarily, who our neighbours and what the constitution of this area was at that time, 1997. So Hélène got an assessment roll so we could see who lived where, and when we looked at it we could see a lot of Oriental people, Chinese, and even now they are not noticeable. They don't take part in any of the activities. We know who they are. [0:30:00] One son is a doctor. If I cross the road, when I moved in I introduced myself, but he died. He was an engineer actually. The father, but his son's a doctor and specialist, and I think a pediatrician.

Interviewer: So you're saying that...

Respondent 1: A lot of Chinese people in homes here, they're quiet. You don't know...

Interviewer: So they're not out in the street...

Respondent 1: No.

Interviewer: ...and they're not doing any community activities.

Respondent 1: I've seen them, but they have their own private – yeah. There are a fair amount of Orientals on this street, on Major Street, but when I first moved here, I had [0:30:30] a lot of law files and the movers put them in the wrong house, the files on the verandah. [Laughs] A few doors away it was Chinese, and the young son – and they were a little angry. I don't blame them. And we moved it back into my house.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: And I remember the son, still I chat with him. I guess he's thirty now. His name is Nelson. I didn't forget. So I was always kind to him. I see him on the subway. I take the TTC to work every morning.

Interviewer: Yeah. [0:31:00] And a lot of us who live in this neighbourhood do this type of thing.

Respondent 1: Yeah. I take TTC to work. I get a lift home from every lawyer in my office, but more often I take the TTC. I take the streetcar at Harbord and Spadina up to the subway at Bloor and Spadina, go down to Osgoode, get off Osgoode. Sometimes when it's cold I get off at St. Andrew and go into PATH. Like during the last few days.

Interviewer: So you've seen a lot of changes. When we're talking about changes to the street, you're talking about the population. What about the homes? The structures?

Respondent 1: [0:31:30] Well these are beautiful, old Victorian homes. They're really gorgeous. They have character, and a lot of them have been renovated. I've been to a lot of these homes in open house and I've seen a lot of tremendous renovation jobs. What I don't like, and what I do like – I'll tell you what I don't like – what's happened to all these homes. They've holed it out. I like a hallway. I like rooms. What they've done, they've knocked out all the walls and they make it [0:32:00] one sort of area. I don't like that. I like to see rooms. I have a dining room, I have a living room, I have a hallway leading to the kitchen, and I have a den, and I don't like a lot of the renovations when they knock out walls and they make it – I forget the word.

Interviewer: Open concept. Yeah.

Respondent 1: Open concept. I don't like it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: I sort of like wall, and I like – I just like it.

Interviewer: DHélèneeated spaces.

Respondent 1: Yeah. I like that. Maybe it's my sense of compulsiveness.

Interviewer: What about the fronts of the houses?

Respondent 1: Pardon?

Interviewer: The fronts of the houses.

Respondent 1: They're quite [0:32:30] nice. Well my home, you know, it's peaked. If you look at our home, take a look on the outside, we had it deliberately painted on the third – when we first bought the home we could have opened the third floor, but we don't have any reason to do that. One of our neighbours did. But if you look at the outside of our home, we hired a painter who did these flowerpots. The paint. If you look carefully you'll see it. We also deliberately – oh, I left out a very important part of Major Street. I've got to tell you this story. That door that you opened up comes from 24 Major Street, my old house.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: The door – [0:33:00] let me tell you the story. We have a street – we could park in the back. There's a public lane, and we even built interlocking. We got a big door, and I think occasionally we did park our car through – from the lane into our backyard, but we didn't like it. And so we had street parking. One day I'm looking for a parking spot, which is one of the problems living on Major, is parking. And in this half of [0:33:30] this area, it's lack of parking, and that is a big problem here. And so one day I'm looking for a parking space. I see a hoarding around my old house on Major Street. By that time it was owned by the Doctor's Hospital. It was used as a nurse's residence. I see a hoarding around it.

Interviewer: A what?

Respondent 1: A hoarding. Boarding, hoarding.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent 1: Around that and some of the other homes around there with Greenspoon Wreckers, a big sign that they're going to tear down all these homes now.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: **[0:34:00]** And so I phone a Greenspoon Wreckers the next morning and said – I spoke to the secretary and I said, "I live at – my home at 24 Major Street. You're tearing down my old house. I want my door."

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: And I phoned, and so I spoke to a woman and I left her my name and number, and also I said to her, "Tell Mr. Greenspoon he's related to – he married my great-uncle's daughter." [Laughter] So around five o'clock I get a call from Mr. Greenspoon himself. **[0:34:30]** "Mr. Silverman, the door is yours."

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: You identify yourself to security. And so I got a dolly from our neighbour next door. My wife and I marched down Major Street to a security guard, and I identified myself, and Hélène and I tried to lift the door. We couldn't. It was too heavy. So the security guard, big guy, I slipped him ten dollars and he helped us with a dolly. He lifted it onto the dolly. We put it to the side of our home, **[0:35:00]** and we hired the same person who did our mantelpiece to restrain it. Hélène bought stained glass windows, where they had ordinary windows, and we bought Weiser locks and hinges, and remodeled it, reframed it, and there it is on Major Street. You'll have to look at it.

Interviewer: Oh my god. But your timing was really lucky.

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Because, you know, a month later it would have been destroyed, thank god.

- Respondent 1:** We're also related – I'm related to my [0:35:30] mother, the Wassermanns – it's a huge family on my mother's side. The Wassermanns.
- Interviewer:** Oh but that's got such a importance to you.
- Respondent 1:** Great-uncle, I have five great-uncles. Pardon?
- Interviewer:** That's got such importance to you...
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** ...to have that door.
- Respondent 1:** I have all these relatives of mine. On my mother's – on my father's side, my father's the first Silverman from our family into Canada. After the Second World War there were a few Silvermans that survived the war, one being Jack Silverman, and he was in – [0:36:00] DP Camp, in Stuttgart, Germany with a wife, two daughters – I think two daughters. I don't know if maybe – I think they're both daughters born in Germany, and my mother-in-law, and wife. My father brought over – Jack Silverman's a lawyer in Poland. He tried to be a lawyer here, became a successful insurance agent, and his daughter, his older daughter is a Justice Supreme Court of Canada, Rosalie Silberman-Abella.
- Interviewer:** Oh I know Rosie.
- Respondent 1:** She's my cousin.
- Interviewer:** Oh my god. I know Rosie very well.
- Respondent 1:** [0:36:30] And Tony, her sister, was at my home on Sunday.
- Interviewer:** And I know Tony. In fact, I called your home last week and Tony had just left.
- Respondent 1:** I told you that? Yeah. So I'm related to them. And another Silverman, Hilary's Drugstore, Hilary Silverman on Dundas and – and further...

Interviewer: And I knew their mother very well too.

Respondent 1: Pardon?

Interviewer: I knew their mother, Fanny.

Respondent 1: Fanny.

Interviewer: Yeah. And she was a good real estate agent.

Respondent 1: I handled their estate.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: Their estate. Yeah. I was their lawyer all the way. I've been a family lawyer. It's all the two connected.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: [0:37:00] Jack's the one who gave the keynote speech at our wedding. [Laughs]

Interviewer: So you're immigrants and you've all done really well.

Respondent 1: Well pretty well.

Interviewer: It was clear to you that you were intelligent and you were going to...

Respondent 1: Yeah. We worked very hard though.

Interviewer: Yeah. For sure.

Respondent 1: When I was brought up on Major Street, you know, I either had to be a lawyer or a doctor. By mother especially. The only disappointment was my brother. My brother is, right, is a [0:37:30] Hasidic Lubavitcher rabbi in Miami, Florida. And my brother is about seven years younger than me. He's the youngest. I remember the teacher saying – when he was taking bar mitzvah classes, "I'm not responsible for your son. He's not studying. He's

twelve years old, and he won't have his bar mitzvah. I don't know what he's doing." But then he turned around completely, a hundred percent turnaround, became ultra-religious, then they one day, after bar mitzvah, he announces to the family, "I want to be a Lubavitcher rabbi." [0:38:00] My father got mad at him. "You're going to be [indiscernible 0:38:01], you're going to be poor all your life. You'll be anything, if very smart." But my mother loved it. I remember she used to say, "My son the lawyer. My son the rabbi." You know, the steitl Jew. [Laughs]

Interviewer: So your parents were different that way. Your mother was the one who had more – bigger connections.

Respondent 1: My father was a communist atheist. My grandfather – I feel really bad I don't have a picture of him. Their religion in those days was communism. That was the religion of the Jews in Poland.

Interviewer: [0:38:30] So your father was a communist...

Respondent 1: Was a communist, at the time. He became a very good Catholic, but he was always an atheist. [Laughs]

Interviewer: But your mother was observant.

Respondent 1: No, she wasn't observant at all. I thought she was. She was what was called – I didn't know that. Until I read the book "Never Again" by Meir Kahane, he had a chapter called, "The Kosher Jew." He sort of dHélèneated certain types of Jews. [Laughs] One was called the Kosher Jew, and that was my mother. Her religion was kosher. [0:39:00] [Laughs] And [indiscernible 0:39:01], so she spent her life cooking, and keeping kosher. I still remember telling my older sister, who's almost seven years older than me and going out with her boyfriend, they married at nineteen, [indiscernible 0:39:15]. They're going to a Chinese restaurant, which was common then. A lot of Jewish people, a lot of kids and young people liked to go to a Chinese – and eat pig food. And my mother – I still remember my mother saying, [indiscernible 0:39:26] [0:39:30] [laughs].

Interviewer: Don't eat pork. I just want to say that for the report. Yeah.

Respondent 1: Yeah. I still – I don't eat pork. We keep kosher in this home.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: So I'm a kosher Jew, but I'm also an atheist.

Interviewer: So you're like your mother. You're like your mother and your father.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Intellectually. But I'm very, very Jewish to the core of my being, but I can't see some God up there. I just don't see it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: I have a background in evolution, and I took news literature, I've written papers [0:40:00] fifty years ago on the concept of God and Judaism. I've studied the Dead Sea Scrolls, I've studied Judaism quite thoroughly.

Interviewer: Oh, so you're knowledgeable.

Respondent 1: I'm very. I've read all the books in psychology and Judaism, and everything. There's lots of books. And one of my friends, one of the two doctors had wrote a book on atheism. [Laughs] One is very religious, and the other doc. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Are you aware of a variety of languages...

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: ...early on or – what was the...

Respondent 1: Yiddish was the first language I knew.

Interviewer: [0:40:30] Oh. You spoke Yiddish with your parents.

Respondent 1: No, I didn't speak. I spoke English to them, and they spoke Yiddish to me.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent 1: But I understand Yiddish better than French. My wife is a Parisian French Jew, and when my wife, H  l  ne, came to Canada, she was seventeen years old. I was twenty-two and I had five years of high school. I took French first year at University College, but only got a C in it. I dropped it after first year, and I forgot most of my – so H  l  ne didn't know English well at all. **[0:40:30]** She had taken German in Paris, and stuff. So she had never taken English, but she sort of picked up a bit. So when she came to Canada, we spoke three languages, but mainly Yiddish. Her Yiddish is quite good.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Respondent 1: So we were able to communicate mainly in Yiddish, and not English and French. Universal language among Jews at that time.

Interviewer: And when did you start having your family?

Respondent 1: I was married in 1963, but thank god to birth control I was [0:41:30] just so young. I wanted to start my law practice. Six years later we had our first daughter who was a lawyer [laughs] in 1969. Six years after we were married.

Interviewer: And what language did you speak to her?

Respondent 1: Oh English. But H  l  ne only spoke French to our children. She still speaks French. We listen. So our kids are fairly bilingual.

Interviewer: Oh, so she spoke – did they respond in French or English?

Respondent 1: No, they spoke in English, but my youngest son – I have two daughters and a son – my son is thirty now. When he graduated from Ryerson he got a job at Telus Mobility [0:42:00] marketing. Because he was able to speak French, he was able, you know, he's a troubleshooter, I guess, because consumer – I guess marketing. So he was able to speak French to these people. So my kids can speak French quite well.

- Interviewer:** That was so smart of H  l  ne to speak French to them, because of course they learned English on the street and...
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah. They pick it up. They're surrounded by it.
- Interviewer:** Fabulous.
- Respondent 1:** But she spoke French. And if you listen, you'll hear her speak in only French to my granddaughter.
- Interviewer:** Oh that's fabulous.
- Respondent 1:** And so they're quite fluent in French, which is helpful, [0:42:30] let's face it. Which they're lucky these kids – yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent 1:** My older daughter is a lawyer with the Department of Justice and Immigration, has a Masters of Law degree. She's divorced, married a lawyer in Winnipeg, divorced, has two children.
- Interviewer:** In Winnipeg? She still lives there?
- Respondent 1:** No. She lives in Toronto now. She moved two years ago. She'll be here soon. She has a new boyfriend in Montreal, and she has a grandson who just turned ten on Friday, yesterday, was the tenth birthday. Our granddaughter's thirteen.
- Interviewer:** That's so tough. That's so tough.
- Respondent 1:** Thirteen.
- Interviewer:** [0:43:00] Did she have a bat mitzvah? Or...
- Respondent 1:** No, she had it in Winnipeg last year. We wouldn't afford to get a hotel...
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent 1:** ...in Winnipeg.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: We used to go to Winnipeg to see our grandson.

Interviewer: When you were a child, were you aware of anybody working at home, what we call cottage industry?

Respondent 1: Not at all. It didn't – I don't think it existed. I don't remember anyone working at home at all. No. They were...

Interviewer: And do you remember from your cohort, were [0:43:30] there any mothers who were working outside the home?

Respondent 1: No. I don't remember any mothers working. No.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: They all were home.

Interviewer: Well for our generation, the mothers did stay home.

Respondent 1: I don't remember anyone ever. No, my mother had four kids and she was working taking care of the kids. The cooking.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right.

Respondent 1: Maintaining the house. She used to scrub the floors and did all the hard work. We had no cleaning woman. [Laughs]

Interviewer: You know what, I've [0:44:00] spoken to people on Major Street. I'm speaking to people in all of Harbord Village. But when I speak to people on Major Street, they seem to have a real love for Major Street.

Respondent 1: Yes. Read the article that came out on Remembrance Day in the Toronto Star. I should have brought it with me. It's about the war heroes, the Jewish people, soldiers who died from Major Street in the Second World War.

- Interviewer:** You know we're doing a name laning.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Lane naming. [Laughs]
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. **[0:44:30]** The two. One is Laki, my next-door neighbour.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** When I first moved here, Louie Laki – he's dead now.
- Interviewer:** And I think it was his daughter, Rose, who gave them their name.
- Respondent 1:** Rosa Rodrigues, yeah. And then the other one is of course from Harbord Bakery. Kosower.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** But I notice that one name they want is David French. Now David French went to high school with me. He's dead now. He was a writer. A playwright from Newfoundland, and he did very well in school, and he criticized my poem [laughs]. When **[0:45:00]** I was published at Harbord Review he said, "Don't use doth." I wrote a sonnet, you know, fourteen-line. The cynic doth sit on a seat on high and skeptically scorns the world's wave. Didn't like the word "doth." He said that is – use modern language. He's being critical. But he did better than me in the school, and he's brilliant. He was a playwright, and I notice that one of the names they want to name is David French. Last I saw David French we – the Terragon Theatre. One of his plays. **[0:45:30]** I went up to him and chatted.
- Interviewer:** So it seems to me there were a lot of very successful people in your class from Lansdowne and from Harbord.
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: Well we had – a couple of years ahead of me. Now Stephen Lewis was a couple of years ahead of me at Harbord. It's such a Jewish...

Interviewer: What about – I want to talk a little bit about the roads, the sidewalks, and the lanes. [0:46:00] You mentioned that you walked to school through the lanes.

Respondent 1: Yes, I did. They were used very much.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Respondent 1: Well there was a passageway to walk through, and when I was a kid with some other kids on Major Street, we used to go in the back in the spring, take lilac, cut the lilac, and try to sell them along the street. [Laughs] This is when we finished. Yeah. So we had lilacs and they had beautiful lilac along through the lanes, and they still do if you go through the lanes at the back, and we cut them and tried to – and also we would try and sell them to make money. [Laughs]

Interviewer: [0:46:30] I'm just turning it off for a minute. So you're saying that the lanes were used for walking through and for picking lilacs and selling.

Respondent 1: I remember many years ago, many, many years ago I remember Mr. Kreigman had a horse. I remember a horse and iceman cometh. Ice. I remember horses even, and we used the horses.

Interviewer: So the horses with wagons and they...

Respondent 1: Yeah. With the wagons. That's right.

Interviewer: ...were selling ice?

Respondent 1: Yeah. And there was ice, and [0:47:00] Mr. Kreigman, the old man, I don't know what he sold. You know, the old rag dealer, the Jewish – there were Jewish rag dealers. You know, them call them...

Interviewer: So rag dealers, they would just take old clothes and then sell them by the pound?

Respondent 1: I don't know how they sold them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: But I remember the iceman, even the milkman delivering milk with a horse and buggy way back in the 19 – mid '40s.

Interviewer: And did they go on the streets or the lanes? Or both?

Respondent 1: Well they went both. I think, like, Kreigman had a stable. Originally these lanes were used for horses and there were stables.

Interviewer: [0:47:30] Where were the stables?

Respondent 1: Where we have these big garages there were stables.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: Some of these places were originally stables, not for gardens like now.

Interviewer: So some of your neighbours had horses.

Respondent 1: Well way back then, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Any other animals that some of your neighbours had?

Respondent 1: I had a dog, a pet, as a kid.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: We had a cat called Poskinak, which is Polish for...

Interviewer: Oh, I know a Poskinak. [Laughs]

Respondent 1: My mother called the cat Poskinak. We had a cat...

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

- Respondent 1:** ...and she called the cat Poskinak, Polish for ugly one.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. [Laughter] [0:48:00] I grew up with that word in my life.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. Did you? Poskinak?
- Interviewer:** Oh absolutely.
- Respondent 1:** [Laughs] So we had a cat, and I had a dog. We had pets, yes.
- Interviewer:** And what about heating the homes?
- Respondent 1:** I remember that. Originally we had coal furnace. Then eventually got oil.
- Interviewer:** So that came through the lane also?
- Respondent 1:** Oh I don't know when the coal came. I have no memory...
- Interviewer:** But then they had to send it down the chute.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah, that's right. That's right. We had a semi-detached home. It went through the chute from either side, I think. But I don't have a good memory of that. We [0:48:30] had an oil furnace. I remember my father feeding the fire with coal.
- Interviewer:** Any comments about the front, the front porches, the sidewalks?
- Respondent 1:** We had a nice porch, and I'm fussy about porches. If you look at this house, I have a porch with a rocking chair on it, and that's where my firewood is. I'm running out of it. Yeah, a porch is very important on Major Street. A lot of people, most people had porches. We sat on them during [0:49:00] the summer in warm weather.
- Interviewer:** So people congregated in the front of their homes.
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah. Very much so. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So it was a social place.

Respondent 1: Very much so. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: I love my porch, my old one.

Interviewer: And is it used as much now?

Respondent 1: I don't think so. I'm probably the only one. I say – I bought a rocking chair. When we first moved here, we had a nice porch on Walmer Road, and we bought two beautiful rocking – Hélène and I sort of put stain – stained it, wood stain on it. It was ordinary wood and we put [0:49:30] a certain dark stain on it, and we moved to – from Walmer Road to Major Street, we had two beautiful rocking chairs. Then an old woman who has since died on Major Street down the street said, "You shouldn't leave those rocking chairs. Someone's going to steal them."

Interviewer: I was wondering about that.

Respondent 1: And so they were stolen.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: I was furious. So I bought...

Interviewer: That's what I thought.

Respondent 1: ...no. I have a chain on my rocking chair, but I gave up on that. I bought a chain and we had it for a number of years, and the one we have right now...

Interviewer: Nobody stole it.

Respondent 1: No. So I'd taken the chain off. [0:50:00] [Laughs] But I had a chain, literally with a lock.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Well if you had two of them stolen, no wonder.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about the back gardens? How were they used? How did your...

Respondent 1: Well my mother was an amateur – she liked to plant vegetables. I can't remember so much on Major, but I know when we moved to Hillmount she had a very large lot, and she liked to plant. But at the back of our home, I don't remember. We had a garage there. My father did anything over there. I remember when we had the garage. [0:50:30] But I don't remember much about the backyard at all, frankly. It just was small.

Interviewer: So could I assume then that you didn't use it much?

Respondent 1: No, we didn't use the backyard.

Interviewer: Yeah. So...

Respondent 1: I have no memory at all.

Interviewer: Okay. So it sounds as if you didn't use the back very much.

Respondent 1: No.

Interviewer: But you congregated...

Respondent 1: Front.

Interviewer: ...in the front.

Respondent 1: Yeah. First of all, the lane only ended – didn't end at our home. I don't think we had a lane right at our home to get into the house next to it. We didn't have...

Interviewer: So it wasn't a through-lane.

Respondent 1: It was not a through-lane.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: The one on the side we lived [0:51:00] on, 124, the other side...

Interviewer: And what about...

Respondent 1: We lived on the other side.

Interviewer: This is so wonderful since you lived here as a child and now you're back. How would you talk about safety and security then and now?

Respondent 1: I never felt insecure when I lived at 24 Major Street. Never entered my mind.

Interviewer: Did your family lock the doors?

Respondent 1: Don't remember. We had a lock, but I never felt anything insecure at all.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: And now I don't feel very much insecure. [0:51:30] Our neighbours are very good people. We know most of our neighbours because of – well for instance, next Wednesday we're going to Gus Sinclair's annual Bobby Burns day.

Interviewer: Oh right.

Respondent 1: So we're always invited. We're invited. Yeah.

Interviewer: And then I know he goes to Free Times Café and they perform there.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Well I've been there many times.

Interviewer: Yeah. I might go this...

Respondent 1: I know Judy Perly quite well.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, Judy.

- Respondent 1:** As a lawyer.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent 1:** Not quite her lawyer, but she bought the – I knew her when she lived above the building [0:52:00] from my client. I was a lawyer on that sale. And I know Judy from way, way back.
- Interviewer:** Well they own Perly's Maps.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. Her father.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, right.
- Respondent 1:** I know. In fact we ate there recently. We eat there.
- Interviewer:** I like it.
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah. We've been there on Sunday brunch.
- Interviewer:** So you're saying that as a child you felt safe, and it's your impression...
- Respondent 1:** I feel very safe.
- Interviewer:** ...that it still is a safe neighbourhood now.
- Respondent 1:** Terrific neighbourhood.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** People are very good people. I like everyone on the street.
[Laughs]
- Interviewer:** Well and you mentioned [0:52:30] Mort Greenberg, you talked about Gus. So it sounds like a friendly place and a place...
- Respondent 1:** Very friendly. It's sort of friendly. You see it on Halloween. You sort of don't know – you're sort of travelling and seeing them doling out the goodies to the kids with their parent.

Interviewer: So people are friendly with the kids.

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. Yeah. They're very good people. I don't dislike anyone. In fact, just the opposite. There's some fairly well-known people on the street. One is Peter Murphy of CTV, and his wife, [0:53:00] Wynona, they live about two, three doors away. They're the ones who raised the third floor. They got a third floor. I've never been in their home. They're nice people. And the people across is a contractor. Bryn, who's been [indiscernible 0:53:10], and a member of our synagogue who's gay. I think his name's Savin. S-A-V-I-N. I'm not sure his name. Works [indiscernible 0:53:20] he – my synagogue.

Interviewer: Do you have air conditioning in your home?

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: [0:53:30] And when did that come in?

Respondent 1: Before we bought. I said, this home was fairly modernized by Tony Ianno. It was fairly – we have also, what do you call it, vacuum system.

Interviewer: Oh, central vacuum.

Respondent 1: Yeah. We have that, we have air conditioning.

Interviewer: What about garbage collection? Do you remember what it was like when you were here as a child? No?

Respondent 1: No, I don't remember. I don't remember any problems with it. I just have no memory of it.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent 1: I guess so and so did garbage.

Interviewer: Did anybody [0:54:00] then or now have maids living in the home?

Respondent 1: Sorry.

Interviewer: Maids or cleaning ladies?

Respondent 1: No, no. My mother – no. I have no memory of any maids on Major Street or any cleaning woman. My mother's an extraordinary hard worker, yeah, and she cleaned. She's very clean.

Interviewer: What about – this might sound coming out of left...

Respondent 1: That's fine.

Interviewer: ...dating? Dating then and dating now. Dating in this neighbourhood?

Respondent 1: Okay. Let me tell you a story [0:54:30] about me dating, okay? [Laughs] When I was in fourth year high school, I worked at the Garden Theatre at College, a little bit east of – on the north side of College Street, east of Major Street, called the Garden Theatre. Maybe you remember it. Anyhow, I worked there as an usher, and part-time, night-time while I was still going to – during the school term I worked. I guess I was smart enough to do both. Anyhow, there was a confectionary young woman, won't mention her name, [0:55:00] Jewish from Israel. She wasn't that good looking. She was smart. And so on the prom, when we finished, I think grade thirteen prom, I took her out to the prom at Harbord Collegiate. Dated her, and then went to a restaurant afterwards and we started talking. And I remember she started talking about – I don't know how we got on the subject of lobster and shrimp, and would you believe I didn't know what she was talking about? [Laughter] Because I always lived [0:55:30] such a sheltered life...

Interviewer: Oh my gosh.

Respondent 1: ...as a child. The only restaurants were the – I think they're called – were the deli restaurants on College Street. I can't remember. One – Caplansky, remember? I already told him about...

Interviewer: There's some on Spadina too, yeah.

Respondent 1: Yeah. And Becker's, and Switzer's, and Shopsy's, I think it was...

Interviewer: Shopsy's. Yeah.

Respondent 1: ...Shopsy's closer.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: Well some of the **[indiscernible 0:55:46]** something on the north side. Ulster or something. So I ate at those. I loved going by myself, eating without my mother around. [Laughs] Like pastrami, and that **[0:56:00]** sort of food. But when this – on going back to the dating, I took her on a date. I actually had no interest in her. [Laughs] I just dated her because I didn't have anyone else to date, and so she talked about – that's how I learned what shrimp was. I had no idea.

Interviewer: Oh my...

Respondent 1: I hadn't the slight idea what she's talking about because I always kept, you know, kosher, and I led a very restricted Jewish life. Never went far out of this neighbourhood, and so I just didn't know. **[0:56:30]** But it brings back – the whole kosherness is very important in my life in that I was astounded my father had kidney stone problems. So I can't remember whether it was before or after my bar mitzvah. I visited my father in the afternoon at the hospital, at Toronto General Hospital after his kidney op. I went by myself, walked from Major Street, and there I see my father eating bacon. I almost died. [Laughs] My father was so embarrassed.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: And here, **[0:57:00]** there's the idol of my – destroyed eating bacon. [Laughs]

Interviewer: That's huge.

Respondent 1: You know, that's so maniacal about pig food that on an airplane, when I smell bacon, I get nauseous. I'm so crazy about it.

Interviewer: So of a kosher home, are you kosher outside?

Respondent 1: No. But I don't...

Interviewer: Kosher diet.

Respondent 1: No. Well no. Would you believe that I really would not eat any meat unless it's kosher until I was in my **[0:57:30]** mid-thirties? I kept – I ate fish, and mushroom omelettes. [Laughs]

Interviewer: You can see how...

Respondent 1: It was so deep embedded...

Interviewer: ...we internalize those things.

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. Very embedded. Well when I first married Hélène, she came from a background that didn't keep kosher, and I said to Hélène when we first got married in 1963 and we rented an apartment on 88 Bernard, "I have to have separate plates. I have to keep kosher." Bought our meat at Greenspan's on Brunswick and **[0:58:00]** College, kosher food. All kosher. I kept kosher. I still come – at home I have separate plates.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Even now.

Interviewer: So tell me, you mentioned Green's or whatever. Would you talk to me about the stores? I know that there were stores on Harbord and...

Respondent 1: I don't remember so much about Harbord. More College. I was closer to College.

Interviewer: Okay. So tell me...

Respondent 1: I remember Harbord Bakery real well.

Interviewer: Yeah. So tell me about the stores on College...

Respondent 1: Okay.

Interviewer: ...as they were in your childhood.

Respondent 1: Okay. The pharmacists at the [0:58:30] corner of College and Major Street on the southeast corner, if I remember, was Rothbart's pharmacist. They sold all sorts of things. There was a convenience store owned by – I can't remember his name – on the north side, right – a few doors on the north side just a little bit west of Major Street. On the corner of Major, on the northwest corner of [0:59:00] Major and College was a gasoline station. I remember as a child – I also grow up with a sort of famous person. He's a very close friend of mine, Larry Greenstein. He changed his name to Larry Green. Larry Green was on CityTV, had his own jazz show...

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: ...and then he – for a number of years he was on the jazz station, 91.1. And I hadn't – but he was a very close friend of mine [0:59:30] when we grew up on Major Street, and then what happened, he moved away like all of us used to do, and I lost track of him. Then one day my wife and I, we liked going out a lot at the time, and I think – I forget. We went to the El Mocambo at College and Spadina. And we went, there was this famous singer, but it was sold out. We went downstairs and there was the Downchild Blues Band. There I see Larry [1:00:00] Greenstein. I recognized him from television. He had a beard at the time, so I went up to him, I introduced myself, and we had dinner at each other's home.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: And he gave us a very good client, so I got to know Larry Greenstein from Major Street, but he's Larry Green. He became somewhat famous. He always loved music as a child. Going back to the stores, there were – I guess there was the variety store owned by a Jewish man. There was where – where I took my haircuts...

Interviewer: On College.

Respondent 1: On College. On north side of College, I cut [1:00:30] my hair to Gerstein's, and on College at Robert was a hardware store called Gerstein's Hardware Store. Now whether they're brothers or not, my barber's Gerstein – barber is Gerstein. That's Judy Perly's....

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: One of the two, she bought out the next building, and the other one next to it was my barber. The hardware store, barber store, there were some kosher restaurants I said on the north. Becker's was on the south side.

Interviewer: [1:01:00] So it was very Jewish.

Respondent 1: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: The stores were owned by Jewish people.

Respondent 1: All Jewish. Even the gasoline stations were run by...

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: I forget. Fireman was his name. And so I remember it was so Jewish. I mean even when I went to University College, it was a lot of Jewish people. Even U of T law school, first year, when I said – we started about a hundred kids, and one-third failed or dropped out. And what were left, one-third of [1:01:30] our class – out of the class that graduated, they were Jewish. It was such a Jewish influence. They just didn't – the only one who failed at U of T law that was Jewish was a guy named Perry Cohen. He became a rabbi from Montreal. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: No, these kids were very bright. A lot of them came here wealthy from Forest Hill.

Interviewer: Yeah.

- Respondent 1:** They came from wealthy backgrounds. Most of them, except one maybe. North Toronto. The smartest one was a guy named Martin Teplitsky. [1:02:00] He's a labour lawyer, and he's terrific. I remember at U of T law he did – first-year law had Dean Wright. Tort the Dean. A very rough guy. And Martin Teplitsky never wore a tie. He had to wear a jacket and a tie.
- Interviewer:** That was demanded for students?
- Respondent 1:** Yeah, we had to. And in those days you were dressed well as a student.
- Interviewer:** So they wanted you to dress like a lawyer, even as you were a law student.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. And so Martin never wore – he sat behind me, and so Dean Wright at the beginning of the class, first people – oh, [1:02:30] maybe a month went through, he said, "You don't come to my class," he points out to Marty. "Don't come to my class if you don't wear a tie and a jacket." [Laughs] I don't think he ever showed up again, but he won the gold medal in torts. [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** Oh yeah.
- Respondent 1:** No, these kids are really smart. A number of them came from Harbord Collegiate. My ex-partner Allan Posner, Husky Goldkind, and Herby Abramowitz. We had a number from Harbord Collegiate entered U of T law.
- Interviewer:** Well [1:03:00] and Alan Borovoy, but he was a...
- Respondent 1:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Oh yeah, but nine years older, in fact. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Want to talk about politics? First of all, I hate the left-wing. [Laughs] I was a liberal. I've been Liberal all my life. I participate in the Liberal parliament. I was a Liberal Member of Parliament. Liberal – in Ottawa. I'm very active in the University of Toronto in politics. I was one of the beginners of the combined university campaign for

nuclear disarmament, otherwise the Liberal type, [1:03:30] and I hated the left-wing shitheads. [Laughter] Sanctimonious left-wing shit-heads who came from wealthy Jewish families and everyone would drive me home from – I'm from Forest Hill. [Laughs] They had this guilt complex. But I believe in the middle road. In medias res, the middle way.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: I don't like left-wing, I don't like right-wing, I like the moderation and media. But going back to your question about stores along there, they were all Jewish as far as I know. I don't know any non-Jewish stores, frankly. They were all Jewish. [1:04:00] I have no memory of non-Jewish stores. [Laughs]

Interviewer: You know, and that really talks about the changes that have occurred because the Jewish stores are gone.

Respondent 1: Except for Judy Perly's. And Caplansky.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent 1: He's just opened...

Interviewer: But he's just opened up a few years ago.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you think of anything about the stores either on Harbord or Bloor? Or were you really so close to College that that's what your life was?

Respondent 1: I spent most of my time – I never went far from my home. I went to Bloor at the Uptown Theatre. The theatres I went, [1:04:30] the movie theatres. South on College there were three movie theatres. The Playhouse, the Garden Theatre, and the Bellevue Theatre.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: All on the north side on College. I used to go to movies a lot, and when I was a kid my dad or someone gave me ten cents, and I'd go in the afternoon with my sister.

Interviewer: So that was a popular activity...

Respondent 1: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: ...going to the movie theatres.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Then when television came in, we had no television on Major Street for – I don't know if we had a phone setup on Major Street. [1:05:00] But my great-uncle, great-aunt Did on Augusta, 100 Augusta Avenue just down the street, so I used to go hand-in-hand with my sister, younger sister, who is sixteen months younger than me, watch "Hop-Along Cassidy" in the afternoon on their television set. I don't know if we ever had a television set on Major Street. I know later on we did, but I don't have any memory of – maybe we did. We were – as I said, we were poor on Major Street.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Can you talk [1:05:30] a little bit about the effect of the university on our neighbourhood? And Kensington Market on our neighbourhood.

Respondent 1: Okay. Talking about the University of Toronto, I mean I have no memory of when I was a child growing up on Major of the university. But now living here, it's very influencing – a tremendous influence. Okay. It was tremendous. The University of Toronto – a lot of these houses they're not well maintained on Major Street are rented homes [1:06:00] to students. You'll often notice that when it snows, no one's shovHélèneg the snow or the gardens aren't maintained.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the houses that are neglected are...

Respondent 1: So yeah, they're not well maintained.

Interviewer: Yeah.

- Respondent 1:** And a lot of them are rentals. And so when I was a kid, I don't remember the influence of U of T, but as I've lived my life fifteen years, almost fifteen years on 157 Major, the University of Toronto's very influential. Of course I'm a graduate, and they built the [1:06:30] residences, so you see a lot of students here. They take a lot of parking spaces too, by the way.
- Interviewer:** Right. Those who don't live here also take the parking spaces.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. They don't – well you see during the Christmas holiday a lot of space. They have money, I guess some, and they have their cars.
- Interviewer:** Okay. But that's an intrusion for those of you who live here.
- Respondent 1:** Yes. You're right.
- Interviewer:** Because they use your spaces.
- Respondent 1:** Yes, they do.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. What about Kensington Market? Its influence.
- Respondent 1:** I love Kensington Market. We [1:07:00] buy our coffee beans there. In fact, I'll go there. In fact, I'll go there probably tomorrow because I've got to buy more coffee. We grind our own coffee, but in the office we have ground there, and I take it to the office. You see it and you buy a coffee bean. And so we shop there. It's very nice. It's somewhat chaotic. What I don't like about it is too many crazy people around, druggies and potheads and who knows what.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** And I don't like that.
- Interviewer:** And they are there. [1:07:30] They are there.
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah. We know it. And sometimes on a nice day we, like, have a day outside the Portuguese restaurant, the corner of August and Denison overlooking the park outside, and it's nice. There's another

new restaurant that started – the owners [indiscernible 01:07:40], as they opened a new restaurant. They took over all that.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. I think we're...

Respondent 1: What I don't like about Harbord Street though [1:08:00] now are – we go to a lot of restaurants.

Interviewer: On Harbord?

Respondent 1: Yeah. The restaurants on Harbord.

Interviewer: Oh good.

Respondent 1: Messis.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: The one – we go to that a lot. Momo's across the road. I'm the lawyer for Momo, by the way.

Interviewer: Oh are you? They're very nice.

Respondent 1: Yeah, he's nice, and very good. And the sushi restaurant we go to on Major.

Interviewer: Akai. Akai, yeah.

Respondent 1: Akai. And we go there, and we'll walk. And it's very expensive, however.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: We like the Boulevard Café. Go there.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: [1:08:30] And the other one we go to is on Brunswick, Dessert Trends.

Interviewer: Yeah. They're doing major renovations. So you really enjoy the restaurants around here.

Respondent 1: Yeah. We spend a lot of money on restaurants.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs]

Respondent 1: We always drink wine.

Interviewer: Do you have any memories of fighting the Spadina Expressway?

Respondent 1: Oh do I ever. [Laughs] This has to do with Walmer, when I lived on Walmer. We lived on Walmer road for eighteen years, and a lot of people [1:09:00] on Walmer were university professors, before Walmer became very expensive. The homes are beautiful and big. And yes, there was a tremendous fight about the Spadina Expressway. The Annex people, and I guess here too, were against it. I was in favour of it. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Oh were you?

Respondent 1: Yes, I wanted it. I think it was a horrible mistake not building it. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Oh. So you were obviously the minority at that time.

Respondent 1: Yes. I'm very much in the minority, and I got mad at them [1:09:30] because I think we need it, and we still need it. It's a mess the whole...

Interviewer: So that was a hard time for you.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Well yes. I opposed – they were all sanctimonious left-wing, S-H-I-T-heads. [Laughter] I happen to be indirectly related at that time to the head of the City of Toronto – my brother-in-law Roy Agar married to my sister, Dr. A. She's a top. And his uncle, I forget

his name, Cass. His name was Cass. **[1:10:00]** C-A-S-S. He was the head of the transporting, and I think on **[indiscernible 01:10:01]**. He talked about it. He was an engineer – about how it was important. I was impressed, and I think it's a stupid bottleneck going that begins at Eglinton.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Sort of falls through. [Laughs]

Interviewer: What about any thoughts about Rochdale? Do you remember?

Respondent 1: Yeah, very well. Again I hated it because it was a violation of law. I like law and order. It went out of control. Students running **[1:10:30]** around, potheads, people committing – I hate it. I'm a law and order man. I like order. I hated the left-wing, the sixties left-wing, you know. The whole scene, I hated it. I don't believe in tearing up schools like when we were – I forget the name of the school in Montreal. I forget the name, but smashing whatever. Just that disruly lack of order and **[1:11:00]** respect. I hated it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: I was not part of that scene. I disliked it.

Interviewer: Some people are romantic about it. Last thing I want to ask is – I have two more questions. Do you remember the end of World War II?

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you...

Respondent 1: One of my first memories, I guess – I don't know. I never saw how I have a memory on Major Street where I lived around – it was a rainy day, and magazines or papers coming from airplane down **[1:11:30]** onto the street. And I don't know what it was about or what. I'm picking up some magazine or something.

Interviewer: And that was?

Respondent 1: Oh yeah, I remember, as I said, immediately after the war sending packages to Paris, helping them. Maybe that was right after. Well actually Paris was liberated during the war. My wife was born January the 2nd, 1945. She's born in Paris. The war in Europe didn't end until [1:12:00] May of 1945.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, we'll end. What I want to ask you is when you agreed to speak to me, did you have any thoughts about what we might talk about that we have not touched on in terms of changes that have happened in this neighbourhood?

Respondent 1: Changes? I didn't think about changes. Changes. Well the main change is the fact that it's not Jewish – in my view [1:12:30] is the tremendous change in the fact of non-Jews being here, although a lot more Jewish professionals are coming in, which I like. I'm very, very Jewish, and we're members in the Narayever's synagogue.

Interviewer: Oh are you? Yeah?

Respondent 1: We've been their members for years. When we lived on Hillhurst, we lived there for seven years, we were members of the Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue, then we moved to Walmer Road and then we used to go to events at the Narayever. [1:13:00] And we became members years ago. Our son was bar mitzvahed there, our daughter was [indiscernible 01:13:05] there.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Respondent 1: So we've been members for maybe almost twenty years now. We're old-time now.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: And so yeah, I'll be at the synagogue tomorrow at nine o'clock. I volunteer, so once every five Sundays I go there.

Interviewer: You might occasionally see my son and daughter-in-law, and my grandson.

- Respondent 1:** Who's that?
- Interviewer:** Marsha Beck, Misha Levine, and Dov, my little red-headed grandson with glasses. **[1:13:30]** He's twelve.
- Respondent 2:** Oh wait a second. Your son is a lawyer, doctor?
- Interviewer:** He was a lawyer. He became a teacher.
- Respondent 2:** Right. He went to school with Nadine, my daughter. They went to Bialik.
- Interviewer:** Oh yes. Okay.
- Respondent 1:** Oh. Okay, they went to Bialik.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent 2:** And he's – the little boy's very sweet.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 2:** He loves the **[indiscernible 01:13:44]**.
- Interviewer:** Oh my goodness.
- Respondent 1:** How old's the boy?
- Interviewer:** He will be twelve next month.
- Respondent 1:** Oh I...
- Respondent 2:** He's in the **[indiscernible 01:13:58]** **[1:14:00]** because I've seen him. I was there.
- Respondent 1:** You know who they are.
- Respondent 2:** I know you. And he said...
- Interviewer:** Ah, that's sweet.

Respondent 2: You're from the synagogue.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent 2: They're there quite a bit.

Interviewer: I'm going to turn this off. Before I turn it off, I just want to say this was wonderful.

Respondent 1: Mm-hm. My sister, Frances, knows more.

Interviewer: Well I'm going to phone her, and I'll visit her, but this was interesting and very rich in information, so a huge thank you to you.

Respondent 1: I'll show you to the part of our home around the back.

Interviewer: Thank you. I'm coming.

[01:14:19]

[End of recording]