040 Wilson Quan

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: Okay. So today is the eighteenth, the day after St. Patrick's Day. Eighteenth of March. I'm sitting in my kitchen with Wilson Quan, who lived on Brunswick from 1957 to '73, and then again from 1976 to right now where he's still living on 195 Brunswick

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: So I want to say thank you very much for coming to be interviewed, **[0:00:30]** okay? As I told you before I turned on the recording machine that we are looking – we want to be with people who have been here for many years, at least 35 years, and we want your perceptions of the changes that have occurred.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: Can you tell me, to start with, what moved your family here to this part of the city? How old were you when you moved here?

Respondent: Well it was – I guess I was about **[0:01:00]** seven years old, and at seven in those days that's when you went to grade one. So I went to that Lord Lansdowne school, and the first year I was at Lord Lansdowne it was the old school. They hadn't torn it down yet, and I think very shortly after, either grade two or three, they made that round school that exists now that's known as Lord Lansdowne. **[0:01:30]** And I remember as a kid at school it was thought to be a revolutionary type cutting-edge school because it was round, and we had all of these people from all over the world and come and see this round school. Didn't seem to catch on. I don't think there are too many round schools.

Interviewer: You're right. I haven't seen any. Yeah.

Respondent: I don't think there are too many round schools. It was a little different. But it was – **[0:02:00]** in reflection, I realized how little the area was ethnic. It was basically – well at that time on the street, there was a lot of – on Brunswick Street anyways, on the particular

block south between Harbord and College, there was like, I'd say every – as a guess, every fifth house was a little **[0:02:30]** Jewish synagogue, very religious, very – you know, like really the whole – the hair, and the clothing, and everything, it was very, very religious.

Interviewer: So it was the Orthodox Jews.

Respondent: Very Orthodox. Yes. And they were – a lot of them were just – I never understood because obviously it's not my religion, but a lot of them were just houses, ordinary houses. And **[0:03:00]** of course we still have the existing synagogue on Brunswick Street just north of Harbord, which is just south of my house. But it was – the early years, when I went to school, Lansdowne School from grade one to six was basically all wasp, white, Anglo-Saxon. And there were some Jewish kids. I went to school with some Jewish kids. And **[0:03:30]** in grade seven and eight we had a few Chinese kids because most of the Chinese kids went to Orde Street School, which is near Chinatown, but it was just the junior school, so they went to grade seven and eight in Lansdowne. But previous to that, we were basically the only Chinese family in our area. When I was going from grade one to six, my brother and sister – we were the only Chinese kids in the lower grades.

Interviewer: **[0:04:00]** Can you talk about what that was like for your whole family and for you and your siblings in school?

Respondent: Well it was very – I don't think they knew what to do with us because I remember that when I first went to school, it was – I don't know how you would label it, but there was an orientation to try to Canadianize all ethnic groups, whether it was **[0:04:30]** Chinese or whatever ethnicity it was. As an example of that, my Chinese name is Wai Sun, and when I went to school, they didn't want to call me by my Chinese name and they gave me the name Wilson. I was puzzled because every time I gave my name as Wilson they go, "Is that your last name or first name?" I always thought my father couldn't figure out an English name and looked up in the telephone book and picked Wilson. But my teacher **[0:05:00]** actually, they did that to all of us kids in my family, so Wai Sun – the closest thing they can think of was Wilson. My brother's name was Wai Lun, and

that's sort of close to William, so he became William. My sister, they didn't know what to do with her because her Chinese name was Han, so they made her a Mary.

Interviewer: Oh. So what was…

Respondent: They just changed the – and I don't know. They did that with **[0:05:30]** Chinese kids, but I didn't know how many Chinese kids they did that to because I think Orde Street School was different because it was predominately Chinese kids. But in Lansdowne they just – I can't remember in grade school ever having, say for instance, an Indian kid with an unusual name. There were no Indian – like Indian Indians from India – in Lansdowne school at that time. I don't think they came until **[0:06:00]** much later. And then the other thing about Lansdowne school is that it wasn't the easiest school to be at when you're a kid because they had the Scott Mission around the corner, and so there were a lot of homeless people, war veterans, and stuff like that. And I remember when I was young, I must have been about eight years old and these **[0:06:30]** people that were – I guess they were homeless and went to Scott Mission, they were war veterans. They were very upset that there were Chinese. They interpreted me as Japanese, so they got very racist and started yelling and screaming, and I was – as a kid, they don't understand all of this, so it was a loss of innocence at a very early age. And the experience of being Chinese in the neighbourhood was also **[0:07:00]** somewhat difficult because most – at that time, nearly all the Chinese people lived in Chinatown. And then what happened, as you know historically, when they made City Hall, they expropriated Chinatown because they didn't want tourists seeing the kind of questionable cleanliness of Chinatown. So the city actually expropriated and bought all the **[0:07:30]** buildings. A couple well-known institutions like Sai Woo and Kwong Chow are very well-known restaurants. They stayed during the course of that. But most of the businesses got bought out and forced out, and that's how Chinatown came to Spadina and Dundas. And it was funny because all through this, through no calculated way, **[0:08:00]** the Chinese people were always thrown in with the Jewish people. So when we moved to Spadina and Dundas, nearly all that area was owned by Jewish people because that was sort of like the garment district, and they still own a lot of

the stores and buildings around Spadina, like a lot of Chinese people own things there too. But as a kid growing up, it didn't feel **[0:08:30]** ethnic. And then…

Interviewer: Didn't feel ethnic. You mean when you moved to Brunswick?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Now I'm not sure what you mean. For you as a child, the kids play on the streets and they go to school. Were you playing with the other kids in an equal, friendly way? Did you feel that you were different, excluded, included? What was that like for you?

Respondent: There was definitely a lot of racism, but the early part wasn't so much **[0:09:00]** because the Jewish people that lived on Brunswick Street, I didn't really have any negative experiences with them. For me, the whole experience of Jewish people was more like – the Kensington Market was known as a Jewish market. So my mother – I think Chinese and Jewish people have a lot of similarities. You know, I mean as **[0:09:30]** I grow older I even see more. There's a lot of similarities. They push their kids to get well educated, they expect a lot from their kids, and you know, so it was funny because when we went down to what we called the Jewish market at that time, my experience with Jewish people is that they were hustlers, a little, and they were very colourful as merchants. So they would know how to speak a bit of Chinese. **[0:10:00]** And it was very colourful because it was the old days. Everything was bargaining. So these Chinese people loved to bargain, and the Jewish people would bargain, and the Jewish people would know the Chinese figures, and the Chinese would be speaking a little Chinese, and you know, five dollars in Chinese, and they'd go, "No." Then the Chinese would be – and it was a real colourful kind of exchange of cultures, and they understood each other, and we lived in harmony really, really well. And all the **[0:10:30]** Jewish people I knew on the street, they were more colourful. For instance, we had this guy – we called him Joe the Junkman. And I guess he collected junk. His garage was full of stuff, and he's always collecting things, and making money and salvaging and stuff like that. So to us as kids, that was fascinating. We would look in his garage and see all this stuff, and we're always fascinated. We were a bit of a pain for him

because he was always, **[0:11:00]** "Get lost, kid," you know? [Laughter] But the early days was really dominated by the Jewish influence in the area because Kensington Market – we did a lot of the shopping down there. They were obviously one of the best places to buy appliances or food, and the market in those days – like to me, the market now **[0:11:30]** is not as interesting, not as varied. When it was the Jewish market, I think the fruit and the food was a little better, more variety, more interesting. In the neighbourhood that I grew up in on Brunswick Street, we had on the corner where Dessert Trends is, that used to be the Budapest Bakery. **[0:12:00]** And the Budapest Bakery was actually busier in those days than the Harbord Bakery. And of course the Harbord Bakery is the Jewish institution. The bakery of bakeries, you know? The only place that still makes prune buns, which I love. And so we had the Budapest Bakery on there, and right across the street was Greenspan's, and that was a **[0:12:30]** Jewish Kosher butcher shop. It was where the pottery store is.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Wonderful.

Respondent: That used to be a butcher shop for Jewish people. And right on the corner of Harbord and Brunswick was a variety store that changed hands many, many times. My earliest recollection of it is an Italian variety store that sold really smelly Limburger cheese and it was just way too weird.

Interviewer: Is that where the cleaner's is? Joe's Cleaner's?

Respondent: Yes. Yes. **[0:13:00]** It was Armando's Grocery Store a long time ago. And across the street, which is the driving school, there's also a little grocery store. And where Flip, Toss, and Shake is now was two stores at the time. It was Famous Ring Audio, and next door to that was Kromer TV and Radio.

Interviewer: Oh. Those are now **[0:13:30]** bigger places.

Respondent: Big, big places now. They did very well. They moved on, I think, in the '60s. They became…

Interviewer: So Kromer's on Bathurst.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Across from the Toronto Western.

Respondent: And they used to fix the old tube TVs, and they had a very thriving business because in the old days, things weren't as disposable. So you had to fix your tube radio, and they had – I remember looking at the store, always fascinated with the electronics, and they had all these tubes everywhere for TVs and picture tubes, and they **[0:14:00]** fixed TVs, and radios, and things like that.

Interviewer: So there was a tremendous amount of industry right on the corner of Brunswick and Harbord.

Respondent: It was very, very busy.

Interviewer: Whoa. Every corner of Harbord.

Respondent: Yes. It was a very, very busy place. And then just north of the butcher shop is an odd-looking house on Brunswick Street. It sticks out now, **[0:14:30]** and…

Interviewer: It has big windows.

Respondent: It has a big window, but it's kind of square-ish out front. That used to be a Jewish pharmacist there, drugstore. And I remember going there and buying – in those days we used to buy dye and dye our pants, and buying stuff like that. Little packets of dye, and different odd things from the old days. **[0:15:00]** And then north of that…

Interviewer: On Brunswick still.

Respondent: …on Brunswick still, there was another building about three buildings north of that one because the – no. The one with the big windows that you're thinking about, with the garage door type windows, that was a chicken shop.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: A kosher chicken shop. And that's why it's designed like that. At the back, there's all this huge garage to receive goods and stuff like that. It was a very well-known chicken shop, and very busy for a **[0:15:30]** long time. And then when you go north on the corner of…

Interviewer: Sussex?

Respondent: …Sussex and Brunswick was a cobbler, a shoe store. That blue house was a shoe store forever. And then there was a variety store across the street on the northwest side. This was the…

Interviewer: That's that big new house that they put up about ten years ago.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So yeah, it was a…

Interviewer: So a tremendous – **[0:16:00]** there were a lot of stores.

Respondent: There were a lot. Me, everybody shopped at corner stores, and the corner stores had everything in them, not like now. The corner store where the crosswalk is over on Robert and Harbord was Fuda's, and they used to sell a lot in the area. So let's see. I must have been twenty-two, twenty-three, thirty-two, thirty-four. I started being a contractor when I was **[0:16:30]** around thirty-five, and I was doing this house on Brunswick Street. One of my first projects. And I can't remember what number Brunswick. I think it was something like 70 or 68. It was closer to College, like halfway between College and Ulster. And this family came knocking on the door and they had this ninety-year-old Jewish woman. She wanted to see her house that she grew up in. It was so cute. She was this shrivelled up **[0:17:00]** little ninety-year-old lady and she wandered around the house, and she had all these recollections because there were a lot of Jewish people that originally lived in the area – and it was really cute. But yeah, so then it was very sudden. My memory isn't that clear because I was very young. I didn't really pay attention to the year, but there was a – I think the Jewish people **[0:17:30]** kept their shops in Kensington Market. I don't know when that transition

happened, but I know in the neighbourhood on Brunswick Street, in about somewhere between ’58 and ’60 in that time period, all the Jewish people just picked up and moved. It’s kind of interesting because I know that some of them never sold their houses.

Interviewer: So you’re saying that they rented them to other people.

Respondent: Yeah. Some people – there were a few. There was an **[0:18:00]** old Jewish lady. There’s a house on Brunswick Street just north of Dessert Trends in this cute little cottage-type looking house with a driveway. That’s the Jewish family that still owns that house, and the little old Jewish lady – I don’t know how old. She must have been ninety-ish or whatever. She lived there right until she pretty well passed away, and I think that was about fifteen years ago. She was the last remaining Jewish person that stayed **[0:18:30]** forever in the neighbourhood. But nearly all the Jewish people, they moved out of the area and they moved up wherever Bathurst and Lawrence and all that. And then we had a huge influx of Italian kids, and so I think that those were my formative years. I remember nearly all my friends being Italian – the old **[0:19:00]** Pasquale, and the Vito – the old names you never hear anymore.

Interviewer: And the Portuguese, did they come too? Or were they…

Respondent: No. The Portuguese really came a lot later. The first wave of immigrants in our area were Italians, and…

Interviewer: And when was that?

Respondent: That was in the – sort of like mid-‘50s to ’70-ish. You know, that whole time period? I remember **[0:19:30]** going to Central Tech when I was in high school and I think there were a little over two thousand students. Like it was a big school. Two thousand to twenty-five hundred students, and at least seventy-five percent Italian.

Interviewer: And what was your relationship? You and your sister and your brother – what was your relationship? Being a Chinese family, what was your relationship with the Italian families? And your parents too.

Respondent: Well it really depended on a lot of things. In those days **[0:20:00]** the Italians were very traditional, so they were very Italian in terms of they would – we were just talking about it because I just had lunch with a pair of Italian people and we were just talking about it and the woman's older. And we were saying that in those days, Italian people tended to marry Italian people, and Chinese tended to marry Chinese people, and Jewish people tended to marry Jewish people. This **[0:20:30]** subsequently changed quite a bit. But the Italian people didn't really – the parents didn't know how to react to us, I think, being Chinese because I think that there was a religious component to the whole thing because those Italian people were more religions than they **[0:21:00]** are now. And so we were seen as heathens, like without religion or God. We were Godless. So the kids were not that – it was a mixed bag, obviously, with every group of people. You have people that accept different ethnic groups, and people that – you know? So it goes both ways. So **[0:21:30]** I didn't have very many Italian friends because I didn't feel that they really cared for my company, whereas my brother, he was a little younger than I was. He seemed to have more Italian friends than me. But the culture pretty well dominated the area for a long time because when the Italians moved in, there was still the influence of Jewish people in the Jewish market because it stayed, the Jewish market, for a long time. **[0:22:00]** Then I stopped shopping there, and somewhere along the line it became very Portuguese and then Chinese, but the Italian culture was very dominant in our area. So I feel like I'm almost twenty-five percent Italian whether I want to or not because I played soccer with the Italian boys, and I played all their card games like seven-and-a-half, and Briscola, and I spent a lot of **[0:22:30]** time in basements and on the porch, and doing all the things Italian kids do because there weren't very many Chinese kids at all in the Annex area. They were all still living in Chinatown, and interspersed in different areas.

Interviewer: So in fact you did hang out with them by the time they were…

Respondent: Yeah. I tended to. There were a couple of groups of people where my better friends were. There was a Ukrainian family **[0:23:00]** that lived on Brunswick Street, and when I was in high school my better friends were Hungarian, which is another component of Brunswick

Street. And in the north end of Brunswick Street were quite a few Hungarian people.

Interviewer: And you're saying closer to Bloor Street.

Respondent: Yes. Like on Brunswick, I know there were a number of Hungarian families that lived on Brunswick not far from Bloor. One of my best friends, Yanno, he lived on Brunswick Street just south of Bloor. And **[0:23:30]** Bloor Street used to be Hungarian. It used to be the Blue Cellar, about six or seven Hungarian restaurants. We had a Hungarian barrister up there, Hungarian bookstore. It was very, very Hungarian, the orientation on Bloor Street. And then eventually the Budapest Bakery did move up there. One of the mysteries of the neighbourhood – who this mysterious man is that owned the **[0:24:00]** Budapest Bakery. Because I guess there were some skeletons in the closet because he was very wealthy. The Budapest Bakery was extremely successful, and my memory of their food was like – let's put it this way. I have better memories of Budapest Bakery than the Harbord Bakery, and the Harbord Bakery is an amazing bakery. The Budapest was at a whole other level of amazing bakery. So I guess the guy made quite a bit of money, and **[0:24:30]** I remember when I first started renovations, we were looking at buying houses. And there were these abandoned houses on Brunswick Street just south of Bloor on the east side. And it was owned by this guy – he owns three houses – that owned the Budapest Bakery. We found this out because the Budapest Bakery, when it closed down on Bloor – I'm not sure when it closed down – it **[0:25:00]** remained vacant for maybe twenty years. It was an empty building on Bloor Street. It's the big bookstore now.

Interviewer: Oh. That's the place.

Respondent: That was the Budapest Bakery.

Interviewer: Oh. It had been vacant for a long time and neglected.

Respondent: Yes. Yes. And that's why I said it's this very eccentric family man. They didn't do anything with the property. They paid taxes on it…

Interviewer: For sure.

Respondent: …but they never – something happened. So the man that owned the Budapest owned a lot of Bloor Street.

Interviewer: And some property on Brunswick in addition.

Respondent: And on Brunswick. He owned a lot. **[0:25:30]** He was very, very wealthy. It was a very successful bakery. He was a very wealthy man. And it was really a sad day for me when – like I used to love Hungarian. I used to be a regular at the Blue Cellar. I used to go there and get my wiener schnitzel and, you know, it was dark and it had all these Hungarian women working there, and they were all motherly. And you know, it was a very – something that **[0:26:00]** I miss that part of what has happened because…

Interviewer: Did you ever eat dobos torte?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: It's layered with chocolate and the top has this crunchy caramelized sugar.

Respondent: I may have, but I don't remember that specifically.

Interviewer: That was a very famous Hungarian dessert.

Respondent: But my experience is that even though we weren't in Little Italy, Little Italy was a little farther **[0:26:30]** west, the other side of Bathurst, it was dominated by – you know, our corner stores, a lot of them were Italian. Later on after the Jewish people moved out, Italian culture was very dominant in the area.

Interviewer: Did you learn some words?

Respondent: Just bad ones. [Laughter]

Interviewer: And did you teach them any Chinese words?

Respondent: Just bad ones. [Laughter]

Interviewer: And so when you were at home, what language did you speak with your siblings and **[0:27:00]** parents?

Respondent: My parents never learned how to speak English, so my first language was Chinese. And in those days, we were very sheltered, so I remember going to Lansdowne School in grade one and pretty well not having any command of the English language. I actually failed grade one because I couldn't speak English very well. But **[0:27:30]** subsequently…

Interviewer: So you learned English at school.

Respondent: …I did learn. I did learn it at school and with my friends because I just spoke Chinese exclusively with my parents. And it's an odd thing because in those days, most Chinese people kept within thier own community. And a lot of the Chinese people, like my mother and father's generation, never learned to speak English.

Interviewer: Yeah. **[0:28:00]** Your parents moved away from the Chinese neighbourhood and moved onto Brunswick. Was that related to the school? Or what was that about?

Respondent: No. That was related to – there was a time there when I remember when we first came to Toronto, nearly all the Chinese people lived in Chinatown. That's just what we did. You didn't move into a **[0:28:30]** white area where there – you know. So I remember that I had relatives. And it was like Chinatown between Bay. I don't remember them being east so much, but between Bay and they did go all the way over to McCaul. A lot of them, I have relatives that lived on St. Patrick's, and they lived in the whole Chinatown area. And **[0:29:00]** I think that we didn't have a choice. We wanted to stay in Chinatown, but as I said, I don't know exactly when City Hall was built.

Interviewer: Oh. So you might have moved out because they…

Respondent: We moved out because City Hall didn't want us in Chinatown and we couldn't buy property. They were discouraging people from buying. I'd have to look at when City Hall was built, but I imagine

City Hall was built – they must have started the planning process **[0:29:30]** in the early ‘50s.

Interviewer: So they kicked people out of their homes.

Respondent: Yes. Yes. They actually bought out Chinese people’s homes. They offered us some money. Like I know my relatives, they live – they had a home on St. Patrick’s and they said, “Look, here’s so much money for your home. We want you to leave.” And you know, of course we had rights, but Chinese people in those days weren’t the kind of litigation type of people. If a government official said, **[0:30:00]** “We want you away,” we would be reasonably compliant. So I think that is a reason why we never stayed in Chinatown, that we moved to Brunswick Street. And I think that it was just a matter of where – when we had to leave that area, it was a matter of where we can find a house. We still wanted to be close to Chinatown, but I mean the Annex is one of the closer places to Chinatown because **[0:30:30]** it was moving to Spadina and Dundas. So, you know, it used to be a streetcar used to go from Ossington station across Harbord Street, down Spadina, right down to Chinatown, and then it turned. So that was…

Interviewer: So you could easily get the streetcar.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And go into Chinatown.

Respondent: Yeah. That’s what would happen.

Interviewer: Did you or your family have any reaction to what they did with your names **[0:31:00]** when you went to school?

Respondent: I don’t even think they gave it a second thought because to them it’s what – they were compliant with whatever the school system…

Interviewer: Yeah. So whatever the authorities say, that was – okay with it. Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. They were pretty much afraid of authorities because, you know – I think the odd irony of it is **[0:31:30]** in those days, they were afraid that they tried to control the immigration, the Chinese people coming to Canada. They were afraid that we would overwhelm the country. It sort of happened whether they wanted it to or not.

Interviewer: So were you born in China?

Respondent: No. I was born in Guelph.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay.

Respondent: What happened, the history of that is that my father came in ’37 and he had been **[0:32:00]** married in China, and I think his wife passed away in the war. And he wasn’t allowed. Chinese people weren’t allowed to bring the wives over. You probably know this. The Chinese people, they were the only group of ethnic people that weren’t allowed to bring the wives over. So the Chinese men had relationships with prostitutes and **[0:32:30]** women that served a purpose. But the first – my mother came over in ’49 because that’s the first time they opened the doors to Chinese women coming over, so a lot of families were reunited at that time, and my mother was actually an arranged marriage, which is very common in the Chinese **[0:33:00]** population. And she came over and, you know, shortly after we were in Guelph. My father had a laundry in Guelph, and she had me in ’51. And then our businesses didn’t do very well in Guelph so we moved to Toronto, and we lived in Chinatown because that’s where you were supposed to go, and then they wanted all the **[0:33:30]** Chinese people out, so that’s why we spread out. And we live in – you know, if you track it down, the Chinese families left Chinatown during that City Hall time period. If they hadn’t built City Hall, the Chinatown probably would still be at Bay and Dundas.

Interviewer: So are you the oldest of the three children in your family?

Respondent: I have a half-brother that came from China from my father’s previous marriage, but I am the oldest of…

Interviewer: Of your mother's children?

Respondent: **[0:34:00]** …of my mother's children. I have a younger brother who's two years younger. No, actually, my sister's the eldest. I'm the eldest boy and my sister's the eldest. She's two years older than I am. They're two-year periods between the kids. And my sister moved to Sarnia, and my brother did stay in the neighbourhood. He lives actually kitty-corner the garages probably just across from you. He lives at 207 Lippincott.

Interviewer: Oh does he?

Respondent: And I use his garage to store **[0:34:30]** my building materials and everything. And he lived right through – we sold the house on Brunswick Street when my mother passed away during those two years that I left when I was in my early twenties. That's when she sold the house on Brunswick Street, and then my brother moved to Lippincott, and I – we each got a house. It was a family house that I'm living in. **[0:35:00]** My father bought it many years ago in 1970 or whatever, so I moved into that house on Brunswick Street. And that's sort of like the family – it was kind of funny because when I started going to high school, most of the Chinese kids were new immigrants, and since I was born here I used to make people's heads turn because I spoke English properly.

Interviewer: **[0:35:30]** So they looked at you and expected very poor English.

Respondent: Yes. And they were a little taken aback that I could speak well, and I did really well in English and in school and stuff like that, which they're also puzzled at, you know? How did this happen? You know, where did you learn? There were very few Chinese people. I think at that time I'm not sure about the numbers, but my memory is in the '50s, something like five thousand Chinese in the city of Toronto. There weren't many. **[0:36:00]** And I can't remember, in my early days, any Indian people of any sort at all. There were no Indian kids at Lansdowne. And I think they came a little later in the '70s, Indian families. So there were basically – my memory, I thought the world was basically comprised of three groups of people – well four. There were the Jewish, and the wasp, and the

Italians, and the Chinese. **[0:36:30]** And there weren't very many Portuguese either in those days, so that's…

Interviewer: So your world was that, and that's what you assumed the whole big world was about.

Respondent: Yes. Yes. I assumed the world was Jewish and Italian.

Interviewer: When you lived in your house as a child, so there were you and your parents and you and your siblings.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Did anybody else live there with you?

Respondent: Yes. All the homes there, nearly **[0:37:00]** all of them, whether they were Italian or Chinese or Ukrainian, all the houses that I remember there were multiple family homes because my father didn't make much money, and it was the way he made ends meet. He would rent the second floor. Not only rent the second floor; there was this kind of thing where **[0:37:30]** if Chinese men would come to work we would rent rooms with them, so the kids – like we had very little space to ourselves. We basically had the basement and a bed too, and then we rented as many rooms as we can to make money. And I think that's how a lot of immigrant families, whether it's Italian or Chinese, survived. They would bring their relatives and rent rooms because I know the Italian families that I knew, they had their uncles there, and their aunts, and brothers, **[0:38:00]** and whoever. And it was very few single-family homes. I mean they were single-family homes theoretically, but I think that…

Interviewer: Everything that could be used as a bedroom had at least one person in there, and often more.

Respondent: Yes. Definitely. Bunk beds and different things like that, double beds, and just crowded in. And a lot of – you know, I know of some Italian people, they had a large family and then they had their uncles, and brothers, **[0:38:30]** and everybody. It was a very dense area in terms of population.

Interviewer: How many people do you think were living under your roof at the time where there were the most of you?

Respondent: Well there was five in my family, and then there was four upstairs, and then there was about three men. So…

Interviewer: That's twelve.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's a lot of people. And how many bathrooms?

Respondent: **[0:39:00]** One upstairs and one in the basement, so two. And originally, our original washroom in the basement just had a toilet, so the kids had to – we had to wash in the laundry tub. It was…

Interviewer: Pretty simple kind of living.

Respondent: It was a very simple life, and things were very – everybody was very frugal. All **[0:39:30]** families because it was all working class. People didn't have a lot of money, so you know, we…

Interviewer: So your father had a laundry, you said, at some point?

Respondent: Well he had a laundry in Guelph.

Interviewer: Guelph. And then when he came here?

Respondent: He just worked for someone else. We actually used to – my mother owned part of a restaurant in High Park, and so **[0:40:00]** we were in the restaurant business. And my father, who was I'd say eighty percent deaf in one ear and fifty percent deaf in the other ear, and so he couldn't hear very well. So he couldn't hold down a regular job. Like he couldn't be a cook or someone where he had to hear, so he struggled a lot. He ironed clothes for a laundry and **[0:40:30]** they would bring the clothes to our house. And I remember standing on a pop crate and ironing like a hundred shirts.

Interviewer: So you were ironing with him.

Respondent: Oh yeah. We had to. When all Chinese kids – we worked if we could.

Interviewer: So at a young age you stood up to be tall enough to iron.

Respondent: We stood on a pop crate.

Interviewer: Wow. So you were little when you were then…

Respondent: We were just as – the irons were those old heavy **[0:41:00]** irons. They weren't the modern ones. And they had no regulator on them, so they would just get really hot. And it used to scare me a lot when I was a kid because when it got really hot, you had to iron really quick or else you burned the shirt, right? And so you would have to pull it out, but there was no on/off on these irons. So every time you pushed it back in there was a huge spark. It used to scare me quite a bit.

Interviewer: Sure. Because it was turned on?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: It was on. So we took turns **[0:41:30]** ironing, my brother, my sister, and myself. And we would do the sleeves and the collar, and my father would do the body and fold it, so it was a production. And it was really, really – I think it was five cents a shirt.

Interviewer: And you did that in the summer too.

Respondent: We did it all year round.

Interviewer: It must have been hell in the summer.

Respondent: It was. It was a very hard life. I mean I was telling – I was in a fish and chip store **[0:42:00]** and I was telling the girl that I used to, at a very, very early age, I can't remember when – I used to be in the basement at a restaurant and peel a hundred pound bags of potatoes with a knife…

Interviewer: Oh my gosh.

Respondent: …and just peel potatoes all day, and everything. Everything was – you know, it was a very difficult existence, and my **[0:42:30]** father was very frugal. I think a lot of immigrant people, Jewish, and Chinese, and Italian, were very frugal in those days because a nickel was very hard to come by. And I remember as kids my brother and I would go to construction sites and get pop bottles and stuff like that and sell them for two cents, or whatever they were worth in those days. And that was the only money we ever got.

Interviewer: So you were getting **[0:43:00]** allowance. Fifty cents allowance, or twenty cents allowance.

Respondent: No. I was telling a friend of mine, my father – I think a big part of our neighbourhood was Honest Ed's in those days. Everybody in the neighbourhood shopped at Honest Ed's. The prices were unreal. They were low. He had always these door-crasher specials. And he'd pretty well give things away. I mean, you know, a nickel for a can of salmon or whatever he did. It was very nice of the guy. It was a very good business. The guy made a lot of money. A very smart **[0:43:30]** man. But like for instance, I was telling a friend this the other day. Supper for my brother, my sister, and myself, and my father would be from Honest Ed's. A can of salmon, and a can of vegetable soup with some rice and that was it for four people. And I was telling her that I remember a number of **[0:44:00]** times that we didn't even have butter or anything, so we went to the school without breakfast. And one time I remember I couldn't find anything, so I made a sugar sandwich.

Interviewer: Was the school aware of that?

Respondent: It was cold in those days. I mean they didn't – I mean I remember, like, my father was very frugal, so we didn't buy as much clothing and stuff like that. So I remember going to school in **[0:44:30]** tattered clothes, in holes, and I remember one teacher, you know, he didn't like the looks of me because I was not…

Interviewer: You looked scruffy.

Respondent: So scruffy. So in front of the whole class he said, “You don’t deserve to be other people. You go to the back of the class and you sit there. That’s where you belong.” And that’s the type of thing that you could expect…

Interviewer: At that time.

Respondent: …at that time. It was very – in those days, I mean kids now are **[0:45:00]** not aware of – it was borderline – you know, like I remember teachers when you did something wrong, I remember one teacher, Mr. Klein, used to walk around the hallway holding your ear so that you had to step on your tiptoes and walk around the halls about four or five times. And if you didn’t step on your tiptoes your ears would hurt a lot. And it was very common to be, you know…

Interviewer: So he would whack you?

Respondent: Well he would just hold you **[0:45:30]** by the ear, walk around the hallway, and hold your ear up…

Interviewer: Too high.

Respondent: …high so you had to stand on your tiptoes.

Interviewer: And he was allowed to do that obviously.

Respondent: He was allowed to do that. Oh, he would parade you around the whole school.

Interviewer: To humiliate you.

Respondent: Yes. All the teachers and the students would see you, and you’d be walking around your tiptoes. And when you got tired and you sort of like – you’d walk around for quite a while, and you got tired, and he’d almost tear off your ear. So it was very common that type of thing. It wasn’t – **[0:46:00]** school for me wasn’t a good experience because I guess I was one of these hyper kids and I couldn’t sit still, and I had all those. And they didn’t care in those days. They

didn't have anything like ADD or any of the – or specialized. If you were not able to sit still, you just were a bad kid. [Laughs]

Interviewer: I remembered because I was in school in Montreal at that same time and they used the strap, and you had all kinds of labels. Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. Bad. Bad kid. So that was the old days.

Interviewer: **[0:46:30]** Now you said you worked a lot. You and your sister, your father – everybody worked.

Respondent: Everybody worked to make ends meet.

Interviewer: Did you play with kids at all?

Respondent: Yeah. We took turns. So it was kind of weird because, you know, we'd be outside playing tag or hide and seek, and my sister wasn't so involved with the same group of kids as us. She had a different – she was a little older. Two years is a big difference. But my brother and I had the same friends in the neighbourhood, so it was kind of weird, you know? Like I'd come out and **[0:47:00]** we were embarrassed in that time because we didn't want people to know that we were so impoverished, and we ironed clothes, you know? We didn't want other kids to know that we did that.

Interviewer: Oh so that was a secret. That's your skeleton in the closet.

Respondent: Yes. We kept that quiet. We didn't like kids to come into our house because we're embarrassed because we had these big ironing boards set up in the basement, and it's kind of primitive-looking because to keep the wire up my father would put elastics so that the wire would hang off the ceiling so that you can iron properly.

Interviewer: Instead of the cord getting in the way.

Respondent: Yeah. It looked very **[0:47:30]** factory and primitive-like. And we had these huge ironing boards that he made out of tables and stuff like that. They weren't regular ironing boards. And so I'd be playing hide and seek, and then I'd do my fifty shirts or whatever it was, and then I called my brother and say, "It's your turn." And the kids

would go, “Why did you say you have to go home? Why don’t you stay playing?” So we’d alternate. So even when we were playing cards it was like, **[0:48:00]** “Okay, my turn to play cards.” And he had to go home. Kids never knew this. Later on they did understand when they were a little older that at that point we didn’t really care that much. And we didn’t iron. When we got a little older, we didn’t iron so much as we worked in the restaurant.

Interviewer: So your mother had the restaurant and your father had the…

Respondent: Yeah. My mother had the restaurant at High Park.

Interviewer: What kind of food did she have there?

Respondent: It was Canadian food. It was like – we had a tie-in. **[0:48:30]** This really famous Chinese, Charlie Wong, very, very well known Chinese cook – he taught my mother how to make Canadian food, so it was Chinese Canadian food. We had Chinese. And then he taught my uncle – he wasn’t my real uncle, but an uncle how to cook Chinese food. So it was an okay business, you know? And we eventually moved to another restaurant, but Charlie was the head cook at Cleveland’s House **[0:49:00]** up in Muskoka.

Interviewer: Yeah. I’ve heard of it.

Respondent: Yes. And I remember one time he decided to be more involved in our restaurant business and he left Cleveland’s House, and it was a big deal because all the customers started leaving. And the owner of Cleveland’s House plead with Charlie to come back because they loved his cooking. So he went back to Cleveland’s house, and my brother worked for him for a while, **[0:49:30]** and he had total control of the kitchen because he was a really good chef.

Interviewer: So you worked ironing, and as you said, you peeled potatoes.

Respondent: Washed dishes, whatever. My brother was – at a very young age, he was learning to cook, and I cooked too, and I waited tables. And we did everything. We just had a very strong – even to this day we’re kind of messed up because we don’t know how to not work, you know? It’s just part of it.

Interviewer: So but you told me **[0:50:00]** before I turned this on that you have an MSW.

Respondent: No. I have a…

Interviewer: Social work.

Respondent: …child care – so that was like so long ago that they grandfathered me in so that I was doing – in the later years I was working at the Griffin Centre with an MSW in family therapy and different things like that.

Interviewer: Right. But you got a profession.

Respondent: Yes, I did. **[0:50:30]** And you know, my sister is a teacher, and my brother is in an accountant print business. So there was always a push to excel in school, much like it is now for Chinese kids. We were really pushed hard to excel, and we all did reasonably well in school, otherwise we'd get beaten pretty bad.

Interviewer: At home?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So **[0:51:00]** that must have been hard for you if you were kind of a restless young child. So it must have been hard for you.

Respondent: Yeah. I was really bad because what it was was I couldn't focus, and I did really badly in school so my mother used to beat me a lot. I think every year I was just barely passing, and they did actually IQ tests on me and I didn't do very well. **[0:51:30]** And St. Patrick's Day is a very scary time for me because what happened was I was a paperboy on Spadina street, and I was a Star paperboy for the Toronto Star, and I had one of those two-wheel crates that you put papers in and it was like a tornado out there. And so the wind was blowing, and the dust **[0:52:00]** was hitting my eyes, so I had this thing shielded against my face. I was holding it and pushing into the wind. And I didn't know this, but then before they chained the paper boxes, a Star paper box was flying in the air at about four feet in the

air, and it smashed me onto the road. And I was lying on the road and a Star paper truck – so it was a Star paper box, I was a Star carrier, and a Star paper truck rolled over my leg. **[0:52:30]** Crushed all the bones in my ankle and broke my tibia and fibula.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: The wheel went right over my leg. Crushed everything. So it doesn't show, but I am a bit of a cripple. And what happened was it was so severe that I had a cast up to my waist and I was in the cast for almost a year, and then another half-year to another year I was still on **[0:53:00]** crutches. My leg, I couldn't walk on it, and the bone structure wasn't strong enough. It was a very tough time for me because I was in Sick Kids, and I remember the doctor telling me directly. It was cold. He said, "You will never walk properly, you have arthritis, you have a lifetime of pain to look forward to."

Interviewer: How old were you at that time?

Respondent: About eleven to twelve

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: I was in grade – I think I was going into grade seven. But the odd thing about that was that **[0:53:30]** I was a very hyper kid and I was very restless. But in those days, it was pretty cold in more ways than one because they never cabbed you to school, so I had to walk in the middle of winter on crutches to school. And Lansdowne School didn't have any elevators, and when it was wet and your crutches were wet, and everything was wet, you would be going up the **[0:54:00]** stairs one at a time.

Interviewer: Slippery.

Respondent: It was slippery and dangerous. And plus they didn't have special consideration for me, so what they did was every lunch and every recess I was pretty well in the library to some freakish thing. Something bad became good because by the time I was in grade eight, I had read the whole library pretty well [laughter] and **[0:54:30]** by grade eight I was reading – for some funny reason I

had run out of things. I was actually going to the encyclopaedias, and I was going through – I was reading Desmond Morris and Margaret Mead at the age of grade eight. And so by the time I got to high school I was so advanced in English, and my comprehension of different subjects – **[0:55:00]** and the other thing about being stuck in a cast, we were poor. We didn't have a TV. I was very bored, so I read a ton of books and I also played a lot of chess.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: And I played in major chess tournaments. I was borderline like right up there in terms of chess. So I came from this very dumb, borderline kid locked up in a library. It's two years of absolute **[0:55:30]** devouring everything, and by the time I got to high school I was like one of the top students in the high school. It just changed everything by randomness, you know?

Interviewer: Wow. Remarkable story. Very touching. So that cloud had a silver lining because some clouds don't.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah. Some don't. And do you have arthritis in that leg?

Respondent: I couldn't play sports and I couldn't stand on my leg. Like I can't put on my pants standing up. I have to sit. **[0:56:00]** What happened was this foot here, you see – it's still smaller than the other one, right? And this foot here is the shape of a cast and it doesn't pivot, so I have a very hard time. You see the shape of it's round, and so this is totally different. So this foot – like I was walking with a friend, and I kept having problems with it. I said, "Look, you've got to walk." She was a woman. She always walked on the inside. I said, "Look, you always walk on the inside, **[0:56:30]** I can't walk on the outside because there's all these driveways, and my foot doesn't pivot, it just goes straight like that." So what happened was also an odd thing too. I didn't play any sports until I was in my thirties, and then I got with this program where I had to run programs and it was with handicapped kids, so I was working with handicapped kids. And I was in the gym, so I started playing sports. And now I'm **[0:57:00]**

pretty athletic. It was very painful to play because I had a lot of pain in my foot, but now it's not too bad. And right now I play high-level squash at the Y, and I've learned to deal with it. So I do have pain in my foot. It's not so bad now, but I didn't get arthritis in my leg. Just my foot bothers me sometimes, but it's **[0:57:30]** probably better than most sixty-one year-olds.

Interviewer: So that doctor's prediction was quite catastrophic and it's not nearly as bad.

Respondent: It could have been. It could have been if I would have been more sedentary in the way I was. But I didn't really have a choice because I think part of the reason why I got stronger was that for a long time when I was a teenager I was a waiter, so I had to **[0:58:00]** walk. And at the end of a shift my foot would just be aching.

Interviewer: I'll bet.

Respondent: But it did make it stronger, so all the supporting muscles around that weak spot got stronger. So it's funny how it worked out.

Interviewer: I want to talk about – it might sound silly – the sidewalks and the back lanes when you were growing up. Did you play on the sidewalks? Did you play in the back lanes?

Respondent: Oh the back lanes were where we lived.

Interviewer: Okay. Talk about that please.

Respondent: Well I had one **[0:58:30]** bad experience in the back lane. When we were kids – well there were a couple of things. I don't know if it's appropriate to talk about it…

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: But there was this one guy in the lane, he's a German guy – at least we assumed he was German – and he was like the local boogeyman. We were terrified of him. And he would come out and scare us and we were in this lane. It was **[0:59:00]** right on

Brunswick Street. And he was the local boogeyman. But we still played in the lane because he was farther south. He was towards Ulster, so we played in the part close to the Harbord Street. And the lanes then were very primitive; they weren't paved, they were mud, and…

Interviewer: Yeah, some were paved and some weren't, so obviously yours wasn't.

Respondent: But we did have a rivalry. Like we had kids on the Borden Street side, and then we had the Brunswick **[0:59:30]** Street side. And we had our little things, and I remember one time we had a slingshot fight.

Interviewer: Oh my god. Yeah.

Respondent: And I beamed a kid in the head, and I quit after that. I was terrified. I thought I hurt him really bad.

Interviewer: But were they street groups? Like was your group all from Brunswick?

Respondent: Yeah. We had this kind of thing where all the parents would basically say, "You have to stay on your **[1:00:00]** block." You weren't allowed to go south of Ulster for the most part when you were young, and you weren't allowed to cross Harbord Street. So we just basically became friends with the kids in our immediate block. We didn't really – we had school friends, but during the summers and the evenings we were basically with the kids on our block because the parents – that's what the rule was.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the kids played out on the street.

Respondent: **[1:00:30]** We played out in the street, we played hide-and-seek, and you know, all kinds of things. We spent a lot of time on the porches, the kids. We played chess games, and Parcheesi, and all those little kids games. Hung out on the porch, sat around.

Interviewer: And did the parents – were adults on the porches too?

Respondent: There were always adults around, but they didn't really supervise us like they do now. We were allowed to do – you know, I remember playing hide-and-seek late at night, and there were no parents around. **[1:01:00]** We just did whatever we wanted.

Interviewer: Yeah. So much more freedom.

Respondent: Much more freedom. We didn't have a sense of danger in terms of that something bad would happen to us. Like our parents obviously would tell us, you know, "You go in the laneway; there's a boogeyman," you know. And they'd tell us all these scary stories, especially Chinese people. They were always frightened of…

Interviewer: Lurking danger.

Respondent: Yes. Yes. They didn't understand society as well, so they said, **[1:01:30]** "Don't talk to strangers. Don't do this. Don't do that." And so I mean they tried to – I think part of it is that a lot of – the Italians tended to have more mothers that were at home than some of the other groups. Like Chinese parents, they all worked. Both of them.

Interviewer: Both parents.

Respondent: Both parents. But we were the only Chinese family on Brunswick Street that I know of.

Interviewer: So the kids **[1:02:00]** you were friends with – Jewish, Italian – what percentage of the mother – your mother worked, and you said Chinese families that was normal. The Italian and Jewish families – were some of the mothers working as far as you knew? Or were they staying home? What do you think?

Respondent: I actually don't have very – I know that I had a number of Jewish friends. I don't **[1:02:30]** remember spending much time in their homes. I guess I was pretty young then when the Jewish people were still around because they left around '58 or something like that. I would have only been about eight, nine years old, and so I think that really my memory of the neighbourhood was more Italian families, and **[1:03:00]** a lot of the Italian men worked in

construction, and most of the Italian mothers were at home. That's what I remember.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. What about changes to the homes? Because you lived here beginning so many years ago and now you're here. So what kinds of changes have you seen happen?

Respondent: Well the biggest change that happened was that the homes became single-family homes in the truer sense. **[1:03:30]** So families would live in the house. It wasn't as multi-family as the years went on. After high school, I think a lot of the Italian people got their own homes, and they moved out, and I think part of the migration to Woodbridge was that the homes were reasonably inexpensive in those days. And my house that I live in now used to be a **[1:04:00]** boarding home. And I remember a lot of the area being homes that rented to students. And the area was, for a time period, after – you know, in the '60s to '70s was a lot of rental properties. A lot of homes, just random **[1:04:30]** rooms. And they were very inexpensive. I remember we used to rent rooms for fifteen dollars a week, sixty dollars a month, and I think the downstairs, renting the whole first floor of the downstairs was, I think, like a hundred dollars a month. And I remember as I got a little older, I spent time in the area – and even the homes a little **[1:05:00]** farther north…

Interviewer: Meaning where? What are you referring to?

Respondent: Brunswick Street north of Bloor. All that north of Bloor Street, those huge homes? There were a lot of students living there. And so it's a large number of rental properties, and a large number of people that were more transient in the area. You know, people would come **[1:05:30]** and go. There's actually a funny book, a paperback book. I think it's named "Everybody lives on Brunswick Street sometime."

Interviewer: Ah okay.

Respondent: There's a paperback, and I always thought that was kind of funny, that book.

Interviewer: I'll have to see if I can get my hands on it.

Respondent: Yeah. And so that's what I remember. I remember the area changing, and the biggest change that I noticed was **[1:06:00]** the stores. I mean when the Jewish people left, I mean obviously kosher meat, kosher chicken, and all that, that was no longer applicable. I think the remaining stores went to the market, and Jewish people still shopped there, but that's the first thing I noticed. The first place that went was **[1:06:30]** the butcher shop on the corner. That's the pottery store now. Greenspan's. They went somewhere else. They were a very well known kosher butcher store. They moved somewhere north somewhere.

Interviewer: Well you talked about so many homes that were like little synagogues that they were small, and just a small group of people would gather, but they were scattered all over the place.

Respondent: A lot of Jewish people. But it was funny because I didn't really think **[1:07:00]** a lot about it, and in retrospect I realize it was a very rapid change from Jewish to Italian. Like it happened within a year or two. Like all the Jewish people just like – boom. They all followed each other. And then when the Italians left, they all left at a certain time too. And then we became a mixed bag of everything – Portuguese, Chinese, Italian, everything. But those are **[1:07:30]** two mass exodus from the area. One, the Jewish, and two, the Italian. And that changed the fabric of the stores and the way we were. And you know, like the shopping – I think the corner stores changed a lot because when the Italian people were here, they catered to the Italian people. **[1:08:00]** And so there was a richness of food, like a lot of good meat, a lot of good cheeses, vegetables, and stuff like that. And then the whole corner store thing changed because I guess they got Dominion, or people started shopping different, and the corner stores became more like cigarette stores with a few items like they are now. They've changed. So we couldn't by meat there. The ethnic **[1:08:30]** food wasn't available to us anymore. So the experience of living in the neighbourhood has changed quite a bit from a neighbourhood that's working-class. The part that I miss the most to this day is that we don't have a middle-class in this area anymore. It's disappearing. There's some old-timers that still live here that aren't really wealthy, but you know, in homes that are worth **[1:09:00]** a million and more, you're not

talking about working-class people anymore. So that is the thing that meant the most and I miss the most. And then the other part of it is that older people can't afford the taxes in this area.

Interviewer: So they're going to be forced out, you're saying.

Respondent: They have been forced out. In my street, it was like a few – you know, there's very few older people, **[1:09:30]** and the older people rent their homes so that they can make ends meet.

Interviewer: The home that you're living in, who lives under your roof in your home space?

Respondent: Right now I have the second and third floor for my family. My kids are twenty-six and twenty-one. And actually Andrew turned twenty-two this year. The sad thing about it from my kids, the thing that is really **[1:10:00]** hard on them is that my son works for me, so he does okay. He doesn't make a lot of money.

Interviewer: And you're doing construction work now.

Respondent: Yes. So my son, he makes forty to fifty thousand a year, which isn't a lot of money in this day in age, and my daughter's, as I said, going into social services. And she's looking at, if she's lucky, making twenty bucks an hour because…

Interviewer: She's the one I met when I went to your house.

Respondent: Yes. They just don't pay very well. Well **[1:10:30]** you know that. If you have an MSW, you do make a little more money, but for…

Interviewer: Yeah. You don't get rich as a social worker.

Respondent: Exactly. You don't get rich.

Interviewer: No.

Respondent: And so the thing about this area is that the kids that grew up in this area, unless their families kept their home, they can't live here anymore. And unless I keep my home here, my daughter and son

won't be able to afford. **[1:11:00]** And the transition for me is really sad because when I was talking to Nicole and I was saying, "Well why did you move from New York City?" And she was saying that the middle-class has disappeared from Manhattan. She grew up in Manhattan.

Interviewer: Oh. And now you have to be very wealthy.

Respondent: You have to be very wealthy, and plus it's not a place where you want to raise a family. That's what she said. She wanted to raise a family. So Manhattan is not the best place to raise a kid. You know, **[1:11:30]** you have to be very wealthy. You have to send your kid to a very exclusive school, and pay a lot of money, and things are very expensive there. That is happening in our area in the Annex unfortunately.

Interviewer: Would your children like to stay in this part of the city?

Respondent: Yes, no they definitely…

Interviewer: They do like it.

Respondent: Yeah. They do like it. They like it. It's a great area because it's central, this is what they know. That's the other part of it. It's where they grew up. **[1:12:00]** And you figure my daughter's twenty-six, so when she was young she also experienced this area different than it is now because in twenty-six years, this place has changed a lot. Like on my block, there's only a few families with kids. Nicole has a kid. There's a family across. I think there's about four families that have kids on my block.

Interviewer: There are quite a few here. They seem **[1:12:30]** to be increasing. Your daughter was very nice, by the way. I had no idea who she was, but I rang both bells. I saw two bells, rang them both, and she was very, very nice. You can tell her I appreciated that.

Respondent: Yeah. She is. Fortunately there are a few people in this generation that haven't lost their way, but a lot of her generation have lost their way. For example, she told a friend she was going off Facebook because she didn't think that **[1:13:00]** that's the way to have a

friendship because she said, “Just because you contact me on Facebook doesn’t mean we’re friends. You have to come and actually see me, and do things with me.” So all her friends think she’s a little weird and something wrong with her.

Interviewer: I agree with her. It’s such a good point. What about heating of your home? Do you remember going through different changes in heating your home?

Respondent: Well our home was always forced air right from a long, long time ago. **[1:13:30]** And all the homes have forced air.

Interviewer: Let’s see. You talked a lot about the stores. Did your family or any of the families around you have pets?

Respondent: Pets – there was the odd cat here and there. Pets weren’t very prevalent in our neighbourhood. I was just thinking – I don’t think we grew up with any pets, any dogs when I was a kid. Nobody, none of my friends had **[1:14:00]** dogs. I think in those days the Italian people came from rural, and dogs and pets, animals, were to be eaten, not to be pets.

Interviewer: So you didn’t want to name them. [Laughs]

Respondent: Yes. That’s more or less. And Chinese people, in those days, they had cats occasionally to take care of mice and stuff like that, but they were in the restaurant. We had a cat in the restaurant, but we never – the idea of having a dog was a foreign thing to them.

Interviewer: Yeah. **[1:14:30]** You were saying that the neighbourhood was very safe other than these supposed boogeymen in the back lanes, but it was safe. Do you think it’s still a safe neighbourhood now?

Respondent: Well I do think it’s a safe neighbourhood, but in the old days, people that were in the neighbourhood usually lived in the neighbourhood. Now **[1:15:00]** people walk through my street that are just random. Maybe they were shopping up at Bloor Street and they’re walking somewhere or something like that. There’s a lot more traffic of people that don’t live in the area, and so there’s a lot of businesses

like Dessert Trends and the restaurants on Harbord. A lot of people that frequent those places aren't from the neighbourhood.

Interviewer: That's for sure.

Respondent: **[1:15:30]** My experience in the old days is that the people you saw were people that you saw on a regular basis because they lived in the neighbourhood, and we didn't get too many strangers or people that we didn't know. I never thought twice. My brother and I, we just wandered the city or played on the streets, stayed out late at night. We never had much fear of danger. But now I feel that you just **[1:16:00]** have to come to terms. Like for instance, you know, I think this was about five years ago a girl got raped in the park across the street from us. And the cops came and they asked what was going on and this and that, but we never found out what happened, or whether it was a neighbourhood person or anything like that. And so **[1:16:30]** there's random crime in the area. Like for instance, there was that guy that got stabbed up on the Brunswick House because he had the gold necklace. That was a few years ago. So I think there's random violence more connected to some of the – and I think the neighbourhood is kind of – on Brunswick Street especially because when the Brunswick House closes, they tend to walk down Brunswick Street. And they were **[1:17:00]** doing random acts of vandalism. Like they were for a while as a sport they were kicking car mirrors, so it was an epidemic of car mirrors that were smashed on Brunswick Street. They'd be putting garbage cans on the cars, and you know, just random vandalism.

Interviewer: As a result of people leaving the Brunswick House drunk?

Respondent: Yes. The Brunswick House has been a negative influence on our particular street. It's because **[1:17:30]** they just walk down that street. And I think it's worse a little closer to Bloor than where we are, but late at night we get kids yelling and screaming and carrying on. But it feels like one of the safer parts of the city for me because I do renovations everywhere in the city, and it still feels safe. I feel comfortable. But then there's more – **[1:18:00]** like on College and Bathurst there's a lot of stuff going on there. And my son actually

the other day got mugged and beaten up. This was on College Street.

Interviewer: College near Bathurst?

Respondent: Yes. College and Bathurst. There's a lot of activity around College and Bathurst, and a lot of it is connected to the drinking and the nightlife around. So I think the big change for our neighbourhood **[1:18:30]** is that there's a lot more people inebriated than there used to be.

Interviewer: Well and it's the kind of – those bars that close late at night.

Respondent: Yes. So that has made it feel a little more – you know. But it still doesn't feel – like we don't have gangs here, or really scary things that are connected like some of the Jane, Finch, or some of the public housing and stuff like that. It **[1:19:00]** doesn't feel unsafe, but you know?

Interviewer: But those kinds of places certainly add to it. What a worry about that having happened to your son. My god.

Respondent: Yeah. He doesn't want to talk about it, so it's like – and there are a lot. There are quite a few fights around the College and Bathurst area.

Interviewer: Yeah. On our side of Bathurst that has just happened in the last few years. A couple of places that have opened up on **[1:19:30]** the east.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: East of Bathurst on College.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah. So we have to avoid them.

Respondent: Yeah. It's starting to get a little rowdy around there.

Interviewer: Do you feel that the University of Toronto has any kind of influence on our neighbourhood?

Respondent: Yes. I'm very thankful for it because the way I look at the U of T, if we didn't have U of T maintaining their grounds, we'd have a thousand condominiums all around us.

Interviewer: Ah yeah, and we sure don't want them. **[1:20:00]** Yeah.

Respondent: I think that's maintained. And I think that our neighbourhood is influenced a lot by U of T because we have a lot of businesses and places that cater to students, and that's a good thing because it keeps some of the stores a little less posh, and a little less catering to – you know, because the Annex could – there's a lot of wealthy people in the Annex, and a lot of this stuff could disappear. **[1:20:30]** But I think the other part of it is that for me, the stores – Bloor Street has just become a Mecca for restaurants and eating. And part of the high turnover, I know that for instance, the corner restaurant next to the hardware store – this was years ago, they were asking ten thousand a month rent. I know where Sobey's was it used to be **[1:21:00]** a DVD rental place, like a VHS rental, and they were wanting fifteen thousand a month for that space.

Interviewer: So those have to become very successful stores just to start off by paying the rent.

Respondent: Yes. They have to be like a Starbucks, or a Sobey's. There used to be on Bloor Street a lot of second-hand DVD stores. They've all disappeared. I knew one guy that was **[1:21:30]** an owner and he said the rent just went crazy. Money and taxes have changed the way the city has functioned because the tax – I mean I was talking to Marty at Wiener's. His taxes are unreal. I mean they're just astronomical.

Interviewer: Yeah. So either the rent is astronomical or the taxes.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you're sixty-one now, you moved to this neighbourhood. You were about five or six.

Respondent: Six. **[1:22:00]** Yes.

Interviewer: And you were out of this neighbourhood for maybe three years in between. You know the neighbourhood well, and you've discussed so much so intelligently and articulately. Before when you knew you were coming after I had phoned you and we had made our appointment, was there anything that you were thinking about that you thought I might ask you about or that you might want to include as you talked about living here for so many years and the changes?

Respondent: **[1:22:30]** No, not really. My dilemma always has been in the last little while, is I've wanted to move for the longest time, but my kids won't let me because they really like it around here. But I don't like living around rich people. Like I don't like that. Kind of like everybody that lives around me has a million-dollar home, **[1:23:00]** and they're either stockbrokers, or doctors, or professors. I miss the middle-class. I miss the ethnicity. I miss the students. I miss all the things I talked about. I miss Kensington Market. I think it's very bland now. I miss colourful Jewish merchants hocking their goods. And I think the place has become bland. It's starting to get bland, and upscale, and **[1:23:30]** kind of like if you walk by my house, even though I'm a contractor, my house is probably one of the least well maintained houses on the block and I wish there were more houses that were dumpy and wrecked.

Interviewer: Have the lived-in look.

Respondent: Yeah. I mean everything is now like – it's just too much for me. The money in the area and the people that live in it. Even parking **[1:24:00]** my car, I don't even like to park my car because I might hit a Porsche or a Lambo or something like this, you know? And it's just out of hand. And I miss the basics of the neighbourhood. I miss the down-to-earth. We're no longer a down-to-earth neighbourhood. I mean Carolyn has a friend who's a real estate agent, and there's a house that sold on Robert Street for one-and-a-half million dollars.

Interviewer: You bet that. I heard that.

Respondent: **[1:24:30]** And that's just kind of like…

Interviewer: Yeah. That's who's moving in.

Respondent: Yes. And this is not my cup of tea. And I think the other thing that I really feel badly for is that the kids that lived here and grew up here can't afford to live here. Like my kids really can't afford to – like a one or two-bedroom in this area is like twelve hundred to sixteen hundred dollars a month. The rents are outrageous. **[1:25:00]** That, I feel like I wish my neighbourhood – and the other part of all the houses prices going up is that your taxes go up. And unless you sell your house, there's no advantage to house prices going up except you pay more taxes. So those combination of things is kind of like why? The city is changing much too rapidly. We're moving much too Manhattan-like. That the downtown core will **[1:25:30]** become a haven for people to have a lot of money, and all the poor people will be living in the outskirts of town. I feel sorry for the kids growing up in the neighbourhood because they won't experience the diversity that would be nice in the area. The different ethnic groups, the older people, all kinds. So I think that **[1:26:00]** that's the part I miss.

Interviewer: Less colourful.

Respondent: It's less colourful, and yeah, it's more bland, and more kind of like – that's the only thing that I have about the neighbourhood. I really – there's nothing you can do. The hard thing about neighbourhoods that are changing and become more upscale is it's just what happens. It happens in a lot of neighbourhoods. The Annex area is one of the most **[1:26:30]** desirable areas to live in Toronto, and then so it draws a lot of money. And if that's what it's going to be, then the old-timers like myself – that's not what we're about, you know? That's not what this neighbourhood was about, but there's nothing much you can do about it. You can't change the fact that this is a really appealing neighbourhood to live in.

Interviewer: Yeah. And now especially because your children are at home and they don't want to budge. **[1:27:00]** It's convenient.

Respondent: Yes. So I think the only way that a lot of people stay in this area is if the houses pass from family member to family member, which is happening. I mean I just did an estimate for a young Chinese couple, and they had the house passed down to them from their parents. And actually there's a certain number of Jewish people moving **[1:27:30]** back in the area because the parents still own the home, so they like this area.

Interviewer: They're lucky.

Respondent: Yes. They're lucky.

Interviewer: The parents bought the homes for twenty-five thousand dollars. Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I'm going to turn this off. Just first of all, right with the tape turned on, I just wanted to say thank you very, very much.

Respondent: You're welcome.

Interviewer: You've just a fountain of wealth of information expressed very clearly.

Respondent: Good.

Interviewer: So thank you very, very much.

Respondent: Good.

Interviewer: Okay. Just please go ahead, yeah.

Respondent: Well Yorkville was **[1:28:00]** very much a part of our neighbourhood, and we had a lot of – of course in those days, people lived all over Yorkville. It wasn't like it is now. You know, I remember spending time in a house and we'd all maybe be twenty of us in a room crashing in on a floor. And a lot of these young people, they spilled over and they lived in the Annex area in the rooming houses and the random rooms, and we rented too there.

[1:28:30] I remember in the house that I'm living in we had a guy on the third floor, a Hare Krishna guy, and on the first floor we had the guitar player from Rough Trade. So we had a large influence of people like that. And of course, since there were a lot of students living here, it was a huge influence from Rochdale. And Rochdale was where everybody got drugs. And it had a huge **[1:29:00]** influence on the neighbourhood because not that the Annex was a drug area or anything like that, but everybody in the Annex, all the kids and teenagers, we knew about Rochdale. We knew people that lived there, and we would frequent it, and that was a very – kind of like it was a point of young people's place where we banded together to rebel against society. That was our **[1:29:30]** place that we went, and that was it. But I mean in the '60s and '70s, the Annex was very, very kind of like influenced by that whole cultural thing that happened. You know, Bloor Street would be full of people with long hair hanging around, tie-dyed shirts, and there were a lot of stores that catered to young people too, you know? We had shops and all kinds of things like that. So **[1:30:00]** it was a transitional period in the whole city.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right. Well thank you. I'm glad you talked about Rochdale because it's obviously significant.

Respondent: It was a very, very big part of our lives.

[01:30:15]

[End of recording]