

063 Janice Dembo**[0:00:00]**

Interviewer: Today is the 27th of June. I'm in the home of Janice Dembo. 27th of June, 2012. I'm in the home of Janice Dembo, and I want to say, Janice, thank you very much for allowing me to come and to meet with you.

Respondent: Oh no, not at all.

Interviewer: And you have been here since 1977.

Respondent: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: So I'm just going to throw questions at you. If you have more that you want to talk about or you feel **[0:00:30]** there are things that I have not...

Respondent: Maybe I should tell you from the beginning, finding the house.

Interviewer: Please. Take off.

Respondent: Well we wanted to live in Cabbagetown, and Cabbagetown was too expensive. And then we started to look in Riverdale, and Riverdale was too expensive. And so we came here to this area, and when we bought the house, which actually Phyllis Keller, the agent, had found, and signed **[0:01:00]** up, the owner of the house was Elizabeth Crystal, and somebody else offered more money, but we made a good impression on Elizabeth, and so she took our offer for the house, and also we gave her as much time as she wanted. You know, to find another place. Elizabeth **[0:01:30]** had been a – she was a Jehovah's Witness, a devout Jehovah's Witness, who'd come to Canada after the war from Austria. And I'm not sure, I think she didn't meet her husband here. No. I think she met him here, and he was also a Jehovah's Witness, and when they bought this house, the reason they moved here was it – being Jehovah's Witnesses who'd **[0:02:00]** been persecuted in, you know, Germany and Austria, they knew that they didn't want to move to the parts of Toronto where Germans or Austrians had moved. So

they specifically bought here because it was a Jewish neighbourhood.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Respondent: And so all of her best friends were Jewish [0:02:30] neighbours, particularly – and I wish I remembered the name, because she had a great friend who lived diagonally across where the acupuncture clinic is across the way.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And she was so proud of the son of that friend of hers because he became a Queen's Council, which she described to me as being [0:03:00] she gave – he was the lawyer to the Queen.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: And if I could find the documents from the – because he was, of course, the lawyer who did all of the legal work for her when we bought the house, and so they couldn't afford this house very much. So when they bought the house, they turned it into a rooming house.

Interviewer: [0:03:30] Do you have any idea what year they bought the house?

Respondent: 1953.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Respondent: And the most extraordinary thing about it was was they added on, you know, the little add-on portions that were added to these houses, and that became their bedroom. And they must have suffered tremendously during the warm, and after the war from the cold and that because, I have to tell [0:04:00] you, the – it has no basement. It just has a crawlspace, which the wind comes in, and it freezes in that room. I use it as a cold cellar in the winter.

Interviewer: And that was their bedroom.

- Respondent:** That was their bedroom.
- Interviewer:** And the rest was rented out?
- Respondent:** The rest was rented out. So they had that as their bedroom, and then the kitchen was like the dining room, [0:04:30] and...
- Interviewer:** With a stove and refrigerator.
- Respondent:** Yes. It had a stove and refrigerator, and it was hilariously decorated. It had these giant – above the wainscoting, they had wainscoting, it had huge Disney character [laughter] stick-ons all the way around. So we had [0:05:00] Donald Duck, and Goofy, and Minnie, and it was Mrs. Crystal's pride and joy. But they modernized the kitchen, which was also their sort of bathroom because it has little mirrors above the stove and that, and that's where they had kept their toothpaste and everything else, because it was only one bathroom in the house really.
- Interviewer:** One toilet in the house, I guess.
- Respondent:** There was – there were two toilets...
- Interviewer:** Oh, there were two.
- Respondent:** ...that they must have added later. But the only [0:05:30] bath was – and they put a shower downstairs. Anyway, and then there was a back staircase, which they took to go to the shared bathroom. And they lowered the ceiling heights of the kitchen and the dining room, which they used as their living room and put Danish modern lighting and that. [0:06:00] And I afterwards restored the dining room ceiling, which had the medallion and everything else.
- Interviewer:** So you just had to remove what they had done.
- Respondent:** Yeah. And I fixed – I remember filling sixty-three holes because it was – it was a huge job to do it, and restore it. This living room was rented to somebody. I don't know what his name was, second name was, but his name was John, and John and Mr. Schweller upstairs had [0:06:30] the expensive parts of the house. They were

the top renters, but I think John paid quite a lot because John had a shower stall in the basement, and a toilet, and then he had a little gas stove in there, and a beautiful old, wooden refrigerator, which she supplied. But the stove that was down there was very, very old. It was an antique stove, which I think leads me to believe that the [0:07:00] previous owners had also probably had rented out, or maybe they didn't. Maybe it was a kosher kitchen for Pesach or something downstairs, I don't know. But all there was was the big, you know, washing, stone washing sinks, and this toilet, and that.

Interviewer: So he had a lot that was is. I mean John had his own...

Respondent: Yes. Yes. He had this living room, the doors were closed, the [0:07:30] room had yellow and white striped wallpaper, and in the fireplace there was a bookshelf. It was built between the pillars of the fireplace, held up the bookshelf.

Interviewer: So the fireplace was hidden.

Respondent: It was hidden, yeah. So when we moved here, we removed that and of course, we spotted beforehand because she'd left it open, we knew that there was the [0:08:00] beautiful tiling and everything there.

Interviewer: So that's the tiling that...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...that you found when you removed the...

Respondent: Yes. And those tiles actually we've seen in the Smithsonian Museum. They do have them. I've seen them, and they came in that colour and dark green. And they're all...

Interviewer: Do you think that was part of the original house? Or somebody did that?

Respondent: No. This was part of the original house. Now this is an unusual house, and the reason I'm pointing these things out is you'll notice

[0:08:30] there's inlay flooring in the living room. It's the whole way around. It has walnut...

Interviewer: Beautiful floor.

Respondent: ...stained walnut in – going the whole way around in a pattern.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And then there has this extraordinary frames around the windows. It's not the standard – you know, the standard windows here all have the square disk.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: **[0:09:00]** And these are the pleated thing. And that was to accommodate the shutters, which we discovered. It was – that were living in the box below in the – and I just was curious because it was an indentation in there where you could see. There were these hinges.

Interviewer: So these had been removed and you...

Respondent: No, they were buried. They were buried and just filled in with newspapers, and the newspapers **[0:09:30]** that came out of there were from the Boer War. I've still got a little piece of one of them about the Boer War that I saved. And the – Edward Johnson, who was the owner of Susan's house, was a builder, and he built these houses – many of these houses, but he was also the **[0:10:00]** mason for Newman House.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: From what I understand. And Newman – and this house was built a little after Newman House was built, which Newman House is absolutely gorgeous.

Interviewer: And this house I saw was 1891.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And Newman House, which was, you know, the Catholic – I think he must have sort of wanted to create a [0:10:30] very grand house for himself.

Interviewer: Well it is grand. It is.

Respondent: Yes. So. And so it has all this, you know, heavy thing. Big, heavy moldings and that, and it never had a divided living room with the doors or anything like that.

Interviewer: Oh, so you have that open space.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Because I know that in my house, there's something that comes in.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It's not closed, but it's...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...smaller.

Respondent: [0:11:00] Yeah. No, most of the houses were divided. Like when I used to visit – oh god, I've gone blank. Mrs. Langer, who lived at 160, which was the house you sat and talked to Susan in...

Interviewer: Okay, yes.

Respondent: ...and you saw the doors there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: She had the doors. And she slept on one side, [0:11:30] and on the other side was her living room.

Interviewer: But you're right, this is unusual to have it – you have all the beautiful molding and up at the ceiling, but it doesn't break up your room.

Respondent: No. No. No.

Interviewer: So obviously you're interested in the history of your house...

Respondent: Oh very.

Interviewer: ...and of your neighbourhood, but your home in particular.

Respondent: Oh yes, yes. So Mrs. Crystal had run it as a rooming house, and she was a cleaning [0:12:00] lady as well, and her husband I think was an orderly in one of the hospitals. I'm not sure.

Interviewer: So their income was small.

Respondent: Small, yes.

Interviewer: Yeah. And that's why they rented out so much.

Respondent: Yes. And then in the bedroom, the big bedroom upstairs, lived Mr. Schweller. And Mr. Schweller rented two rooms and what we now [0:12:30] use as a bathroom was a kitchen. And Mr. Schweller, Mrs. Crystal – as soon as we bought the house said to me, "Now, don't, don't think you have to rent to Mr. Schweller because he's going to come and tell you he wants to be a tenant." She said, "He's a very wealthy man." And that was borne out, I think, by the fact [0:13:00] of for years, I redirected mail. He didn't pay for his mail to be directed, and it was from stockbrokers and all sorts of things, and he rented the second room to Mr. Gilbar. I think his name was Mr. Gilbar. And Mr. Gilbar – Mrs. Crystal – I don't know if this is true – said he worked for the post office, and he was also supposedly the local peeping Tom.

Interviewer: [0:13:30] [Laughs] Oh you have colourful stories about the...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...people who were tenants.

Respondent: And then in this living room, it's gone now because I've put modern windows in because it was so cold, there was a bullet hole through one of the windows, which must have been with a, you know, kids playing with pellet guns in those days. And then of course somewhere – and it is written on one of these shutters, I know, because I've saved it, was, "Somebody says fuck you." [0:14:00] And I just felt it had to be preserved. [Laughter]

Interviewer: And I'm sure the stained glass is the original stained glass.

Respondent: Yes. Now the stained glass is all the original.

Interviewer: Beautiful.

Respondent: And hand-painted. And Mrs. Crystal said the one in the entrance hall – I don't know if it was somebody from the museum, or somebody from the art school, but somebody came and [0:14:30] painted them, you know. Did a watercolour of them because they felt they were so beautiful. And the one inside is very, very beautiful. And so, you know, we began restoring, and I, of course – I'll carry on telling you about the tenants. And then there was a tiny bathroom, and which was shared by everybody on the third floor, the second [0:15:00] floor, and of course, Mr. and Mrs. Crystal. Now somebody by the name of John, who was English, had lived in the end room, and for years I kept sending back to England – there were these – also must have been – Mrs. Crystal said he drank a lot, and then I think she got rid of him. But it must have been a wealthy [0:15:30] young Englishman because notices would come from banks in England, you know, and I would be sending this stuff back to England, you know. And then on the third floor, I know a little girl was born here because she came when she was a teenager and asked if she could [0:16:00] come and see where she had been born. And so that's who was there before that. When we did the history on the house, which I've got to find for you...

Interviewer: Please, thank you.

- Respondent:** ...I'm the fifth owner. Now before Mrs. Crystal, there were people who lived here by the name of Tennenbaum or Tannenbaum. And I asked Norman Cook [0:16:30] about them, if he remembered them, and he said yes. He doesn't know if they were German Jews. They were religious, but not super religious, and they kept very much to themselves. He had a feeling they looked down on the Polish neighbours or the Polish neighbours, Jewish neighbours, didn't want to mix with them, but they didn't – and they were always very [0:17:00] somberly dressed.
- Interviewer:** And if they were German Jews...
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** ...they would have looked down on the Polish Jews.
- Respondent:** Yes, of course. Of course.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** And they probably didn't speak Yiddish either.
- Interviewer:** Yes. I agree. Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. So – but he said, you know, they were very decent people.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** He thinks they were in business. And so that accounts for three of us. We know the [0:17:30] first one was Edward Johnson, who built Susan's house, lived there, then built this one, and then moved on. I guess carrying on. And I wouldn't be at all surprised if he built a house lower down the street a few blocks – no, a few houses up from Doctor's Hospital because when I was in that house once, it certainly had [0:18:00] the same – it was a slightly different configuration, but it had the same – these big carvings and that, but didn't have the inlaid floor or anything like that, but it did have the fancier moldings and that.

- Interviewer:** So you do know a lot about the history of this house. When you find it, I mean you have it all...
- Respondent:** Yes, I will.
- Interviewer:** ...documented.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** We'll be happy to have a copy.
- Respondent:** Oh yes. No, no, no. **[0:18:30]** I know. It was well worth it. You see, when we had this Sesquicentennial, Sussex-Ulster, you know, we could buy the plaques of the ages, but also the person who'd come up with all the dates and everything, you paid him. I think I paid sixty dollars, which was a fortune in 19 – I can't remember when the **[0:19:00]** – was in the early '80s. I think it was about '81, '82. And this young man then went to the archives and did everything, finding out the history. But of course now I'm sure we could find out a whole lot more than we did previously because now you can trace where people came in on manifests from ships and things like that.
- Interviewer:** Well, but I appreciate what you already have.
- Respondent:** **[0:19:30]** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Because we're looking at the neighbourhood, and you more specifically could tell us a lot about this, 156 Major Street.
- Respondent:** And it was a very interesting neighbourhood. I actually loved the neighbourhood before it became gentrified because there were tremendous characters. First of all, everybody sat on their front porches, and there were...
- Interviewer:** At what time of day? Any time? Just...
- Respondent:** The whole day.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] The whole day? **[0:20:00]** [Laughs]

Respondent: They were there unless the weather was bad. [Laughter] They were there. Unless the weather was awful, they were there. They could tell you. You arrived home from work, you were told who'd been to your door, if people had been to your door, you were – they were – at first one took it amiss, you know. You sort of – but then afterwards you realized this was – [0:20:30] this was a neighbourhood watch, and there were such characters. And also many of the elderly people were illiterate and couldn't write, but they got letters from their children, or other people, and so you – or their eyesight was such, and you read them their letters. They would come and say, you know, "Come and do this, or I want you to write me a letter," and...

Interviewer: Now you came in – you moved here, you bought the house in [0:21:00] 1977.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: The neighbourhood – at that time, who made up the neighbourhood? Where were these people from? What languages did they speak?

Respondent: Well we were – we still had a lot of the old Jewish neighbours. We had a fair contingent of Hungarians. People were from all over, and then there were the Portuguese neighbours. You know, there's Rose, the [0:21:30] Slovaks, there were the Kalinkos who came from – I don't – they were also from Yugoslavia, but I can't remember where. There was Slovakia. I'm not sure. There were some Chinese neighbours. But a lot of Portuguese and old Jewish neighbours. And they were remarkable. People were generous, were – you know, [0:22:00] if there was a glut of tomatoes or whatever, everybody shared. If you were out trying to fix something in no time, particularly the Portuguese, they've got all – they're helping you. And we still have that in terms of Antero and his wonderful helping us. You know, when my carport blew away in [0:22:30] the storm – well it didn't blow away, it was about to blow away, and Antero nailed it all down because I was up north. And you know, saved the day, and...

Interviewer: Well and you talk about there was a generosity, and at the same time you would read their letters for them, and you would write for them.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So it went both ways.

Respondent: Oh yes, and with Mrs. Langer, I spent my life going [0:23:00] in the ambulance. We were always emergencies to Doctor's Hospital. She used to get extremely dehydrated despite the fact that we all tried to keep an eye on her, but you know, if you were working it was – Susan was – I took over. Susan did it for many years, and then I took over, and of course, we weren't around in the day, and then her heating would go off, and [0:23:30] you would take all your heaters and put them in there, and oh, I found myself signing as next of kin for operations and all kinds of things that went on.

Interviewer: Yes. So it was mutual.

Respondent: And you know, and then contacting her daughter in California and saying, you know, I think I should buy her a winter coat, you know? She needs a coat. Because after her son died, [0:24:00] she didn't have any family living here, and so...

Interviewer: So all of you became her chosen family.

Respondent: Yes, yes. And she was quite a character. And she was, in fact, very funny because she'd first of all – could tell you everything that was going on and that, and...

Interviewer: From the front porch?

Respondent: Yes, yes. She sat there. She was very great friends with her tenant, Mrs. Pasternak. [0:24:30] And Mr. Schweller, who apparently lived here. The three of them. And there was somebody else. They used to all sit on the porch, but after I bought the house – I don't know where Mr. Schweller went, and Mr. Gilbar – because they were the only – and John, the young man who lived in here in the living room. But they all sat out there. And then...

Interviewer: So that was the unofficial neighbourhood watch.

Respondent: Oh yes. Yes. [0:25:00] The unofficial neighbourhood watch. And in fact, Mrs. Langer's – got a caregiver who came to live with her in her last years and she only told me afterwards that after I'd split up from my husband, that she – he and his colleague that he was having an affair with [0:25:30] and subsequently married, used to come to the house during lunchtimes or different times of the day.

Interviewer: Oh no.

Respondent: And I said it would have been a help if she told me before. [Laughs] But anyway, people knew. But the thing that caused a – oh, I got into big trouble with all of the neighbours. I did the most terrible thing. In about 1979, [0:26:00] I think it was, I dug up the front lawn because it was such a hassle to take, you know, the old push lawnmower around to the front, and you know, it had this little tree there, and this big, huge tree now was a little tree. And so just had the square [0:26:30] and the tree, and so I dug it up and I put, you know, natural. And of course in those days, this was not done and I soon realized that – and everybody came to tell me. Everybody came to tell me.

Interviewer: What a terrible thing you had done?

Respondent: Oh yes. This was just everybody was appalled.

Interviewer: So they wanted a tree with grass around it.

Respondent: [0:27:00] Yes. A tree with grass around it, and you could have flowers and things like that. And as you know, if you look at the old – you can tell who are the old houses.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. So you were a pioneer.

Respondent: I was a pioneer, and then of course as the years went on, I soon discovered that the only things that really do grow are Norway Maple, a dark one, which I read the other day in the list of trees the city doesn't recommend you plant, is the dark [0:27:30] Norway

Maple. They prefer this. Because nothing grows under them, and they take – they have a – it's like it's dense. Dense superficial, thousands of...

Interviewer: So the roots.

Respondent: ...roots. So many of the things that I was growing successfully under the tree were in actual fact what my neighbours considered weeds because they were [0:28:00] Ontario natural plants. Of course, it's changed because as the trees got bigger, I've had to go to shade-loving ones because it used to be sun, and so there were all these weeds in my front garden.

Interviewer: So you had a hassle with your neighbours at that time.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Yeah. You talk about the front porch where a lot of people sat.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: The people watching, and people [0:28:30] socializing with each other.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you talk about what people had in their back gardens in '77 and '80?

Respondent: Oh. A lot of people were just lawn, like we were, and maybe grew tomatoes and things. But certainly all the Italians and all the Chinese, the gardens were completely devoted to [0:29:00] vegetables.

Interviewer: So did they use those gardens for sitting outside for barbecuing? Or that was vegetables?

Respondent: It was all vegetables, but people built a sort of porch thing, and you can see that – and I think it's at 146. Angela and Brian still have the – all the [0:29:30] grapes.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: It's a whole grape arbour, and I don't know if they took that out. We'll see this summer because they renovated. But you know, Angela for years, we'd all get an email or a note saying, "Please come and take the grapes." [Laughter] And then the other thing that was fascinating was when it came to wine time, all the [0:30:00] neighbours were very busy making wine. And I had – in those days, my cats were allowed out, and during that period they obviously used to come in the boxes with all the grape skins, and they would have blue feet and dark red feet. It was bluish from the Concord grapes, and [0:30:30] which were primarily what was used in those days, but they were also imported grapes. Now that's an interesting thing because many of these houses have, as you know, are front yards are owned by the city. They own up to our stairs.

Interviewer: I didn't know that.

Respondent: Yes. And that's why you get a free city tree because of – the city owns your [0:31:00] front yard because if they ever wanted, in those days, to widen the road or something, they can just, you know, come down and plow it all down, and I guess that was the thinking. However, what happened was as you know, the Italians and the Portuguese were all in the building trades, and they built illegal cellars. They – from under their fronts, they [0:31:30] built out...

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: And in fact, Drew and Doris ran into this problem at their house at 152. They bought the house and there was this, you know, this front room. And the city would not pass it. And it – they could not get a permit. They went [0:32:00] through all sorts of things. But eventually it was sorted out. And how I know about all of these illegal cellars was when I was at the – it was the sixty-fifth, I think – would it be seventy? No, I think it was the sixty-fifth birthday of my former boss, Art Eggleton. David Crombie, because [0:32:30] Art was part of the, you know, the group, the revolutionary group that, you know, got us the downtown area plan and everything, and

saving St. Jamestown and things like that – David Crombie told a very funny story about Art coming to him. And Art's constituency office was on College at Beatrice [0:33:00] on the south side of the road, and he came to him and he said, "I want to have going through executive and then council a large approval of what are currently illegal basements." And Crombie said, "How many?" And he said I think it was about three or four thousand of these things. [0:33:30] And it turned out that the whole of that area, which was the Italian part of town, and I guess it was happening here too because of Drew and Doris, but theirs became legal, whereas they didn't have a councillor here who, you know, got all of these illegal basements [laughs] made legal. So it was a fascinating sort [0:34:00] of thing, you know? And certainly the houses were very interesting. When you went in to see people's homes, you know how they lived in the old days here.

Interviewer: Do you want to tell me what you're referring to?

Respondent: Well it was – everybody used the front rooms. There might be the front, this portion, but it was the living room. [0:34:30] But then the next room was always – behind the glass doors were always...

Interviewer: A bedroom.

Respondent: ...bedroom. Yes.

Interviewer: So what we would use as a living room and a dining room...

Respondent: Dining room.

Interviewer: ...they used as a living room, and then bodies.

Respondent: Yes. And then the kitchen was the dining room.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And the other thing when there was a lot of Portuguese neighbours was the sardines. Everybody barbecued sardines, [0:35:00] or they cooked the salt cod. And the smell would pervade, you know, the area.

Interviewer: Was it an unpleasant smell?

Respondent: Well the – it was. I think the sardines certainly, but then, you know, I thought about it, and well I'm sure some of the things – I certainly know when I moved to Canada you couldn't serve any Canadians I knew curry. I mean – and, you know, [0:35:30] whenever I cook curry, people had a fit at the smell. They certainly weren't even going to taste it, and that was funny. We had wonderful Ugandan neighbours when we moved in here. They were lovely people from Uganda, East Indians, and I loved it when they had parties because they always felt they had to make up [0:36:00] for any noise that might occur, and the day of the party – first of all, they'd given you good warning beforehand and said, "You know, we'll all be out in the backyard, and there might be a lot of people out front," and you know. "We promise we'll be gone by eleven kind of thing, but we don't want to disturb." They would arrive with a tray loaded with, you know, the minced meat kabobs on the...

Interviewer: You mean for the neighbours?

Respondent: [0:36:30] For the immediate neighbours you got...

Interviewer: Right. For the inconvenience of the party.

Respondent: ...for the party, you were provided with a large tray, which was an absolute feast.

Interviewer: What a beautiful way of compensating you.

Respondent: Yes. And the main – I loved those neighbours. They were wonderful rose gardeners. And the mother, who was an elderly lady, used to sit on the back porch with [0:37:00] – I have one of them. I actually own it, but it's been put away. With a horsehair, made with a horse's tail, and then it would be a beaded handle. We use them all over Africa, and you swish it to keep the flies off you in the summer or the insects, and she would sit on the verandah, and they used to have hanging – just, you know, they braid all the [0:37:30] garlic, and there would be – just when the wind blew. Of course you would get a waft of garlic. [Laughs]

Interviewer: So what you said earlier on how much you missed the way it was...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...because it was so colourful, and that's a beautiful example.

Respondent: Oh it was.

Interviewer: Fabulous.

Respondent: It was. But people were very, very – there was always something going on. And, you know, of course this lane has retained a bit of it. The Brunswick, Major lane we have a party every year. [0:38:00] We've just had our...

Interviewer: In the lane?

Respondent: Yes. We have a barbecue. What happens is Susan Purvis and her husband, Bryn, and George and Mary Kwan, and one other neighbour, they bring out their big barbecues and folding tables, and then [0:38:30] it starts at five o'clock, and you bring your own meat, but everybody brings a...

Interviewer: A side dish.

Respondent: A side dish of some sort. And we have a wonderful party, and the children, you know, are doing games, and the dogs...

Interviewer: And are there tables out there? Or people bring chairs?

Respondent: Oh tables. Yes. Susan will probably be able to give you some photographs. And we bring our own chairs, and we bring our own booze, and well [0:39:00] this year's went to 12:15, we were out there.

Interviewer: So it's a real community.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: A real neighbourhood.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And when Donald from DT became aware of it, last year he sent us a big platter of mushroom strudels, and this year he sent an apple strudel.

Interviewer: He's a very nice neighbour.

Respondent: Oh, he's a wonderful man. And his story is incredible. He has a wonderful [0:39:30] story.

Interviewer: I haven't heard it yet.

Respondent: Yes, yes. It's a wonderful story. He is a real gift to humanity as well, but his life story is quite extraordinary.

Interviewer: Well maybe we can talk about that after. [Laughs] You talk about the lane. When you moved here in '77, was that lane paved?

Respondent: No, no. It was a swamp.

Interviewer: Okay. So tell me.

Respondent: Oh my god.

Interviewer: What changed?

Respondent: You had to have, you know, galoshes as I call them. [Laughter] [0:40:00] And big boots. You could – oh my goodness. When spring came, it was appalling. First of all, we didn't have any drain out there, so it just would sort of form and it was unlit.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: And it was – and we were all the little garages. Oh, and I forgot about the chop shop. Oh, that's an interesting link. The owner – I

almost forgot to tell you about the fish store. [0:40:30] Well the – directly behind me was a huge garage, not as high as any of the two – you know, the one that's lower down. It was a garage that was owned by the fish, the Harbord Fish Store. And the Harbord Fish Store kept equipment and, I suppose, all sorts [0:41:00] of things in there. And I'll tell you about them, and then I'll tell you about the chop shop. And the Harbord Fish Store served probably – sold fish to the Jews of Forest Hill and the whole Jewish neighbourhood here and that, because...

Interviewer: It was a very successful business.

Respondent: It was a – yes. A huge business. And I didn't know the first owners, [0:41:30] who actually owned – the one owned, I think, Susan's house. And they became Epicure Smoked Salmon.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: And then the workers bought it from them, but the big fun of the Harbord Fish Store, wasn't so nice when they put the smelly fish water in the drains on hot summer's days, but anyway, once a week [0:42:00] or maybe twice a week, a truck would come from Buffalo loaded with carp, live carp. And a man would climb on top and fish them out. And there was a dog who lived across the way, and he would bark upstairs, go crazy, and just bark and bark and bark [0:42:30] because fishes would drop out and be scuppering all over the sidewalk, and it was great – it was the event of the week. And there were three guys who lived there, two of whom above the store who – one, was it Lottario? They won the jackpot, and they rented a room to Bob, and Bob [0:43:00] used to sit in the corner store every night with Jack, who Jack and rose owned the corner store, which was a real little old smoke shop. And he would sit there and keep him company until 10:30 or so, so that he was safe. And it was very sad because Bob was a bit of a tippler and I think a little [0:43:30] on the simple side, and he sort of became – he became homeless after that, and I'm not quite sure what's happened with him, after they moved because, of course...

Interviewer: So he was with them, and they kind of took care of...

Respondent: Yes, yes. Yes. And also Jack, when Jack and Rose sold the shop, and the shop was definitely where you went also to know anything. And also people who didn't have TV, like Bob and that, would [0:44:00] sit there with Jack and Rose, and...

Interviewer: So it was kind of one of the hubs of the community.

Respondent: Oh, it was very much a hub of the community. And you know, a friend of mine grew up in the neighbourhood, and also – and it was the whole way down to Queen Street and everything, were the little corner stores. Although they were closed on Sundays, everybody went in through the back door. [Laughter] [0:44:30] Everybody shopped and got their milk, and everything else – they would pull the shutters down, and there was a roaring trade that took place because the Jewish neighbours couldn't shop on Saturday, and they would all...

Interviewer: So business was on.

Respondent: Business was on, and everybody knew that you could, if you wanted an ice cream or you'd run out of something, the little corner store always had it. [0:45:00] And then – anyway, I'll get to the chop shop now, and then I have to tell you about Mrs. Fuda's grocery store. And the chop shop, what happened was we went through this extraordinary spate of things being stolen from cars. Car parts. You'd come out – I remember Jack having his car, and [0:45:30] was missing its front grill. I went through umpteen light – you know, the front lights and backlights. I went through three batteries.

Interviewer: So they were very active.

Respondent: And it turned out – and all the neighbours were being robbed. It was – and we all became a bit suspicious, and we actually [0:46:00] used to see cops going in there and that, into the garage, and so we brought it to the attention of – and I can't remember her name. She was quite the best, best constituency assistant to Dale Martin. Susan Potts would remember her. And she was an American. And when we – before we knew there was a chop shop

there, when we told her this was going on, she said there must be a chop shop. [0:46:30] And we didn't know what a chop shop was.

Interviewer: I'm assuming what it is, but I've never heard of it.

Respondent: Well it turns out to be where you sell stolen car parts. And she said, "Well you should start watching in the lane, because obviously this must be taking place in the lane and in the areas here, and see if you see people coming and going." And sure enough, we did, and we reported it. [0:47:00] And it took quite a while for them to get action on it because we think the police were in on the action.

Interviewer: Well and that's what you had just said, that you saw police there, so they were also – they were shopping there too.

Respondent: Yes. Now the other thing that I forgot to tell you with the chop – and then I must tell you about Mrs. Fuda was – and this was a very funny story because, you know, the laneway was – I'm responsible, actually, for getting the lane – that we bought the [0:47:30] lane, and paved. I worked very hard on that with my friend, Dennis Hefferon, who worked through the City Hall things for us to...

Interviewer: So when was that? We're bouncing back and forth a bit, but since we're talking about...

Respondent: The lane would have been in the – about 1990.

Interviewer: Oh. Oh, so you lived here for many years with that mud in the back there.

Respondent: Oh you have no idea. [0:48:00] Oh, well first of all, you couldn't get through with the snow. It was the snow and ice. I used to – if I knew there was a big snowfall coming – tells you how cheap parking was – I used to take my car and park it in Yorkville in the covered parking.

Interviewer: That's a long schlep between...

Respondent: Yes. But it cost – I remember that. The highest I paid was twenty-one fifty for the week.

- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** And so [0:48:30] that I – at least if I had to go somewhere, you know, north of Eglinton or anything else, I knew because you knew. Nothing – when the lane froze, unless you had front-wheel drive and you were strong...
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** ...you couldn't get your car out of there.
- Interviewer:** And as you say, in the spring it was horrible. It was all melting.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Messy. Very, very messy. Yes.
- Respondent:** But [0:49:00] anyway...
- Interviewer:** I had no idea that it was that late as 1990 that it was finally paved.
- Respondent:** Yes. Anyway, then we had a very interesting few years. A lot of the garages were rented, and she was a better-looking woman then, but you know famous Florence.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** Well Florence did – used to bring her clients [0:49:30] to the garages. [Laughter]
- Interviewer:** One garage? Or several?
- Respondent:** Yes. And there was a lovely man across the way who was gay, and he burst in on a scene, and he'd soon moved his car elsewhere. It was just a little bit too much for him. However, Florence – I discovered – I used to come home and I'd think, oh, I can smell things in my garden, you know? And I could smell urine and odd things. And then – and also [0:50:00] the lane and the garages, you always found – we didn't have a garage, but you always found

condoms and things like that. Well anyway, I soon realized after seeing the stains on my canvas deck chairs, and also by the strange perfume my cat, Bronson had, who Florence used to pet on the street and that, was that [0:50:30] Florence was bringing her clients to my yard when I was at work.

Interviewer: Oh, so outdoors under the sun.

Respondent: Sun.

Interviewer: There was a lot of action at your house at noon hour and in your back garden...

Respondent: [Laughs] Yes.

Interviewer: ...between your ex-husband and Florence.

Respondent: Mm-hm. Well it was also shaded, and the corner had a patio under the big back tree.

Interviewer: So Florence used the garage at times, or your back garden at other times.

Respondent: Yes. No, she didn't use my garage, [0:51:00] she used the other garages because I didn't have a garage because when I moved here I was so scared of spiders, and this garage was one of these low things that had no lighting, and you bumped against the ceiling of it, and the sides, and you had to open these doors into this dark thing, and so...

Interviewer: So you got rid of your garage?

Respondent: I got rid of it, and that was funny [0:51:30] because when I got rid of the garage, had a permit, but I didn't understand that you had to put it up that day or something. And I think Mark Coimbra, whose father's just died, who then was a – oh, he's about fifteen. He built quite a number of our fences, and he now owns a trucking company, and Mark took it [0:52:00] down and within minutes there was an inspector. The neighbours called an inspector immediately.

Interviewer: Oh, so you had the permit, but you hadn't put it into the window.

Respondent: No. I'd forgotten to do that.

Interviewer: Yeah. So he was a good little businessman.

Respondent: Who?

Interviewer: Mark.

Respondent: Oh Mark. Mark, yes he did. And I remember Mrs. Crystal, when he bought his first truck saying, you know, Mark had asked her to loan her money, and we – [0:52:30] he asked us too, but unfortunately we were so up to our ears in this mortgage and things, having bought the most expensive house on the street and the neighbourhood, we paid seventy-four thousand. People thought we were out of our mind, and even more so people thought to buy opposite a fish shop that was emptying all the scales and the smelly water into the drain.

Interviewer: You appreciate the show you had [0:53:00] every week [laughter] with the dog barking, and the fish flopping on the sidewalk. [Laughs]

Respondent: Yes, yes. Oh yeah. But it was – you know, the neighbourhood wasn't noisy in any way. It was...

Interviewer: Safe?

Respondent: Oh, it was always very safe. It was always very safe. I always laughed at my friends from north Toronto and that who would arrive, and you know, would come and ask me to walk them to their car at night or something [0:53:30] like that. And we also knew all of our – there were quite a few, you know, mentally challenged people, and some people who were suffering maybe from schizophrenia, and you knew them, and you knew if there was a change. You know? There was the bicycle man who spent his life just collecting different parts of bicycles. He didn't steal them, but he just attached them to fences, and [0:54:00] attached other things to them, and I knew there was something wrong with the

bicycle man once because he had suddenly acquired a knife and was chopping up pizza boxes and stabbing them, and that instance I knew to call Public Health and say, I think – one of your nurses, I think there's been a change in behaviour. And you knew. You knew – you know, people would come and say, "Oh, you know, Mrs. So-and-so." I mean just no, no, [0:54:30] no, that's her normal behaviour.

Interviewer: So they were part of the neighbourhood...

Respondent: It was a world.

Interviewer: ...they were part of the – and if they needed help then you got help for them.

Respondent: Oh, absolutely. You know, if somebody was in trouble, everybody knew where to go. You know? There would be odd incidents where somebody would come here and say, "Do you know" – you know, late at night, "Do you know somebody who's a lawyer?" You know, "My son's got into trouble," or this, or that.

Interviewer: So you keep coming back to the fact that [0:55:00] it was a real neighbourhood.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Now you wanted to say something about Fuda, the corner store.

Respondent: Oh. Mrs. Fuda was an Italian, and she and her husband – he sat at the cash register in a suit, and she was this lovely Italian woman, and Friday, like if you go to Fiesta Farms or to Lady Vince Foods, or to any of these places, Friday was big business day, and of course [0:55:30] she had a big – where, in the corner store, back where they keep the flowers – there was always the big fridge there and another one underneath, but the doors opened, and there was a big chopping block, and Mrs. Fuda would be – you know, if you wanted a chicken, she'd chop the head off it, and you'd get – if you wanted veal cutlets...

Interviewer: So she had meat there in addition.

Respondent: Oh yes. Oh, and you got beautiful meat, and she'd hammer your [0:56:00] schnitzels for you, and you know, "Do you want the eggs from inside of the chicken?" It was like – it was just so old world.

Interviewer: And that was Robert and Harbord?

Respondent: Yes. And it was called Fuda's. And I don't know if the family still own the building because I know that the owners who – of the store who are lovely, we've had a number of very nice owners there.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Korean owners since then. [0:56:30] But I know they don't own the apartment above.

Interviewer: Well you know, I live on Borden Street now...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...and I've been there for twelve years. And for the twelve years before I moved to Borden Street...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...I lived on Robert Street, and Johnny Fuda, Mr. and Mrs. Fuda's son, was my landlord.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Lived at 158 Robert Street, and Johnny Fuda was my landlord.

Respondent: Isn't that something?

Interviewer: And I'll tell you a story after I turn this off...

Respondent: Oh, but it was wonderful. It was just marvellous.

Interviewer: [0:57:00] Yeah. Yeah.

- Respondent:** And you know, she – she'd ask you earlier in the week when you were getting your milk and things, and saying, you know, "Is anything special you want – need to get?" And that. You know, what you didn't get there, you got down in Kensington Market.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So talk to me about Kensington Market now. You've naturally just gone to it. How – what was it like, what is it like? **[0:57:30]** How much have you used it?
- Respondent:** Oh, I think it's changed. Oh, it's not what it was. Oh, it was such a wonderful market. Oh, I mean I remember being – when I first visited Toronto in the '60s, because my sisters lived here since then, and oh, I remember I used to go to Perlmutter's, and oh, and the herrings in the barrel, and you had to taste everything. **[0:58:00]** And it was – oh, it was wonderful. The only thing that I couldn't stand was the – I used to feel so bad about the animals in the cages. You know, the chickens, and the goats, and the sheep, and everything else. That was, you know, it was – and it was like that – it was like that in the '70s when I came here, the Market. And the Market always was such fun. We used to have garbage day **[0:58:30]** was Friday, and also at the night, but particularly on garbage – Thursday night, after the Market closed, it was racoon city.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** They were running up and down. It was just such fun.
- Interviewer:** They were fed very well that night, obviously.
- Respondent:** Oh my god, you can't believe it. It was – and it was only on summer days was it smelly, you know? And just as the fish shop was. But oh, the stores **[0:59:00]** and what you got, and what you tasted, and it was very exciting.
- Interviewer:** So you feel it's lost a lot of...
- Respondent:** Oh it has.
- Interviewer:** ...life at that time.

Respondent: Oh, it was wonderful, you know? I really felt so sad when the egg lady went two years ago. And she was just lovely. She – and you could get duck eggs, and all kinds of things, and [0:59:30] oh no, I used to go – I was all – but I shopped at the Market before I even moved to the neighbourhood.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. So that was already an important place.

Respondent: Yes. I've never been a supermarket person.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: I like to smell and feel things.

Interviewer: Well and you talked about the corner stores, how much you liked...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...using those.

Respondent: Yes. And one of the funniest things was in one of the fish stores in the Market one – it was [1:00:00] just before Rosh Hashanah or Pesach, and this elderly lady said to us, "Come. I'm going to give you a huge bargain. You can have all of these shrimps for ten dollars because the Jews won't be buying this week [laughter] and I have to sell them." [Laughter]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And you know, it was a – but [1:00:30] I think the Market has gained from the South American stores. You know, the lovely empanadas. And I knew the food because I have friends from Colombia, and Peru, and Chile, so I knew many of the things to buy. But, you know, you could always find the most exotic things. And it – [1:01:00] I don't know. It was always the Market – I always felt like a tourist.

Interviewer: Ah. Yeah. It was not the mundane every day.

Respondent: Shopping never was – even with – there there was – I think one of the places, I think it's Oxford – yes, the Oxford Green [1:01:30] Grocer is still – they've sold the store, but they still have, and I don't know where they've moved, or whether they're there, but they had a huge basement with fridges, and also keeping things cool, and they are wholesalers to restaurants and that. And so you'd ask for things upstairs, and they'd say, "No, come downstairs. I've got it there." And you would get all kinds of things you never see in a store. And beautiful, fresh, fresh [1:02:00] things, and it was – it was really lovely. And also even the clothes were more interesting. I mean you'd get your Tom's in the old days. Oh my god. I remember buying, oh, when he first took over from his father, and he bought – he had real designer things before he had to compete with [1:02:30] Winners and things, and you could buy with a label cut out Carolina Herreras and, you know, real, real bargains. And be so elegant. And also it was the fun of everything. The bargaining.

Interviewer: Yeah. It was a true market.

Respondent: It was a market.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Talk about institutions. Do you have any thoughts or feelings about the university being right on the edge [1:03:00] of our neighbourhood?

Respondent: Well I get really angry about the university. It has this holier than thou, the haughty attitude. No, no. It's [1:03:30] not respectful. I mean when you look at that thing on the corner of Harbord and...

Interviewer: The library?

Respondent: No. The – well the library is bad enough, but the thing when they were going to have it all lit up.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I mean nobody wanted it. It was – this was the entrance to the university. [1:04:00] Everything is always they know better. The only way I can describe U of T's attitude is the Victorian attitude to

the colonies and the people in the colonies, namely the natives. We know what's good for you, and we know what's better to you, for you. And so I've – this whole thing that's going on now [1:04:30] really upsets me from that point of view, but I'm not surprised.

Interviewer: It's more of the same.

Respondent: It's more of the same, and you know, having worked as the race relations coordinator for the City of Toronto, we had complaints years and years ago about to do with hiring of tenured staff and things like that, and discrimination, and the university knew better than, and [1:05:00] you know, the then President of the university would not answer to the committee or anything like that, and he was very surprised when June Rowlands took him on, and things like that. And you know, it showed up there were no policies, you know? There were – you know, when they allowed the Heritage Front and the Aryan Nation to speak in the name of academic freedom, [1:05:30] and things like that, so I saw a different thing. And it was again, as I say, as a South African I can certainly say and knowing British history that it's a colonial Victorian attitude, and I don't think they are part of the neighbourhood.

Interviewer: Well, you know, we are in the midst of another battle with them.

Respondent: I know. I signed the letter.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. So it hasn't changed.

Respondent: No, it hasn't changed. [1:06:00] It hasn't changed, and I think it's wrong. And it's got enough of its own land there, and also, you know, I'm told that they're not hiring their own graduates to be tenured staff. They're bringing in Americans and people from elsewhere, and that's – that says you don't – you're not part of who [1:06:30] we are.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: And I find that sad. I hope I don't get sued over that, but...

- Interviewer:** [Laughs] I think you – there are a lot of people in this neighbourhood who share those sentiments. Well you know that's why we're battling with them at this moment.
- Respondent:** Yes. Yes, no. No, I don't – you know. And certainly in terms of the preservation of Victorian buildings that may be owned [1:07:00] by them, it's been a real fight.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. Well we do appreciate the beauty of our neighbourhood, and to raze any of these buildings and put up huge other buildings changes the beauty of what we appreciate.
- Respondent:** Well it's not just huge other buildings. It's huge ugly buildings. You know, it would be different if they went and hired architects [1:07:30] who built something that was beautiful and fitted in. You know, you look at the ROM – I mean not the ROM, the AGO, it's beautiful.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** And it's going to be gorgeous in the park. I know it took quite a bit of work on the part of the Grange Residents' Association and that, but you know, we have a history here and if you [1:08:00] don't know your history, we're going to repeat it all. And you know, some of our history in this area has not been exactly the best. I mean you know, Toronto has not had a good history. I mean I took a girlfriend of mine who grew up in this neighbourhood to the Beaches to swim, and she was in her forties and she had never been to the Beach because when she was growing up, Jews didn't go to the Beach [1:08:30] because of the no Jews – you know? Or darks or blacks were allowed there.
- Interviewer:** You know...
- Respondent:** And she grew up never swimming. She learned to swim, you know, in her forties because she couldn't go to the Beach where, you know, she might have learned to have swum. You have the riot of Christie Pits, and if you don't remember all of these things – part of why this neighbourhood [1:09:00] and HVRA – and we have to keep it this way, and it's hard work.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It's hard work. You know, when you get people moving in who don't want to respect all of this, you have a problem because you have to remember when people came – and as refugees to this area, they moved into an area which had been the bricklayers, the white working [1:09:30] class, and this neighbourhood welcomed – well not welcomed, but the Jews and the blacks moved here. And then people came who came from, you know, Eastern European countries to settle here. The Hungarians and everything. And those were not countries that were friendly maybe to Jews and blacks, but they learned to live and to respect each other. And as Norman [1:10:00] Cook said, you know, we learned – it became so exciting, and it was the children. And all of this – you know, to say it, to look after a city, to look after for a university or anywhere, it's like a marriage and a family. It's damn hard work.

Interviewer: Yeah, you do have to work on it. Yeah, and Norman Cook did say that they did get along, the Chinese, the blacks, the...

Respondent: [1:10:30] Yes.

Interviewer: ...whatever. The Jews, the Germans...

Respondent: And they made a point of it. And even if they didn't, maybe on the inside they said things and did that, he did mention one person to me who was particularly anti-blacks and anti-Semitic and that, but you know, he was kept in check by the rest of the neighbourhood. And that's what's so good about it is that we – you know, it was the respect and the learning, [1:11:00] and the – and you know, you see it and the people who live here.

Interviewer: Well and you described to me how protective you – I mean the people on the front were watching who was around, but with people who had any kind of disability, they were known in the neighbourhood, they were watched, they were helped. What do you feel we're like now in 2012 in this neighbourhood?

Respondent: I think that's changed. I think it has unfortunately. [1:11:30] You know, I think people just sort of walk past it or ignore it. I don't know. I think it has changed. And that you have young people, you know, like we have Ron Molton and his wife, Kate French, who moved in here. And whenever [1:12:00] they have anything that's – recently it's – Kate's an architect, so she's been very busy in the garden and doing things, so you know, we all get an email, "Do you want stepping stones? We have this." You know? That. "We've got so many bags of leftover soil." All of that kind of thing. And they are, you know – they've moved from the suburbs or elsewhere and have taken [1:12:30] on that old world thing.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Treating this neighbourhood as a neighbourhood.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It's not just where you live and go to work.

Respondent: Which is wonderful.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: You know, it is. It is the – and the – you know, the laneway is a dead-end laneway, and there's a new batch of babies now and I hope it happens for them, but when the children – the last generation of kids, [1:13:00] many of whom are teenagers now and just beginning – one parent was always on duty down at the bottom of the lane, sitting under the trees while the kids played basketball, or rode around in their little tricycles and things, and then there were would be mothers and fathers, would be out there until late at night with all the kids playing, and that's just wonderful. And there used to [1:13:30] be the hockey on the street. We used to see that, and we all employed all the kids, you know?

Interviewer: So they did jobs like shoveling or what?

Respondent: Oh yes, yes. Well Lindon and his brother, Quinn, when my back sort of gave out and that, and I approached their parents, Quinn was seven, [1:14:00] and Lindon was five, and we made a contract, you know, a dollar or a quarter or whatever it was, and the

first year – and believe you me, they were poor parents – Bryn and Susan were out there early in the morning clearing. But you know, it's seen them into university, and motorcycles and all kinds of things, and you know, there will be other kids and you know, that was because Mark Coimbra, you know, he also did [1:14:30] that sort of thing when he was the fix-it guy. And there were all these people who fixed, and the children who did things, and...

Interviewer: Would you describe what you see in terms of the changes? Who's living here now as opposed to 1977, 1980, 1985? What's the population composed of?

Respondent: I think we're getting a lot of – what happened was in the – when we moved in in the [1:15:00] late '70s, a lot of people who moved in were people who were teachers or maybe had a job at U of T, or Queen's Park, and they were – we were sort of – it was like a hippie generation, I think.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: It was very different. What's happening now [1:15:30] is there are a lot of younger people who either were in very well-paid jobs, or getting a lot of help from their families, and so that's a different...

Interviewer: So it's a more affluent...

Respondent: More affluent, yes. And it was also a change – I remember when we didn't want the patio, and we have wonderful people on the corner [1:16:00] now. And you know, people lower down the road, I remember running into a few, we're now talking probably ten years ago. And couldn't understand, you know, why we were concerned about a patio restaurant, you know. Now we have to – you know, the noise and everything. It's not noisy, but you hear, you know – noise travels very – and [1:16:30] saying, "Oh, but you know, you have to get used to this," you know? Look at cities like London and Paris. And you know, I don't know how happy they are about what goes on on College Street or on Bloor, you know, after midnight, and they certainly don't – and they wouldn't, you know, they were not at all supportive. And it was a very different – whereas [1:17:00] one finds with the older generation there's more of people

– they may abstain from things, but they wouldn't support things that might affect their neighbours.

Interviewer: Yeah. The word that comes to my mind is caring.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: That they – right now, if they don't live close enough to the patio, they don't care that you might have the inconvenience of noise.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And at that time, people cared more about each other, I think...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...might be what you're saying.

Respondent: [1:17:30] Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yes. But you know, we have wonderful people across the way, just you know, terrific.

Interviewer: Well I lived south of Messis and now I live south of Boulevard Café, so I know. [Laughs] I know these. I think I'm going to kind of wind us down.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: I'm wondering if before I came, when you were thinking about us meeting and having this conversation, whether there were some things [1:18:00] you thought you really wanted us to talk about, which perhaps we haven't touched on at all?

Respondent: No. I don't think so. I think I've remembered everything. I think what's interesting is, you know, for many of the people who move away, our relationships did continue with those people, and I know that's happening now. Like [1:18:30] you know, I kept in contact

with Mrs. Crystal, and I'm still visited by Jehovah's Witnesses who are trying to save me because, you know, she had – she left everything to the Jehovah's Witnesses when she died. And I know, you know, we have neighbours down the street who moved, and when we had the barbecue the other day, everybody was talking about, [1:19:00] you know, how it's been better for the particular neighbour because of her knees and you know, that living in a condo has been great. And people come back to our party who've moved to bigger houses and that.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the sense of belonging – they still feel they belong a little bit. Or they don't want to let go.

Respondent: Oh yes. Oh, and one of the funniest things, oh, I must tell you, is – this is a very old neighbourhood. Very different. [1:19:30] My neighbour, Jack, was a very gentle man, and could get really upset about stuff at times, and one day he came into the – tried to get into the laneway, and you know how people illegally park. And so they parked where – it was his entrance to his garage, [1:20:00] so he thought, "Well, I'll teach you a lesson. I'll park my car." Boy, the Ferwins here panicked Jack. "Janice, Janice. I don't know what to do. They're shaking my car, they're shaking my car." And screaming and that. So I said, "Jack, go in." I called 911. I called Susan, and we both went out in our nightdresses and just took on these young men and, you know, [laughter] and you know, there'd been many [1:20:30] times we've gone out over the years, and you just take people on. And what's changed is when that used to happen, it was seen as caring for your neighbours.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Now you're seen as batty. You're a batty old fogey.

Interviewer: So you're using the same word that I used, caring.

Respondent: [1:21:00] Yes.

Interviewer: That you were out there.

Respondent: Yeah. And people are, you know? I mean you know, if somebody notices something, and any of us – it's a very tight-knit little area. You know, from where the – Sheila has a vegetable garden, and everybody – you know, she says, "Oh please, come and get, you know, [1:21:30] some lettuce or whatever." It's her passion in the summer, and that the lower end of the lane is always in her garden.

Interviewer: You know, I found that in particular with Major Street.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Major south of here. Major here. Major south of Bloor. Major Street in particular. Most of us in this neighbourhood care about – or many of us do – care about a lot, but Major Street has these pockets of powerful [1:22:00] sense of connectedness and belonging, and...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And you know, there's another very interesting thing about Major Street. Major Street has had a lot of human rights people live on Major Street. We had lately a Cohen. There was one of the earlier Chairs of the Canadian Human Rights Commission. I worked in race relations, and you know, [1:22:30] in the good old fighting days for human rights and social justice. There'd been many people, many – Angela in the women's issues, there was the – and prior to that, before Angela Miles moved in there, Dodi and Don Pirie, and Dodi was quite a feminist and that.

Interviewer: With a social conscience.

Respondent: It's a real social [1:23:00] conscience. It's a very – it's a politically astute, caring thing. And of course we have Matt Cohen who lived here, and there've been many, many people.

Interviewer: Well I look at the – our board of directors at the Harbord Village...

Respondent: Yes.

- Interviewer:** ...and these are hardworking people working for this neighbourhood.
- Respondent:** Oh tremendously.
- Interviewer:** Really willing to put in that extra effort. But I have that feeling that [1:23:30] you've done that in this neighbourhood too.
- Respondent:** Yes. I've done it on a sort of – I'll go out on an issue if I become aware of the thing, and you know, I'll get the community police in or something like that because they're things that affect – or something happens, you know. Like I had a strange thing this week. Somebody stole my garden. I had organic potting soil, and [1:24:00] four bags of it, and somebody had to have come with a wheelbarrow or a thing, and that's odd. But apart from, you know, the forty dollars or whatever it was, it – my concern is people leave their garages open, their kids, da, da, da, da, so you know, you email. People – we'll all email each other or phone each other and notify each other if something – [1:24:30] because it could be the beginning of something.
- Interviewer:** Yes. Yeah.
- Respondent:** And – but I – you know, the reason we moved here was I lived in a condominium and I was on a board of a condominium at twenty-five years old, and I saw what went on in a condominium and I said, "Listen, you know, this is crazy to live in the sky and all of this sort of thing, and people not caring for each other." And [1:25:00] you know, I definitely wanted to be on the ground, and also in a neighbourhood, and I didn't realize when I moved here how wonderful it would be.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well I think we're going to close with that.
- Respondent:** We better, yes. I've got to go to – and do you want some herbs and things?
- Interviewer:** Well – let me just say officially thank you very much, it's been...
- Respondent:** Not at all.

Interviewer: ...such a pleasure, and I appreciate your time...

Respondent: No, no.

Interviewer: ...and all your – the wonderful information you've shared.

[01:25:28]

[At this time the recorder was turned off,
then turned on again a few minutes later for a few final remarks.]

[1:25:33]

Interviewer: Okay. Continuing with Janice. [Laughter] Thank you.

Respondent: Well one of the things I forgot was the dark period, and I call it the dark period because our neighbourhood, it wasn't who was in the neighbourhood, it was who came, bussed in every day into our neighbourhood. When we had the Morgentaler Clinic here **[1:26:00]**, we – which was on Harbord Street, we would get busloads of people who would be bussed in. The buses would park in front here. If you walked – I always remember having to walk to, you know, to catch the bus on the corner of Spadina, or the streetcar. You would be accosted **[1:26:30]** by these – well they were the paid people. There was an old lady and a whole series of ones who were paid, and they were there every day. And then you got these other people aborted. And as a woman, you would be walking on the street and you would be accosted by them, by people being hostile and trying to stop you because they thought you were going to go to the Morgentaler Clinic. And it was really awful. And then we started to come home to **[1:27:00]** these virulent flyers that looked like the sort of pictures in the protocols of the Elders of Zion, supposedly, you know, and about Morgentaler and that. And anti-Semitic, and it was just a horrible, horrible period. And I just felt I **[1:27:30]** just share it with you because it

was – it was just an intrusion onto our lives, just like the buses that bring these kids who get drunk, and stab people, and everything at the Brunswick. You just had this intrusion of people who had no idea of community, but felt they knew what was good for us.

[1:28:00] And in actual fact, it was very harmful, and it really did spoil the neighbourhood.

Interviewer: And then it culminated with the fire.

Respondent: Well not the fire, the bombing, which I slept through. It was quite extraordinary. No, the whole building – the whole front of the building was blown out.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well thank you, but there was something else you talked about before I turned the machine...

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: ...on again, and you talked about there used to be cats in the corner stores to take care of the mice?

Respondent: Oh yes, all the corner stores. **[1:28:30]** In fact, everywhere in Toronto. The corner stores have had cats, and city health is – the Public Health Department has made these stores all give up the cats. Many of these animals – I know from the local store they tried very hard to make their cat live at home with them, and eventually it ran away. **[1:29:00]** And so, you know, we've added to the number of cats out there who have probably – and these were working animals.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you want to be more explicit?

Respondent: And you know, they really did. And you know...

Interviewer: They rid them of mice and rats.

Respondent: They rid them of mice and that, and instead now we go into these stores, and they're full of pesticides. And they don't rid us of mice and insects. **[1:29:30]** And the other thing about it is, you know,

there are many, many more mice, I must tell you. And I saw a huge rat the other day.

Interviewer: In the neighbourhood. In the store.

Respondent: Yes. Not in the store, but in the neighbourhood. A rat ran from across the building site next to me, you know, crossing into the lane, and it was big.

Interviewer: Yeah, and that's what you meant when you said they were working cats.

Respondent: They were working cats. [1:30:00]

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And the people who had those cats cared for them and cared for them enough that, you know, there were other cats that they would become aware of and feed, and you know, other neighbours became involved to get them spayed and catch them, and you know, there'd been articles about, you know, Susan Potts and, oh, the lovely lady [1:30:30] at the framing store. I've forgotten...

Interviewer: Oh, Alison.

Respondent: Alison. I mean they and the owners of that store were incredible. And then Susan adopted the one cat. Eventually it was caught, and her babies were given away, and then she got spayed, and she lives out in Bolton and is very happy there.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well okay. We're going to...

Respondent: Yes. Save it.

Interviewer: Thank you for a second talk, and thank you.

[1:31:03]

[End of recording]

