

VN810090 Mathilde and Rakel Stephanian

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

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: The date today is the 25th of January, 2013. I'm at 412 College Street with Mathilde and her daughter, Rakel, in what used to be a pharmacy beginning in 1905, and it was in 1961 that Mathilde and her husband, [0:00:30] Bartkev, took over. So they ran it as a pharmacy together from 1961 to 2005, and 2005 it became a second-hand store, and Mathilde is still running the second-hand store. Would you like to tell us your age?

Respondent 1: Eighty-two.

Interviewer: Eighty-two. And you're running a store by yourself.

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Congratulations.

Respondent 1: Well, she helps me.

Interviewer: Yes. [Laughter]

Respondent 2: She's running a store by herself.

Respondent 1: She helps [0:01:00] me. I have another daughter, older. She also comes every Wednesday and she mostly does the paperwork because how humble a business, there is still a lot of paperwork to do.

Interviewer: I'm sure that there is. But I just wanted to start off by saying thank you to both of you for giving me the opportunity to meet you and to learn about your history in this neighbourhood. [0:01:30] And Rakel, you're living nearby, so we're at 412 College, as I said, and you're living nearby.

Respondent 2: Yes.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Did you ever live upstairs from here?

Respondent 1: No.

Interviewer: You didn't.

Respondent 1: No.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: When we got over, two floors upstairs was a bookstore. A Hungarian bookstore, and they asked us when we were buying [0:02:00] not to evict them, to keep them. They were happy. Two brothers running a bookstore. They were here until – I don't remember, but they voluntarily left. Yeah.

Interviewer: And I assume that your husband was a pharmacist.

Respondent 1: Oh yes.

Interviewer: And then I guess after he died is when you made it into a [0:02:30] different kind of store?

Respondent 1: Yes. We had to notify the College of Pharmacy that he passed away, and there were many drugs to be taken care of. Each company came and took their own. They were very good. Very good. Apotex, perfect. [0:03:00] They even took the half-bottles, and they refunded – I cannot say. According to their rule, they refunded, but they refunded. And he had a big order put on that day to our supplier. After two hours he died.

Interviewer: So he died very suddenly, unexpectedly.

Respondent 1: [0:03:30] Yeah.

Interviewer: And he was healthy until then.

Respondent 2: Yeah. He worked the day he died.

- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. He was wonderful. Perfect health. Ninety-three.
- Interviewer:** Ninety-three. So he was still running the pharmacy at ninety-three.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And you're running the second-hand shop at eighty-two.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** You have good genes there.
- Respondent 2:** I hope so. [Laughter]
- Respondent 1:** So I mean how can I say that order was going to come? And when we went home, he collapsed. **[0:04:00]** We had to phone them and say hold the – but it was already shipped, put on the truck. I mean in this country, you don't have a chance to mourn your death.
- Respondent 2:** It's true.
- Respondent 1:** The goods will come and be piled up at the door. It was...
- Respondent 2:** It's hard.
- Respondent 1:** ...quite **[0:04:30]** a hectic time. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** But you decided that you were – how did that happen that you decided to continue running a business?
- Respondent 1:** Well it was closed for some time, until everything settled. Then we wanted to rent it as a pharmacy. Nobody wants a small pharmacy anymore. We wanted **[0:05:00]** – we said okay, let's empty and then we see what we can do. After some time being closed, my other daughter and me, and her we came to sell the front shop of the pharmacy, like Kleenex, shampoo. We saw that it was working,

so we started bringing things from home. [Laughter] [0:05:30] And it gives me something to do, as opposed to be alone at home.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent 2: You can imagine, if I can set the landscape, you know, for decades every corner had a pharmacy, and the neighbourhood would rely on that corner pharmacy. But once the concept of big-box store pharmacies and...

Voice: Shoppers was coming in.

Respondent 2: Yeah. I'm not exactly sure, but there [0:06:00] might actually be a connection between this family and Shoppers, but I've never really researched that. But that would be ironic if this was the first Shoppers. Yeah.

Interviewer: So that's the family. And that's the family that had a pharmacy...

Voice: 1905.

Interviewer: ...in 1905.

Respondent 2: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent 2: But once the – not only the chains like Shoppers, but the concept of having the pharmacy in the grocery store, once that happened, all of these [0:06:30] pharmacies grew into such a big retail business at the same time that my parents were aging and heading into their retirement. So that's the only reason they were able to survive, because they were tapering down their business as business was dwindling. Like most small pharmacies closed because as a small pharmacy, you could no longer order [0:07:00] in small amounts. You were forced from, let's say, there used to be a company called the Drug Trading Company that small pharmacists like my parents built that company. They owned the shares. All pharmacies owned the shares in that company, but there came a time when a small pharmacy would not be allowed to order, you know, twenty of

something, or you'd have to order a hundred, or a thousand of something. So small pharmacies started to try to band together to order [0:07:30] as a little group, but frankly, most of them closed. They either passed away, or they retired, or they simply could not survive, if you can imagine across the street in the '80s was an IDA. You know, it was directly across, and so slowly, this place had always had kind of an air of overlap. Like it had always been a place that had a little bit of the past, [0:08:00] as you can see. But in the '80s, I would say, she slowly started to morph this place into – it started to get a second-hand feel even then because, if you can imagine, they couldn't buy cosmetics and sundries. They couldn't buy them at the price that people were selling them in the big-box stores, you know? So it was no longer [0:08:30] possible for small pharmacies to – you know, if they want to offer you a bottle of shampoo, it's going to be seven dollars, yeah? So some pharmacies, there was a lovely one on Bloor Street for the longest time, he was famous for – you know, he still sold Chanel perfume, and his ancestors were the people who gilded the jars. It was either his father or his grandfather, so he had beautiful pharmacy jars that were in his family, [0:09:00] but I don't want you to imagine that suddenly, one day this became a second-hand store. It was a slow, twenty-year morphing, a metamorphosis.

Interviewer: And it started out with Kleenex that you brought from that. [Laughs]

Respondent 2: No. Well she didn't bring Kleenex from the house, no. But I'm saying if there was a – let's say like a bottle or something that she liked, she had had it at home, she, you know, started to bring her collection back here.

Interviewer: [0:09:30] Yeah.

Respondent 2: Yeah. Because we're all collectors.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Also, when we wanted to rent it as a drug store, before they asked the price, they say, "How many doctors are there upstairs?"

Interviewer: Oh, so that they would send their patients down.

Respondent 2: Yeah. That's very common. Most addresses between Dufferin and University are medical centres, so – and there's probably, oh god, maybe **[0:10:00]** sixty of them. Sixty to eighty probably.

Respondent 1: Like over there, Tony at Markham corner, he has fifty doctors upstairs.

Interviewer: So they wanted the patients to shop.

Respondent 1: They wanted the prescription to come down.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Respondent 1: If you say, "I have no doctors," how can you survive? He survived because he's had his old faithful customers, and he spoke many languages.

Voice: **[0:10:30]** This is Tony?

Respondent 2: No. She's referring now to my father. You know, my father survived because he started such a long time ago. They purchased the building such a long time ago. She's right. He spoke ten languages, so people would come long distances to just speak to him.

Respondent 1: People used to come from Woodbridge.

Interviewer: Wow.

Voice: Was he connected then with – I'm not sure of the timing of Doctors Hospital.

Respondent 1: Never.

Voice: Never.

Respondent 1: No. Never. No.

Respondent 2: He did work there **[0:11:00]** at some point.

Respondent 1: Not at Doctors Hospital. At the General Hospital.

Respondent 2: Sorry. General Hospital.

Respondent 1: Toronto General.

Respondent 2: Toronto General.

Respondent 1: To build up his apprenticeship.

Voice: That was where he did his training?

Respondent 1: Yeah. When he just came to Canada, he couldn't have – his license was not recognized.

Interviewer: What country was it from?

Respondent 2: Switzerland. Well, he did the degree in Rome. He has two degrees, so he's a chemist and a pharmacist from Rome, and then he practiced in [0:11:30] Iran, and he practiced in Switzerland, and that's just normal. Any college here in Ontario, when you come from another country you have to meet the requirements of the colleges. So it took him approximately – about between four and five years he worked in other pharmacies in the city. So you might remember the chain, Tamblyn? He worked for a Tamblyn. There was one at Avenue Road and Davenport. Remember that?

Interviewer: He was [0:12:00] qualifying, requalifying during that time.

Respondent 2: Yeah. And he was a pharmacist at the King Edward Hotel for a while. And then this family, Lilker, they found his name.

Respondent 1: Lilker also died of heart attack suddenly. His son was a student, a medical student. He wanted to sell the store, and I think, [0:12:30] like us at that time, a small store was not popular. Just then, my husband had finished. He had got his license.

Interviewer: Oh, perfect timing.

Respondent 1: This guy, junior Lilker, I don't know how he got hold of his name, and he approached him, and he said, "I have a pharmacy for sale. Are you interested?" And my **[0:13:00]** husband by then was fed up to work for others. Two months here, four months there, one – okay? And he used to say, "Never mind how humble. I'm going to start my own." So it was the right thing to do at the right time. He came, he looked, he said, "Just perfect for me." And he's – this **[0:13:30]** community at that time was all Jewish community. That's all right. It didn't bother us. We don't – okay? They were our – the customers before kept coming.

Respondent 2: Who was upstairs?

Respondent 1: Booksellers.

Respondent 2: Oh. Even at that time.

Respondent 1: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Respondent 1: And in those days, there was delivery. Even a package of **[0:14:00]** cigarettes was. [Laughter]

Interviewer: So you had to provide. You had to deliver.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Respondent 2: Well my – that was very common. They would hire young boys, or well...

Respondent 1: Schoolboys.

Respondent 2: ...the years went on, my brother, I would deliver. Yeah. We all delivered.

Respondent 1: Schoolboys, or she was too young.

Voice: What did you pay them? You remember?

Respondent 1: Yes. A dollar a day. [Laughter] And how much – here was full of chocolate, and chips, and [0:14:30] whatever. Eat whatever you want. [Laughter] Yeah.

Voice: Was that the same thing for Rakel?

Respondent 2: Yes, unfortunately. Yes.

Respondent 1: We bought a bicycle for the delivery boy, but it was not his. Like it was our bicycle. If they left, the bicycle was for the other one. Yeah.

Respondent 2: But you've had some of them return.

Interviewer: Some of the delivery boys?

Respondent 1: [0:15:00] Oh yeah.

Voice: Oh, we'd love to talk to one of them too.

Respondent 1: When they were grown up, fathers of families, they used to come and say, "Do you remember me?"

Interviewer: Oh. [Laughs] Oh.

Respondent 1: And yeah.

Respondent 2: Yeah. We had – I mean I unfortunately wasn't here, but a gentleman came and said he shoveled coal for this pharmacist during the Depression. Yeah? And he made a wonderful wage for that time. He made, yeah, something like [0:15:30] fifty cents a day, or a dollar a day, which was...

Respondent 1: A dollar a day was when I know.

Respondent 2: Right.

Respondent 1: But it went up and up, and then...

Respondent 2: Yeah. But that gentleman who came and said that he had shoveled coal when he was a boy, do you remember what wage he said?

- Respondent 1:** No. I don't remember that.
- Respondent 2:** But you know, all these stores had the barn doors straight to the basement. Mars might still have theirs. Mars [0:16:00] was one of the addresses that had theirs the longest, but otherwise, they've all been filled in.
- Interviewer:** So they all had coal, you're saying.
- Respondent 2:** Yes. Yeah. And as in New York, all these sidewalks had metal doors outside the front that the coal would be delivered down a chute.
- Voice:** So do you have your – can you still see it in the front?
- Respondent 2:** No. That's what I'm saying. That Mars is the only address that might still have that metal door, but otherwise, all of College Street, they've all been filled in because the next phase was oil, so [0:16:30] of course we have the oil tank down there, but then now it's, you know, it's a gas and natural gas furnace.
- Interviewer:** Do you have any idea when you made these changes from coal, to oil, to natural gas?
- Respondent 2:** Was it oil when you came?
- Respondent 1:** When we came it was oil.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Oh, it was oil when you came.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. We had a little cap out there, and we paid eight dollars a year for that cap because we were [0:17:00] using public property, like city property.
- Interviewer:** So you paid the city that eight dollars.

- Respondent 1:** Yes. And then one time, not too long ago, not too long ago, you remember they repaved the sidewalk, and I said, "This is not mine. What should I do?" Okay. The man said, "Don't worry about it." He took it off, and he paved over it. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And when did you move to gas?
- Respondent 2:** [0:17:30] Natural gas?
- Respondent 1:** I don't remember, but when oil became expensive. [Laughter]
- Interviewer:** Do you have air conditioning in here?
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** You do. And when did you add that?
- Respondent 1:** 1998, '7, when we were – we renovated the whole building from top to bottom. We renovated.
- Respondent 2:** [0:18:00] Yeah. Really it would not really be possible to live on the third floor without the air conditioning because, if you can imagine, it's an uninsulated building, and it's a black tar roof, so unfortunately that third floor is not – yeah. It has some trends, some windows.
- Respondent 1:** When she came back from university, she wanted to live upstairs and then she started [0:18:30] her share of the apartment too. Of course, with the help of a – a man, a worker who could do these things. The whole thing, the floor was like this. You take this out, and there is another layer. You take that out, and there is oak.
- Interviewer:** Oh. Beautiful. So it's wood. Lovely wood.
- Respondent 1:** And we...
- Interviewer:** So you had the wood upstairs [0:19:00].
- Respondent 2:** Yes. It had many incarnations. She mentioned the bookstore.
- Interviewer:** Yes.

Respondent 2: But at one point, it was also a dentist's office, so there are three rooms upstairs, and so the middle room would have been the dentist's office, so there's an old sink there, and you can see there's blood on the floor there into the nook.

Voice: It's easy to yank and pull.

Respondent 2: [Laughter] [0:19:30] Yeah. At one point it was a PI office.

Interviewer: What's that?

Respondent 2: Private investigator.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 2: You know, like you would see in film noir. [Laughter] And then when I was growing up, it was the offices of a medical doctor. He was Kusevich.

Respondent 1: Kusevich. Yes.

Respondent 2: And his wife was kind of – she just helped him out a little bit administratively, but if you can imagine, it [0:20:00] kind of looked like Mad Men up there. You know, the modern globe pendant lights, and the drawing of the curtain for the examination, and all greys, and kind of a cold medical atmosphere. And then in the early '70s it was the offices of two women, a medical doctor who's a psychiatrist, and a woman who was a professional storyteller and Gestalt therapist.

Interviewer: Oh. [0:20:30] What a history.

Respondent 2: But each had their own room, and the front room would have been like a waiting room area, so I grew up in this building, like on weekends, let's say, and sometimes I would play with their daughter and, you know, sometimes roam upstairs a little. But they stayed many, many years.

Respondent 1: Seventeen years.

- Respondent 2:** Seventeen years. Yes.
- Respondent 1:** The storytelling school.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Voice:** Yeah. Was that Joan?
- Respondent 2:** Joan Bodger.
- Voice:** Bodger.
- Interviewer:** Tell **[0:21:00]** me about – for the tape, I'm speaking to Rakel at this moment, tell me your work history related to this building and the pharmacy, and now the second-hand store.
- Respondent 2:** Well my siblings and I, whenever there was a free moment, we were here. But there's a big age gap in our ages, so we each have a different perspective on the – you know, the neighbourhood or the demographic, or the time.
- Interviewer:** And what's the birth order? Where are you?
- Respondent 2:** I'm the **[0:21:30]** third, so my sister is twelve years older, my brother is nine years older, and I'm the last and third, and I would say we all visited as much as we could, especially Saturdays, was always a lively visiting day here. And my brother-in-law would also join us here on Saturdays. We had a long tradition.
- Respondent 1:** Well the reason you were here **[0:22:00]** on Saturdays because at one point, I saw that on Saturday, I have too many school kids who come to buy chips or chocolate, whatever. I say, "Where do you come from?" They said from the church. Saturday German school. And my husband is very fluent in Italian, German, English, **[0:22:30]** Turkish, Armenian, Arab, whatever, and I had them under my foot here because I wouldn't leave them at home alone. I said, "Okay." I went and I said, "We're not German, but I'd like to send my children to this school." They said, "You're welcome." So the reason they were here on Saturdays is because they used to go to

school, and then school is [0:23:00] out at two o'clock or one o'clock.

Interviewer: So you learned German, Rakel.

Respondent 2: Yeah. That little church. It turned into the Toronto Heritage Language Program, so most public schools would teach a language on Saturdays. You know, Chinese, or Mandarin, Spanish, whatever, so I, being the youngest, continued on with that program. I actually went for fourteen years. Every Saturday. Yeah. [0:23:30] So it was a long...

Voice: And you learned German?

Respondent 2: Yeah. Yeah. So when I finished my architecture degree at Waterloo, I came here and I had – that program at Waterloo is a cooperative university. If you can imagine, every four months you alternate between studying and working in a firm, and during my education, it was the first significant [0:24:00] recession that affected architecture. So the year was 1989 and that was a landmark in the profession of architecture in that longstanding firms with hundreds of employees became very, very small firms, so it was a challenging time in that era to get work in architecture. So whenever there were jobs in Toronto, I would sometimes stay here, [0:24:30] and friends would stay here while we had office jobs in nearby firms, and then by the time I graduated, our needs met. This building was really in desperate need of an overhaul, and myself and friends needed a good place to live, so I spent two years with my colleague renovating the two floors, and we overhauled the electrical, and the plumbing.

Interviewer: [0:25:00] And what year was that?

Respondent 2: That was '95. '95, '96.

Interviewer: So your family never lived in this building.

Respondent 2: No. If you can imagine, most of their career, this pharmacy ran twelve hours a day, seven days a week while she was raising three children and taking care of her senile mother. So that was – there

was absolutely no attraction, no glamour to owning an [0:25:30] old house in this neighbourhood, and in the '70s, these houses had never been renovated yet. It was a lot of work. They didn't have the time, they didn't have the inclination. They had no sense of it being a romantic pursuit, and also this neighbourhood was a lot more like, if you can imagine, like a cross between Chico and the Man and Barney Miller, you know? It was...

Voice: It was rough.

Respondent 2: It was rough. Our neighbourhood was a very different – [0:26:00] it was a very different scene here.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Interviewer: What I'd like to do is use that as a jumping off point. What years are you talking about now when you're talking about...

Respondent 2: Between – well they bought it in '61.

Interviewer: Okay. So could we just spend a couple of minutes talking about the neighbourhood in the '60s?

Respondent 2: Yeah. So some of your neighbours in the '60s, do you remember their names?

Respondent 1: Eve?

Respondent 2: Your neighbours?

Respondent 1: Mrs. Mugenil. [0:26:30] I was just talking about her.

Voice: What was she like? What did she do? Was she nearby? Or?

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. At number 121.

Voice: Okay. Lippincott?

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Respondent 1: 121. And...

Interviewer: But generally speaking, you said that when you first bought the store there were a lot of Jewish people in the neighbourhood?

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: If you can talk about who lived here, the larger groups who lived here, [0:27:00] who shopped here, that kind of thing. And you were saying that it was a bit of a Wild West neighbourhood. Rakel, you were saying that. So I'd really like to hear you spend a few minutes talking about what the neighbourhood was like around '61 and through the '60s.

Respondent 1: It was very quiet.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent 1: A family neighbourhood. Mostly, let's say, survivors of the war. Jewish people. They minded their own [0:27:30] business. They were – they still had that fear of a policeman, you know?

Respondent 2: Some were Hungarian.

Respondent 1: Hungarian, Polish, anything. Whoever escaped, whoever landed in Canada in one way or other.

Respondent 2: I mean, you had a neighbour who was also a pharmacist here, an older gentleman.

Respondent 1: [0:28:00] Cohen?

Respondent 2: Not – Cohen was there, but you had a friend who was a pharmacist. A small pharmacy?

Respondent 1: Halpern?

Respondent 2: Halpern?

- Respondent 1:** Halpern.
- Interviewer:** Oh yes. I heard about Halpern's pharmacy.
- Respondent 2:** And also...
- Respondent 1:** Every corner was a pharmacy.
- Respondent 2:** And also somewhere beside Mrs. Fish there was a small, small pharmacy. An older man. Do you remember him?
- Respondent 1:** Not right beside Mrs. Fish.
- Respondent 2:** Not far from her.
- Respondent 1:** [0:28:30] Yeah.
- Respondent 2:** You would send me to his shop.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. I know who you mean. I will think of his name. Yeah.
- Respondent 2:** And Mr. and Mrs. Fish had a variety store. Their son still...
- Voice:** I was going to say, is Joseph Fish the lawyer there?
- Respondent 1:** Mrs. Fish. Her son is the lawyer.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. He'll know many of their names.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So you're talking about the stores, that there were a lot of pharmacies. What other kinds of stores were there at that time?
- Respondent 1:** There was Mario Grocery Store at the [0:29:00] corner of Borden.
- Voice:** Was it a Portuguese family?
- Respondent 1:** Mario was Italian.
- Voice:** Oh, Italian.

- Respondent 2:** Italian? Oh. Sorry.
- Respondent 1:** Okay? There was a jewellery store, Mr. Bogo. Jewellery. One restaurant at the corner, the Greek restaurant just before the bank.
- Respondent 2:** It was Koss then.
- Respondent 1:** Koss.
- Respondent 2:** Koss. Yeah. Perfati. Perfati.
- Voice:** Perfetti electric shop.
- Respondent 2:** [0:29:30] Where the art, the private art gallery is now.
- Interviewer:** Oh, that's right. I know the owner of that gallery. Yes.
- Respondent 1:** And then there was another man, a shoe store. Children's shoe store. I used to buy their shoes from there. It was variety. Now it is café, restaurant, café, restaurant.
- Voice:** Computer, computer, computer.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. At the corner of Borden was a beautiful Hungarian bakery.
- Respondent 1:** Bakery. [0:30:00] Palm Bakery.
- Respondent 2:** Palm Bakery.
- Respondent 1:** Palm Bakery.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. It had beautiful – they would make meringues, pink and white meringues and pile them in the window.
- Interviewer:** And dobos torte?
- Respondent 2:** And dobos torte [laughter], and Austrian jam tarts.
- Respondent 1:** I used to give them ten cents and go buy what you want.

- Respondent 2:** Yeah. We were bumped to fifty cents.
- Respondent 1:** That took half an hour for me and for...
- Voice:** Yeah. A break.
- Respondent 1:** A very nice lady. One day I went myself and I said, "I want something **[0:30:30]** which is not sweet. Do you have anything salty? I don't feel like eating some." She said, "My dear, the only not sweet in this store is me." [Laughter]
- Interviewer:** But you knew the owners of the other stores.
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** It was a real community.
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah.
- Respondent 2:** And they would send us to go get something at each of the stores, or deliver something, or borrow something, or **[0:31:00]** buy something. Yeah, I mean we sold – the big joke was we sold chocolate, but it was a thrill to go buy chocolate from Mr. and Mrs. Fish. And tell them about Mr. Fish leaning on the parking meter.
- Respondent 1:** Mr. Fish was standing with his elbow on the parking meter. Couple. Elderly couple. Mrs. Fish and Mr. I said, "Oh, you're standing there doing **[0:31:30]** nothing." He said, "I cannot move. I just put a nickel to the meter."
- Interviewer:** Oh. [Laughter] He wasn't going to waste his nickel.
- Respondent 1:** And Mr. Fish used to sort the Coke bottles from Pepsi, from Coke, from – he was a lot helping his mother, and Mrs. Fish used to say, "If my mother came with a cheque, I don't take it, so don't try to give me a cheque."
- Interviewer:** Cash only.

- Respondent 2:** [0:32:00] She was amazing. She always used her apron pockets. She never used the cash register. She was obliged to have one, but she never used it. She did all the math in her head, and she just would take the change from her pockets. They were amazing, amazing people. Wonderful humour.
- Interviewer:** So remind me, what store was that?
- Respondent 1:** A very small store there.
- Respondent 2:** It might – is it the skateboarding shop [0:32:30] now?
- Interviewer:** But it was a corner store?
- Respondent 1:** Latin American. It was Latin American at one point.
- Respondent 2:** I don't think she'll know, but right now...
- Respondent 1:** After the lane.
- Voice:** Yeah. By Croft Street.
- Respondent 1:** After the lane.
- Respondent 2:** It might be the skateboarding address now, but Mr. Fish would know.
- Respondent 1:** Oh, she had such a hard time with the inspector and this cash register. And she used to say, "Mister, go look in my books. I pay my taxes. What for is cash register?" She [0:33:00] had a pocket. The dollar is – she never sold anything for a dollar. Everything was five cents, ten cents.
- Interviewer:** So she was weighed down with heavy coins.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** She was really funny. Very funny. And her son, when he became a lawyer, "Mom, retire." "Mom, you're doing two cents an hour here." "Mom, why are you still [0:33:30] here?" And she used to say, "I

make two cents an hour here. Am I asking you to give me any money? I'm happy here." "No. Go." Once I asked her, I said, "Do you own the building?" She said, "No. This garbage? I can put my hand in my pocket and buy it if I want." Okay. The son made her close the store. She didn't last [0:34:00] one year.

Interviewer: She was much happier being out and working.

Respondent 1: Now when I am sweeping outside and her son passes...

Voice: Joseph?

Respondent 1: ...he says, "Good for you. Keep it up."

Respondent 2: Oh, that's so sad.

Voice: Did they live in the neighbourhood then?

Respondent 2: Did they? Where did they live? The Fishes. Did they live nearby?

Respondent 1: No, they lived on Palmerston. They had a big, nice house on Palmerston.

Voice: And when you [0:34:30] were growing up, did you three go to schools here in this neighbourhood?

Respondent 2: Yeah. My sister and brother went to Queen Victoria Public School near...

Respondent 1: Because we used to live downtown, King and – near the Exhibition.

Voice: Right.

Respondent 1: They went to that school. And imagine in those days, after school, they used to come all by themselves with the streetcar back here. I [0:35:00] went to school and talked to the guard, the crossing guard, I said, "These two will take the streetcar. Please see that they do." I used to give them a ticket, and they came through Bathurst, and they changed, and I used to go and meet them there. It didn't occur to us kidnapping or...

- Interviewer:** How old were they when **[0:35:30]** they started to do that?
- Respondent 1:** One was in grade four, the other was in grade one.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Voice:** They were little.
- Respondent 2:** Very little. Yeah. Yeah. But then we moved to the suburbs in '68, so I grew up in the suburbs.
- Voice:** So you didn't go to King Edward. No.
- Respondent 2:** No.
- Interviewer:** Was the neighbourhood at that time – was it a safe place?
- Respondent 1:** Oh yes. Very safe. Very safe. **[0:36:00]** We go home and I say to my son, "Greg, what happened to your tricycle? Did you put it in?" Say, "I don't remember." We come the next day, it is still on the sidewalk. Yeah. Then the Jewish changed to Italians. Lots of Italians, and because he spoke Italian, we had **[0:36:30]** – all our customers were Italians.
- Respondent 2:** And then in the late '70s, more Hispanic, Spanish.
- Respondent 1:** Portuguese came after the Italians.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He didn't learn Portuguese, but he learned Spanish. And...
- Respondent 1:** Now is everybody.
- Respondent 2:** ...the late '70s, I mean there were quite a few people who were – had challenges with mental health and addiction, and alcoholism, **[0:37:00]** and there were...
- Interviewer:** This was this neighbourhood.

- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Especially related to all the hospitals being in this neighbourhood, and before, a lot of Native people were sent to reserves. So this was more of a drop-in centre really for people who wouldn't feel comfortable going to other places for help, and so they did a lot of work in terms of what would be called social work today to get people homes, to get them ID, [0:37:30] to get them drug benefit plans.
- Voice:** This is your father.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Voice:** And so...
- Respondent 2:** They disenfranchised. A lot of disenfranchised. Yeah.
- Voice:** And how would he refer them? He knew others in different fields to say, "I know a social worker?"
- Respondent 2:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Voice:** That's amazing.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. But they did countless hours – what would today be called social work. So many homeless people. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So there was trust on both sides.
- Respondent 2:** Oh yes. They were greatly – yeah. They were greatly – [0:38:00] he had a very – he had a special gift to calm and heal people, and a great gift to – I don't know how to word it, but some of his customers were CEOs of very important companies, and so if his customers were people who – no one would ever want to give the time of day, but he had a great – they both had a great gift to treat everyone, you know, with respect, and people [0:38:30] came here to feel safe. Or if they had nowhere else to be and nowhere else to sit, or...
- Voice:** How was the space set up then? Was there chairs and a place to sit?

Respondent 2: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Definitely. There was a chair here, and there was a chair at that end, so that was the kind of – one of the main places that someone would sit and wait for their prescription, and you would talk to them while they were waiting. You know, because in those days it was also a compounding pharmacist, so it's not something that's [0:39:00] going to take two minutes. It would take maybe half an hour or an hour, and then his very special customers were allowed to sit behind the desk, you know, as long as they didn't talk or touch anything. I'm talking very old men, or...

Respondent 1: Yeah. One Italian customer, Rosa, she used to come from Wilson and, I don't know how old, for – sometimes she didn't come. And then one day [0:39:30] I saw her staggering in. I said, "Rosa, I missed you. Where were you?" "First I sit. First I sit." "Okay, sit." Then she said, "Too far. My legs hurt. I like to come to Mr. Stephano." Many people called him Mr. Stephano. "But too far." I said, "Then you came today." She said, "I go [0:40:00] near my house pharmacy. The girl comes say, 'Give me paper. Sit there, wait your turn.' I don't like that." She comes here, sometimes I used to make a cup of tea for her. They discussed their vegetable garden. She brings a sample of her tomato.

Interviewer: A friendly welcoming [0:40:30] place.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: People to gather.

Respondent 1: And my husband was a very placid man.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: He had all the time in the world for everybody. He never hurried, he never pushed them, he never say, "Okay." And we had lots of Italian customers who came from far away, and at one point, also at the beginning, [0:41:00] there were many people who had relatives in Poland, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia. They wanted – "I want to send my mother high blood pressure pills. I want to send my," – okay. Pills. Because he never [indiscernible 0:41:22] from

Switzerland pharmacy, he used to phone them and say, [0:41:30]
"Send fifty tablets to such an address in Hungary."

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: It was easier to send from Europe to a place in Europe than from Canada. And we kept that trade until after he died. They used to phone her and say, yeah.

Voice: That was the beginning of online shopping. [Laughter]

Respondent 2: When I think of it now, yeah, [0:42:00] for some reason they didn't have access to natural vitamin E for the longest time.

Respondent 1: No. I tell you why.

Respondent 2: Until very, very late.

Respondent 1: Because that pharmacy was under a hotel, the Savoy Hotel, [indiscernible 0:42:15], which was very popular with American tourists, and those American tourists, they wanted their own American stuff. Something as [0:42:30] simple as Phillip's Magnesia. If you give them something similar, no, they want Phillip's Magnesia.

Interviewer: The trade name.

Respondent 2: The trade name. Yeah. So they would – sometimes I would get a call asking, you know, if we could ship them a brand of vitamin E or something, and that was until fairly recently actually.

Respondent 1: So we used to ship them whatever they want, and they used to ship whatever we want to Europe. It was a good [0:43:00] understanding, and slowly, slowly these relatives, either they came to Canada or they died, and that shipment also ceased.

Voice: I'm just watching the time for Rakel.

Respondent 2: Yeah. How are you doing?

- Respondent 1:** I'm okay.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah?
- Respondent 1:** You have to go?
- Respondent 2:** I need to make a phone call, but I can make the call and come back.
- Respondent 1:** It's all right. Are you going to **[indiscernible 0:43:28]** today?
- Respondent 2:** Not at this **[0:43:30]** time.
- Respondent 1:** What time?
- Respondent 2:** On the weekend.
- Respondent 1:** Oh okay. So you want to go make the call from here? I tell you, this is the worst time of the history of the store because of so many bars all around us.
- Voice:** Yeah. We've heard the complaints, and there's many who are neighbours that are trying to work on that to work with everyone.
- Respondent 1:** Next door it used to be a **[0:44:00]** furniture store.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** Very nice people. Six o'clock, they close the door and go home. They went up north in, I don't know where. They rented it to a bar.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** He is supposed to close at two o'clock. At two o'clock, whoever goes out, he **[0:44:30]** sends them a supply. They come and they stay in my door. They drink, they get sick, they pee, they throw up, they fight, they break the bottles. I even put a light that when you walk in – didn't make a difference. I put a camera there, it's a fake camera, [laughter]. Okay. **[0:45:00]** Somebody said, "Even if it was a true camera, go find him." Okay?

- Voice:** It's because of this alcove here.
- Respondent 1:** Not that. Anywhere. All this corner. All this corner. And graffiti. We didn't have this much graffiti.
- Interviewer:** So you're saying that the biggest change and for the worst has been the bars coming...
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** **[0:45:30]** into the neighbourhood.
- Respondent 1:** Yes. The bars. They shouldn't allow bars in a residential neighbourhood. In plazas it's okay. Upstairs, you cannot keep any tenants there of the noise.
- Respondent 1:** We have done our best. I mean, put **[0:46:00]** foam in between.
- Interviewer:** To insulate.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** To insulate against the sound.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Voice:** Well afterwards we'll talk to Rakel, and there's a group of other people right on Lippincott and College who are working with the police and the City Hall to try and change it, so there's some good coming.
- Respondent 1:** There is a young woman over there, first house after the church. Janice. She says every day she **[0:46:30]** sends an email to Vaughan.
- Voice:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Every day.

Interviewer: Well it's good because we're aware of it, but good for her for doing that.

Voice: Yes.

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: And we have petitions so many times. This barkeeper, after, you know, Aunts and Uncles, which is a family restaurant...

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent 1: After that, there is a small house. He bought that house and he started his [0:47:00] club. He was going to sell liquor there. We all petitioned against it.

Voice: Good.

Respondent 1: Now it is a sandwich store, but how much really is a sandwich store? I'm not commenting on that.

Interviewer: You're not sure if there's some other business happening?

Respondent 1: I don't know. I cannot.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: I cannot say anything. Yeah.

Interviewer: So that's very upsetting.

Respondent 1: [0:47:30] Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: It was. I mean, we all knew each other. Our children knew each other. Now it's...

- Interviewer:** So it was a neighbourhood, and it was a family-friendly neighbourhood.
- Respondent 1:** Sure. Yeah.
- Voice:** Mathilde, in the '60s when you first moved here...
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Voice:** ...and you were getting to know the families...
- Respondent 1:** Yeah.
- Voice:** ...if someone said to you, "Where is your store in Toronto," what would they **[0:48:00]** have called this area? Was there a name for it? Did they...
- Respondent 1:** Oh, College and Bathurst.
- Voice:** College and Bathurst. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** No, no name. No.
- Voice:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** At that time, when we bought this, we used to live on King Street. King and **[indiscernible 0:48:15]**, which was just a few steps from the Exhibition. And it was all right. We didn't have a car then. We were immigrants. **[0:48:30]** Don't forget that. And you're done? Oh okay. We did – to come to Canada to begin with, we had to show that we had a trade. He was a pharmacist, I was a teacher. **[0:49:00]** We had to show that we each had three thousand dollars.
- Interviewer:** Whoa. That's a lot.
- Respondent 1:** And sign a paper that for ten years, we're not going to go on welfare, or – and there was no OHIP then.
- Interviewer:** What year was that?

- Respondent 2:** '57.
- Respondent 1:** '61.
- Respondent 2:** '57.
- Interviewer:** '57 is when you came to Canada.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Okay. **[0:49:30]** I'm going to change the subject. I want to talk about the neighbourhood again. What is it like being so close to Kensington Market? Has that been part of your life?
- Respondent 1:** I used to shop there. [Laughs] Yeah.
- Voice:** What was it like?
- Respondent 1:** It was nice. They had more, like, my taste of food, let's put it that, okay? Because neighbours used to say it used to be only cabbage and potatoes before, but when I **[0:50:00]** went, there was zucchini, there was eggplant, there was other things that we grew up with.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. We always had the ritual of going there, and she's a prolific cook, and they're both prolific gardeners. So she wouldn't buy one eggplant; she would buy bushels. [Laughter] You know? She would always be seen carrying, like, huge **[0:50:30]** handfuls, bagfuls of, you know – because they would cook so many wonderful things. And as I said, we had a very full household of people, so she was feeding seven people every day.
- Respondent 1:** One of the delivery boys – you were not born then – was really a, let's say, a babysitter to my son. **[Indiscernible 0:50:55]**. And I used to give them **[0:51:00]** some money. Oh, big money, two dollars. Go to the Kensington Market. Buy. Greg insisted he wanted an artichoke, and the boy says, "You can't eat that." And he says, "No, my mom eats." [Laughs] And they bought figs, fresh figs, which was, we know. And one artichoke. [Laughs] **[0:51:30]** Okay. I said, "Thank you," but what can I do with one artichoke?

Interviewer: Yeah. So you liked cooking in quantity.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Respondent 2: Yeah. Well because as I said, so there were three of us and the two of them, and then her mother, and we had a tenant, and at some point we had her friend living with us as well, so sometimes...

Voice: Eight.

Respondent 2: ...you know, sometimes eight. But everyone was a different age at a different era, so it wasn't eight all at the same time, but [0:52:00] there was always a minimum for a long time of five. Yeah. So a lot of – and as I said, they were here most of the time, so she had to really plan her time of when and how she would cook. It doesn't make sense to cook small amounts ten times.

Respondent 1: As I said, we were new. Money was tight. I cannot say that there was no money, but it was tight. We had a big apartment. .A [0:52:30] three-bedroom apartment, which is rare to find.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent 1: And at that time, if you know Jameson Street, Jameson Avenue, they were demolishing all the small houses on Jameson and putting high-rises there. A neighbour down the street said to me, "You have three bedrooms. You don't need three bedrooms. There is [0:53:00] this man who was a tenant on James Street, Jameson, the house is being demolished. He is looking for a room. One person only." So we spoke with my husband and we decided yes, it will help with the rent. We interviewed this man. He's not married, he works at the Union Station. [0:53:30] He goes in the morning, he comes at night. He says, "I eat there. I don't cook here." And he even takes his showers there. All he needs is a place to sleep at night. Tom, an Irishman. He was a God-sent blessing to me. He was so – there came a time that I said, "Don't pay me any rent." Six dollars a week. [0:54:00] [Laughs] Play with the children. And he loved them. He goes – he had all the advantages of having children around without the responsibility.

- Interviewer:** Yes. So he became like a member of your family.
- Respondent 1:** Oh yes. He lived with me twenty years until he died. When we moved to Mississauga, he moved with us.
- Respondent 2:** **[0:54:30]** Yeah. The Market in those days was a big part of our lives. That was the day when they still had animals, you know, buckets of – big barrels of snails crawling out of the barrels, and a lot of varieties of fish that still were semi-alive on ice, or in tanks, and sharks. You know, if I can remember – one day I wasn't watching where I was going and I literally walked into a shark hanging upside-down. And rabbits in cages, and pigeons in **[0:55:00]** cages. And yeah. Yeah. In my personal opinion, those animals were very well loved. They were well cared for, and you knew you ordered the animal and the butcher killed it humanely there in front of you, so I think it's a little ironic that it was animal activists who protested – those were probably the only humanely killed animals in Canada, if you can imagine, compared to what meat we eat, so that was a terrible irony. **[0:55:30]** But I would hold my nose the entire trip to the Market. [Laughter] It was really, you know, it was another world, you know? There was always squashed fruit and vegetables on the sidewalk, and you know, the cars were, you know, as wide as the street in those days. You know, Cadillacs or Pontiacs, and...
- Respondent 1:** Did you live around here?
- Voice:** I live on Borden Street.
- Respondent 1:** Always?
- Voice:** Just since the '80s.
- Respondent 1:** You're acquainted with the Jewish Market, they used to call it?
- Voice:** **[0:56:00]** Yes. Yes.
- Respondent 1:** Live chicken.
- Voice:** Yes.

Respondent 1: Live pigeons.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Fish, snails, whatever.

Respondent 2: Yeah. We would get – always, we would get Portuguese barbecued chicken.

Voice: Yes.

Respondent 1: Yeah, barbecued chicken.

Respondent 2: There were a lot of Portuguese people. Or corn bread. There were some bakeries. Also the Beautiful Quality Bakery was just at Bellevue.

Voice: That's what I remember.

Respondent 1: And then at the corner...

Voice: At College there is [0:56:30] Quality Bakery too.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Voice: Just past...

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Voice: ...Borden.

Respondent 2: Bellevue and College. It had a central doorframe, door entrance with two big windows, and they would pile the bread in the door windows, and they would serve, you know, sponge cakes and cheesecakes by weight. They would have huge, deep trays and they would cut it by weight.

Respondent 1: And in the Market at the corner was another bakery. Baldwin and Kensington Street at the corner. A very big bakery.

- Interviewer:** Perlmutter's [0:57:00] Bakery.
- Respondent 2:** Perlmutter?
- Interviewer:** Perlmutter's was in the Market?
- Respondent 2:** Yeah?
- Interviewer:** When I first came to Toronto in 1968.
- Respondent 1:** Oh. What was the name?
- Respondent 2:** Perlmutter.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. That was one.
- Respondent 2:** And the large butcher. Now it's a...
- Respondent 1:** European butcher.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Now it's closed.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Voice:** It's a new butcher now.
- Respondent 2:** It's a new butcher now. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Oh.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. And then there were Hispanic people here. I remember the late '70s, you know, we had [0:57:30] some neighbours who were truly Romanian Gypsies. You know, they were an infamous family. The matron of that family, you know, nobody messed with her, and her children tended to get their own way.
- Interviewer:** Where were they? Right here on College Street?

- Respondent 2:** Where did the Gypsy family live? Do you remember?
- Respondent 1:** No. Refresh my memory.
- Respondent 2:** The mother was quite a robust figure, and her [0:58:00] boys were also very...
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. I know. On Bathurst Street just south of College. Those little houses there.
- Respondent 2:** For a little while there was a kind of leftover descended palm reader.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Voice:** Yes, yes.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. And then we had Mexican – you had Mexican tenants at some point. I still have the hooks to prove it. They're still in the wall where they had hammocks...
- Respondent 1:** The hammock.
- Respondent 2:** ...hanging. Yeah. [0:58:30] Yeah. And then this infamous address right here. It's now this tiny little house, the third one right here. That was a...
- Voice:** They do roti now?
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. But when I was growing up, it was owned by a hit man. A bald man who wore a fedora, and he would have a brass band around his head. You know, and he had, like, a Fu Manchu moustache, and often a suit. Do you remember his name?
- Respondent 1:** He had [0:59:00] many names. [Laughter]
- Respondent 2:** He called my father, "Boss."
- Interviewer:** Oh. He called your father, "Boss."

- Respondent 2:** Yeah. He called my father, "Boss." Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And what did your father call him? [Laughs]
- Respondent 2:** What did my dad call him? What did he call him? He did have a name.
- Respondent 1:** Yes, but...
- Voice:** How did you know he was a hit man?
- Respondent 1:** He was bald, he was very bald and he used to call him Kalosh.
- Respondent 2:** Kalosh. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Kalosh.
- Respondent 2:** He wore pointy boots, and mobster suits, and you could tell he was connected to **[0:59:30]** a long underworld. And then there literally was a shooting there. We presume he shot them.
- Respondent 1:** He was a – what do you call it? Ouster? Or ouster at bars? He throws the drug people out.
- Voice:** Oh a...
- Interviewer:** A bouncer.
- Respondent 1:** Bouncer. Yeah. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So he worked as a bouncer?
- Respondent 2:** That was his...
- Interviewer:** Cover.
- Respondent 2:** That was one of his professions.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.

- Respondent 1:** One day he came here at night. [1:00:00] He put a fence around his house.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** If you remember, a six-foot wood fence.
- Voice:** Yeah. I never knew what was under.
- Respondent 1:** Okay. One day he came here and he said to my husband, "You know nothing. You saw nothing. You speak nothing. You don't know me." And my husband says, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Good. You know nothing."
- Interviewer:** Whoa.
- Respondent 1:** Then inspector [1:00:30] comes. "What about this wall? Who made it? Who could?" My husband said, "I don't know." I came one day, it was here. He built it at night. Yeah. And I had a friend who had difficulty with her husband, and we used to joke and say [laughter], "You know, I know him. I know who can take care of it." [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** During the night he does fences or...
- Respondent 2:** He wasn't – yeah.
- Respondent 1:** [1:01:00] No, he was good with us because we didn't mess with him. No.
- Respondent 2:** But there were many characters like that anyway.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So you've talked about the Gypsy family...
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** ...and this bouncer.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you think of one or two other of these characters of the neighbourhood?

Respondent 2: Well there were many, many benign characters. There were many disenfranchised men who for one reason or another left their lives as they knew it, you know? They were [1:01:30] a banker, or they were the father of three, or they were an architect, or many people who basically became homeless men who had some reason, some trauma why they left the life as they knew it.

Voice: Were there many rooming houses then?

Respondent 2: Yeah. The Salvation Army for the most part, they would stay at the Salvation Army. And they would – [1:02:00] sometimes if they got some kind of government assistance, sometimes the two of them would kind of help them by – sometimes they wouldn't have an address, you know? Like they would arrange – it's a vicious circle. If you don't have an identity, you don't have an address. If you don't have an address, you can't get the proper medical care or the proper [1:02:30] benefits. So sometimes they would – for people who simply could just not cope, they would keep their funds for them and they would make sure that they could come and get them here by – you know, so they wouldn't spend it all at once, or you know...

Voice: So they'd use the address here.

Respondent 2: Yeah. They'd use the address here, and my parents would make sure that – they'd keep a ledger for each person, and it's like...

Interviewer: Wow. Oh my...

Respondent 2: ...you know, this is your money, and this is...

Respondent 1: I cannot tell you how many people I filled their old age pension papers, [1:03:00] apply for a job, apply for welfare, apply, and one of them said, "Miss, put a chair here and the table. You do better business than that girl over there." [Laughs] And so many.

Respondent 2: But a lot of these men, especially there were a lot of Native people who were completely disenfranchised. A lot of them had severe alcohol problems, and also in the late [1:03:30] '70s, early '80s, there were a lot of people who had more severe addictions to narcotics or drugs. He had a methadone program here at some point. A couple of people had to deal with that, and yeah. It was – you know, it was always an unusual place in terms of people who just simply wouldn't [1:04:00] be welcome or wouldn't be accepted, or would be made to feel ashamed too. They would simply not be able to walk into a Shoppers or whatever else was an option, you know? Or as she said, he was patient and often he could speak their language. And he had a great quality of being able to calm people who were disturbed, especially mentally disturbed people, so – and a lot of them were frankly, [1:04:30] you know, schizophrenic. Many of them were schizophrenic. He has some paintings. You might see some. There's some paintings. You know, people would pay him in paintings or whatever if they needed something. They were kind of like the grandparents to many of these people.

Respondent 1: These street people, there is only one who is still around.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Respondent 1: You know him maybe. He walks around. He lives at Seaton [1:05:00] House. He is entitled to a certain amount of money every month from his cheque that goes straight to Seaton House.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent 1: If you don't ask, they don't give. Okay? You have to go to the office and ask for your share. If you don't ask, they don't give. He comes and he begs. I am phoning for him. I say, "Mister [1:05:30] Evol, here." His name is Evol Krezo, a Croatian man. If you tell him, "Where is your country? Where do you come from?" He will say, "Camp. Camp." It means during the war he was in a concentration camp. That's all he remembers. I phoned and I said, "Here, Mr. Krezo. He has to have his pocket money. It's a shame that [1:06:00] he is begging." "Is he related to you?" I say, "No." "Sorry. We cannot talk to you about him."

- Respondent 2:** Mm-hm. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So somebody has to take him to the welfare office? Is that what has to happen?
- Voice:** Well the Seaton office, then they distribute, but you have to be registered there.
- Respondent 1:** And I say to him, "Evol, go to the office. They will give you money." He walks still the fire station. He forgets. And then he [1:06:30] comes. "Five dollars, please? Five dollars."
- Voice:** Is this the very tall, with gray, long hair?
- Respondent 2:** No, no.
- Voice:** And he's always carrying bags?
- Respondent 1:** No hair.
- Respondent 2:** No. This man is a – he has a very round head, no hair. Like short, short hair. Quite tall, broad, usually a long coat, and he is, for the most part, silent. He just walks silently and he doesn't...
- Respondent 1:** He does not drink.
- Respondent 2:** He doesn't drink and he doesn't make any physical gestures.
- Respondent 1:** He shakes every [1:07:00] door...
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** ...to see if it is open.
- Respondent 2:** For a while he would yell. He would come, you know, at seven in the morning and start yelling. He would march up and down the street and yell, you know. He probably – if you can imagine, he woke the people at the camp, you know? So fifty years later he would march up and down the street and he's yelling to wake

everyone at seven or six or whatever on a Sunday. Yeah. But yeah, one time he tried to break [1:07:30] in that door. I didn't know who he was yet, and I was alarmed. And eventually I saw him and I said, you know, this is the man who tried to break in, and she said, "Oh. Oh, that's Evol. We've known him for thirty years." And he wanted the doctor. He wanted the doctor upstairs, and so he came and he asked you about the doctor.

Respondent 1: I said, "He is dead." He said, "Okay. I wait."

Voice: Oh. [Laughter]

Respondent 1: And he comes now. If he [1:08:00] comes in, he goes around the corner and he says, "Doctor under ground?" And I say, "Yes. Doctor under ground."

Interviewer: So he understands.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: But I think what you're talking about is the amount of kindness that happened in this space has just been remarkable for decades.

Respondent 1: My husband used to say to these people, some of them used to call him, "Dad." He said, [1:08:30] "Your own father was not so good to you as I am."

Interviewer: I think so.

Respondent 1: "You better do this." Okay. For example, this Evol, he was on medication, but people rob him because they think it is narcotic. So he used to come every day for a pill. We used to give him one by one, one by one. Now they do the same thing at Seaton House. [1:09:00] Each person who has a prescription, they get their pill every day because if you have it in your pocket, a smart person might think it's a narcotic.

- Voice:** It sounds like some of your practices and your relationships with people made – just common sense and kindness on your part, but it was the forefront of some of the health practices now with community clinics, and practices, [1:09:30] so it's wonderful. Wonderful.
- Interviewer:** You were doing it out of the goodness of your heart.
- Voice:** Yes.
- Respondent 1:** No. I need the prescription.
- Respondent 2:** There was a need. There was a need. There was a terrible need.
- Interviewer:** But your parents provided it.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Now I need a prescription, let's say. I need medication like everybody else. I give my prescription, I wait, they call me, I pay them, that's it. No, "How are you? How is it?"
- Respondent 2:** [1:10:00] Yeah. That's why people would come a long distance. And also sometimes, you know, like anything, knowledge takes time. So there were many diseases where at the time it was not acceptable to speak about them. I mean we speak about cancer now, but for a long time, no one would ever...
- Interviewer:** It was always the pressing, "Should we tell them? Or shouldn't we?"
- Respondent 2:** No one would speak about that out loud. And then when AIDS came, many people [1:10:30] came from long distances to, you know, to hide their identity. They didn't want to, I guess, you don't want to run into someone at their local pharmacy, so they would – literally this was kind of an oasis of anonymity. You know, people would be able to come here and a lot of people – my father. I remember him telling me that he was sure he knew – which goes with that profession. Sometimes you know, especially also in therapy, you might know people [1:11:00] in a way that their own families don't know them at all.

- Voice:** Yeah, I'm sure.
- Respondent 2:** So, you know, you have a...
- Interviewer:** And then there's the confidentiality.
- Respondent 2:** The confidentiality. Absolutely. And he was just a master of that.
- Interviewer:** That has to do with respect.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Yeah. He's a master of that. And he had such an old-world education. You know, in Italy, a pharmacist is called of doctor. A pharmacist is allowed to diagnose and allowed to compound, so he came from that tradition. So you know, over the decades in Ontario, the rules with the College of Pharmacy [1:11:30] changed. At some point, he was no longer allowed to compound, and of course, the industry of pharmaceuticals changed, and you know, pills were delivered ready-made in the billions.
- Respondent 1:** Many people who were cash paying customers, they would come and say, "The doctor wrote this. What do you think about it?" He said, "I don't know. Your doctor knows you, and he wrote this." "How much does it cost?" Okay, maybe, [1:12:00] let's say in those days twenty dollars, thirty dollars. "Is it good?" "Your doctor wrote it." "Is it?" "You know what I can do? I give you twelve pills instead of fifty. Go take twelve pills, pay me for twelve pills, see does it make you sleeplessness, does it cut you, does it make you nauseated? Does it – you like it, [1:12:30] come take the other forty. You don't like it, you only lose ten pills worth. You go to your doctor and you say, 'This makes me – it gives me headache, or it keeps me awake, or,'" he used to do that a lot to these cash paying customers instead of saying, "The heck with you. Give me your twenty dollars. Here are your pills."
- Voice:** [1:13:00] That's very good.
- Respondent 1:** Because I think he grew up very poor, and he sympathized with poor people. He was very poor when he grew up.

Interviewer: Well but you were part of it too. I mean the two of you took care of a lot of people in the neighbourhood.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Yah.

Respondent 2: Yeah, when she – '61. Yeah. [1:13:30] When she started, she was thirty-one. Yeah. When she started here, she was thirty-one.

Voice: When they arrived in '57.

Respondent 2: No, but when they bought the pharmacy.

Voice: In '61.

Respondent 2: Yeah. She was...

Voice: Thirty-seven.

Interviewer: We're going to stop there, about to stop. What do you see over the next few years, Mathilde?

Respondent 1: Oh.

Interviewer: What's your plan?

Respondent 1: I don't know what I see tomorrow. [Laughter] No. I will [1:14:00] come here as long as I come. Okay? Because the day is too long to be alone at home. How much can I clean? How much can I read? I don't have a computer at home. I don't have television at home. Okay? I have five grandchildren. I always – every week there is [1:14:30] somebody who wants me to do some mending, some alterations, the button is gone, the pocket has a hole, the jeans are too long. Okay. I do that. But you never know what will happen tomorrow.

Interviewer: But as long as you're well you're...

Respondent 1: As long as I can drive, I passed my driving test. You ladies don't have an idea about that. [Laughs] In Ontario, if you are [1:15:00] eighty, you are called to pass your driving test, so for the second

time at eighty and eighty-two, I passed my driving test. Today I did not bring the car because it said eighty percent snow. If it is eighty percent snow, I don't like to drive to Mississauga.

Interviewer: Whoa.

Voice: No.

Respondent 1: But so far there is no snow. I don't know what will happen tomorrow.

Voice: [1:15:30] Did you mention a documentary?

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Voice: What was that about?

Respondent 2: About three years ago, a young couple, Callie Anderson and Zachary Finkelstein, they have their own small original filmmaking company, and so they made a nine-minute film called "Stephanian." So if you Google "Stephanian," there's a trailer, and you can order [1:16:00] the documentary through them.

Voice: Was it good? Did you...

Respondent 2: It's nine minutes. It's – I'm in it for a few minutes, and my voice, the narration is shared with myself and her, and it's the story of how she made the shop her second-hand shop.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent 2: Yeah. We said a lot of things covered here.

Voice: Yeah. Sure.

Respondent 2: Yeah. They were interested in her and her [1:16:30] story of how she made it, how she morphed it into a second-hand shop. So the documentary is more about that...

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent 2: ...than it is about the life of it as a pharmacy in the past.

Voice: Right.

Respondent 1: And another reason I come here. I know more people here than I know where I live in – it's so – nobody – my husband used to say, "Good day to you today. [1:17:00] Hot day today. Cold day today." He said, "They told me the temperature." [Laughter]

Voice: Well you were here twelve hours a day. I'm sure you didn't get to know your neighbours up there.

Respondent 1: He used to go out and come in. He says, "Okay, Mister. Mister Sandrowich told me the temperature. Good day today. Sunny day today. Cold day, windy today." That's it.

Voice: That's enough.

Respondent 1: Okay. I know. Here they come. At one [1:17:30] point, he fell. This is many years ago. Oh.

Respondent 2: '88. '88.

Respondent 1: About twenty-two years ago. Olin was just being born. We went out, somebody had blocked our car. He said, "You go that way, I go that way. Let's see who owns this car." He had two wheels on the sidewalk, two wheels on the street, but just [1:18:00] where my car is. I come back, I see him on the floor. He had tripped and hit his head to the wall. Okay. We called the ambulance, we went. They put a tape over it, and they said, "Don't fall again." That's it. The next day, I see that [1:18:30] the spoon fell from his hand, and he is shuffling. I said, "We'll go to the doctor." We went to the doctor, he said he had a mild heart attack. I said, "No, he fell." "No, no, a mild heart attack." The day after, the third day now, terrible. [1:19:00] So I took him to emergency near my house over there. We told him what happened. A neurosurgeon came. He's taking the story. He turned out to be a guy from King Edward school [laughs], her school.

- Voice:** He knew the store?
- Respondent 1:** And he said, "Oh, we used to call you the old man even then."
[Laughs] But he said, [1:19:30] "Did you steal my chocolates and my chips?" [Laughter] He said, "Well." [Laughter] He said, "Okay, do a good job, I forgive you." [Laughter]
- Interviewer:** Aww.
- Respondent 1:** They took out a three-inch blocked clot from his brain.
- Interviewer:** Wow.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. It was a subdural hematoma. Yeah.
- Voice:** Caused by the fall? Or?
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** He would have been paralyzed for the rest of his life. That doctor said he [1:20:00] had a mild stroke. I said, "No, he fell. No, he fell." And these people, they did not even X-ray him. They just put a Band-Aid and they said, "Don't fall again." They opened his head, this big, and then it was all staples around it.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Anyway, very lucky man. No problem.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** No problem. That left no effects.
- Voice:** Wow, it was good you took him in.
- Respondent 2:** Very lucky.
- Respondent 1:** No effects. But that doctor kept being a friend.
- Respondent 2:** [1:20:30] Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. He was also Dania Shinsky's friend.

Voice: Oh yes?

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Voice: You remember the...

Respondent 1: Doctor Seltzer.

Voice: Seltzer.

Respondent 2: Seltzer.

Respondent 1: Seltzer.

Voice: Okay. We'll try to find him.

Interviewer: Okay. I just – I'm going to turn this off now, but first I want to say to Mathilde and Rakel Stephanian, and to Dinny Biggs who's sitting with me, participating, thank you very much. You told us – you gave us very [1:21:00] rich, interesting information about the neighbourhood, about your history right here, and you're still here. And you're a wonderful storyteller. You speak so clearly. It's been a pleasure to meet you.

Respondent 1: Thank you.

Interviewer: And thank you.

Respondent 1: Thank you.

Interviewer: And thank you very much.

Respondent 2: Thank you. Thank you.

[01:21:15]

[End of recording]