091 Bev Chernos

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 5th of February, 2013, and I'm sitting with Bev Chernos, who lived at 122 Robert Street from 1937 to 1942, and then 125 Robert Street until 1949. So I just want to say thank you for allowing me…

Respondent: You're welcome.

Interviewer: …to pick your brain and hear your stories.

Respondent: It's fun to do it.

Interviewer: **[0:00:30]** I hope so. Yeah. I hope so. Bev, do you have any idea what prompted your family to move to Robert Street?

Respondent: Yes. My mother's parents lived on Major Street. I think the number was 152, just south of Harbord across the laneway that's now known as Kosower Lane.

Interviewer: Oh, Kosower. Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And so my mother always **[0:01:00]** wanted to live near her mother, so that was one reason. Another reason was that my father worked in his brother's store, which was at 272 College Street, which was just beside Fox the Tailor between Spadina and Robert Street on the north side.

Interviewer: What kind of store was it?

Respondent: It was an automotive parts store. Was called Motor Trade, **[0:01:30]** and so my dad worked there. My grandparents, my mother's parents, lived on Major, and then my father's parents lived at number 6 Kensington Avenue, so it was all in the general vicinity of family and work.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. I just want to make sure that this is on. Oh yeah. Just that the light was browned out.

Respondent: I can set this.

Interviewer: Oh, that's fine. Okay, so **[0:02:00]** the mishpokhe was all in the neighbourhood. They lived there, they had business there, and that's what prompted your parents to…

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: When you first moved there, just describe where you lived because you moved away a few years later.

Respondent: We lived at – 122 Robert is across the road from Willcocks Avenue, and my parents and I lived upstairs in a flat that consisted of a living room, **[0:02:30]** which was a living room by day, and my parents' and my bedroom by night, and a bathroom, and a kitchen. And it was a little bit – we had a very lovely landlady, Mrs. Polisher.

Interviewer: And she lived on the first floor?

Respondent: She lived on the first floor. Her son was a postman. I remember that because it was very impressive to me **[0:03:00]** as a child, and she was extremely nice, but she was fanatically clean. And I was never allowed to have a guest in the house. What I remember most distinctly was that when I walked in the door, everything was covered with newspapers because she would just have polished, and we of course, we had a family joke about the floor was polished by Mrs. Polisher. [Laughter]

Interviewer: **[0:03:30]** The name suited her.

Respondent: Yeah. But – and we lived there actually until my mother was going to be giving birth to another child, and I was just turning six around that time, and that's when they moved a little bit north and bought the house at 125, and that was our house.

Interviewer: So – but those first years of your **[0:04:00]** life, you were living in small quarters.

Respondent: Very small.

Interviewer: It transitioned at night to become a bedroom.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. And then your parents bought the other house?

Respondent: And that, and we always rent – the basement, of course, was just a cellar. And because it was used to send coal down the chute, and so we – I never was actually in the cellar. I was at the side **[0:04:30]** of it, you know, at the first landing, but I don't think I ever went down it. And we always rented out the upstairs to help pay for the mortgage, which had bought and fixed the house up. And the quarters still were not large because my parents shared their bedroom with my brother until he was six, and that was in the back. There was a bathroom and a **[0:05:00]** kitchen, and a living room, which was separated from what was the dining room, but the dining room was actually my bedroom, and it was separated by a curtain.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: So it still was never – you know, it wasn't large. But it never appeared not large to me.

Interviewer: So you never felt cramped or crowded.

Respondent: I never. No. Never.

Interviewer: And who was upstairs?

Respondent: **[0:05:30]** Upstairs lived a family. Oh, I'm going to forget Gordon's name now. Actually, Susan's uncle…

Interviewer: Susan Stancer's uncle. Small world.

Respondent: And he and his wife and their little boy, Harvey, lived upstairs from us, and they were very – they and my parents became very good friends, and when my – I remember when my mother went to the **[0:06:00]** hospital to give birth to my brother, Gert and Gordon looked after me, and made sure I had my breakfast before I went to school. And they remained in touch for many, many years after my parents sold that house.

Interviewer: They have their own kitchen and their own bathroom?

Respondent: Yes. They had their – but they entered through the main door.

Interviewer: Okay. So they walked through your house…

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: …to get to their house. Well…

Respondent: **[0:06:30]** The stairs were in the middle of the downstairs, and so they would walk past the living room and my room, and before the kitchen, I think were the stairs that went up.

Interviewer: Well that could make or break it, and obviously it worked out well.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So you were two families that felt very close to each other.

Respondent: Yes. And they got along very, very well.

Interviewer: Yeah. And there was no third floor.

Respondent: No. It was just a two-storey house.

Interviewer: **[0:07:00]** Did your parents ever take over the second floor?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. So then by that time when they did a little better, they moved away.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Yeah. What was it like for you to leave that neighbourhood?

Respondent: I was very excited and a kind of apprehensive. I loved Lansdowne School. I felt very sad to leave the school. We moved at the beginning of April and the principal at Lansdowne **[0:07:30]** suggested to my parents and me that I should not finish out the school year at Lansdowne, but should rather move to my new school because after that term, in the coming fall, I was going to be going to junior high, and he felt that that was farther, and it would be important for me to have friends to walk to school with. **[0:08:00]** And we followed his advice, and that's what happened.

Interviewer: But it's so interesting that you remember that. That's a lot of years ago.

Respondent: It was, and I think those years are formative in your life. I remember a lot. Not because I'm older, but I've always remembered a lot about – I think I lived on Robert Street for such a long time that it wasn't a fleeting experience. **[0:08:30]** I feel like my entire elementary school experience really was there, and in fact, I know that my preschool experience was there as well because I went to nursery school for about three years at Knox Presbyterian Church.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Respondent: Around the corner on Spadina, where Miss Mackay was my teacher. There you are. I spent a lot of years in nursery **[0:09:00]** school because I loved school.

Interviewer: Tell me some of your memories, please, about the nursery school and then elementary school.

Respondent: Well, I went to nursery school for so long because I loved school and because my birthday was in March, which meant that I couldn't start school until a bit later because the cut-off date then, as now, was the end of **[0:09:30]** December. And maybe being an only child

was part of that, but I wanted to be at school. The teachers at Knox Presbyterian were lovely. I do remember that I loved nursery school, and I also remember that when it came – when I thought I should be in kindergarten, I wasn't quite old enough, but I forced **[0:10:00]** my mother to take me on sign-up day, and she did. And of course, they told me that I couldn't, and I created such a fuss, crying and crying, not like a rebellious fuss, but such a disappointment. I was so terribly and vociferously disappointed that the school actually agreed that I could **[0:10:30]** come to kindergarten, but I would have to spend two years in kindergarten, so I did. That was my bargain. I think it was probably where I first learned the art of compromise. [Laughs]

Interviewer: At a young age.

Respondent: [Laughs] Yeah. So I remember that very clearly. I also remember all the Christmas carols I used to come home with from Knox Presbyterian Church, and my mother **[0:11:00]** loved singing and music, and she loved singing all the carols with me and my friends, but I was advised on very strict orders never to sing certain ones in front of my grandparents. [Laughs]

Interviewer: I have similar stories.

Respondent: [Laughs] Yeah. I'm sure we all do.

Interviewer: Yeah. And the hymns too.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I went to school in Montreal. Protestant school board. And I loved the hymns too, and similar.

Respondent: Yeah. [Laughs] **[0:11:30]** No, we're not doing "Away in the Manger" for Zayda. [Laughter]

Interviewer: When you were in elementary school, what was the population there in terms of religion and ethnicity?

Respondent: It was quite mixed.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: There were Jewish kids, but there were also many kids who were not Jewish, but I don't recall black kids. **[0:12:00]** Although there were black people that lived in the area generally, I honestly don't remember anybody in my school that was other than Christian or Jewish.

Interviewer: So I asked that about the school, but really we're talking about the neighbourhood.

Respondent: Yeah. The neighbourhood was similar. There **[0:12:30]** were many Christian families on Robert Street. There, on Major Street just above College, there was a convent and I remember the nuns very well, walking along the street in their habits. And so it was not an entirely Jewish neighbourhood or anything like that **[0:13:00]** at all. And in fact, I remember that I walked – I went to Hebrew school every day.

Interviewer: Where was that?

Respondent: At the Brunswick Talmud Torah, which is where Doctors' Hospital is now. And I remember very clearly that I walked there by myself after school, so I didn't – the kids in my class at Brunswick Talmud Torah were **[0:13:30]** not from Lansdowne. They may have been from the area, but they were not from Lansdowne school. I didn't have anyone to walk to or from Hebrew school with. I went – when I went after school or when I went at later hours, even when I was a bit older and I went from six to eight, I still went and came home by myself.

Interviewer: It's different from the families today. **[0:14:00]** They wouldn't allow a six-, or seven-, or eight-year-old…

Respondent: I walked – in those days, I walked home through the lane. My habit was to walk through the lane, stop in at my grandparents' either on the way there or the way back, and then I would go to Hebrew school and then I would come back home through the lane, even if it were eight-thirty in the evening.

Interviewer: And dark.

Respondent: And dark. And there – we often – I often **[0:14:30]** encountered older men urinating in the laneway. It was just kind of an ordinary event, and really you didn't take any notice of it. There were people around, but you never felt threatened in any way at all.

Interviewer: So you're saying you and your family felt it was a safe…

Respondent: Oh yes.

Interviewer: …neighbourhood.

Respondent: Completely comfortable.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. You mentioned the laneways. I'd like to just stop there for a minute. **[0:15:00]** As you were growing up, did you and your friends, or your family, use the laneways in any way?

Respondent: Just to walk through. Oh, and my parents – well my father was a travelling salesman in the automotive parts business, so he had a truck, and he parked his truck in the laneway that ran behind our house on Robert Street.

Interviewer: Was there a garage?

Respondent: Yes, there were garages and you had to park in the garage because otherwise you would block the **[0:15:30]** laneway.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: So he had a garage and he parked his car there, and the laneways that connected the streets we often walked through.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. So where did you play? You didn't play in the lane. Where did you play?

Respondent: On the street and in each other's houses. And a little bit in the backyard, but during the war – when I **[0:16:00]** lived on Robert –

well, when I lived at 122, I played on the street because there was no access for me to anything else. When we lived in our own house at 125, during the war, our backyard was a victory garden because that was the patriotic thing to do, and everybody that I knew had a victory garden, **[0:16:30]** including us. Always was a vegetable garden. And we all planted and looked after our vegetable gardens.

Interviewer: Do you remember what vegetables you had?

Respondent: As part of – I don't. But – carrots for sure. We had carrots. [Laughter] I remember that. But I do remember very distinctly that that was quite the big deal to have a – and everybody had a – and they were called victory gardens.

Interviewer: Yeah. Who did the gardening?

Respondent: **[0:17:00]** My mother and I for the most part. My father sometimes. My brother was quite young, and at the – the war was over when he was about three.

Interviewer: Did you use the garden in any other way? Or was it just filled with…

Respondent: No. I don't remember ever actually playing there. I often played in my own house. My mother was extraordinarily hospitable. Both my parents were. And **[0:17:30]** I always had – once we moved from 122, it was very important to my mother that I be able to have any and all of my friends in any time, and I think our house was always a kind of headquarters for entertaining. My parents entertained their friends, and – because I remember feeling like I was at all their parties because very little separated me **[0:18:00]** from the living room. And I remember having friends over all the time, and family.

Interviewer: So it must have been difficult for your mother when you lived upstairs and you couldn't – she probably couldn't very much, but you certainly could not have friends.

Respondent: I couldn't have friends. She didn't have any company either, and it was very difficult for her because both my parents were extremely gregarious.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And loved **[0:18:30]** to have company.

Interviewer: So it must have been such a relief and pleasure…

Respondent: It was.

Interviewer: …to have their own place where they could – yeah.

Respondent: And that was why she did it. I think she just went crazy when she had a space where she could have us and our families, and everybody over. She loved that.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the children played. You played in your home, you played – you walked in the lanes, on the street. Were the front porches used in any way?

Respondent: Yes. We **[0:19:00]** sat on the porches, we played on the porches, we sat on the steps. We played on the front lawns. We played a lot of skipping. You know, there was a lot of Double-Dutch and that kind of – we played a lot of games like that. And on the street. And we knew most of our neighbours, and we played with other children on the street, and our parents had friends **[0:19:30]** on the street. We knew who had gone to war, who was – you know, it was quite a nice little close neighbourhood.

Interviewer: And it remained that way until you left.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It never changed.

Respondent: Yes. It was like that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. You talked about the store on College Street. Would you come back to talking about some of these commercial places?

Respondent: Sure.

Interviewer: College Street, **[0:20:00]** Harbord. What are…

Respondent: Well, I still go to the Harbord Bakery…

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: …because I still feel completely attached to the Harbord Bakery. My mother sent me there probably when I was four. I was going to the store and buying challas and everything else. And so I have very warm memories of that. So **[0:20:30]** I go not only because it's good, which it is – it's marvellous. But I feel attached still to the Harbord Bakery. And there, beside the Harbord Bakery on the corner of Major Street, there was a store called the Harbord Fish Market, and my mother bought all her fish at that market. There was a grocery store **[0:21:00]** where there still is a grocery store on Harbord Street and Robert on the south side. There was a grocery store there where I still remember that – the thing I most remember buying, I think I was very – I remember it because I was very proud when I finally began to be able to pronounce it. My mother would send me for petrishke, which was parsley. **[0:21:30]** And [laughs]…

Interviewer: And they sold it at that corner store.

Respondent: They did. And so I remember that store very well. And then there was a store on the northwest corner of Major Street that – it started with a "Z," and there was a family that owned that. I don't remember if the name was "Zeit's" or something like that. And I remember going to that store a lot.

Interviewer: **[0:22:00]** So it was another corner store?

Respondent: Another corner store, and I remember that I went – I think I went to school with one of the kids from that store. Those are the stores. Oh, and then on Harbord also, there was – I think there was a Jewish butcher on the south side, and a shochet. I think that's where I sometimes went with my father with live chickens.

Interviewer: Oh yeah. You could **[0:22:30]** actually choose your chicken.

Respondent: To carry the live – well his parents, his family, his uncle, had stores on Kensington, and we would get our chickens – had chicken stores. We would get our chickens and take them either on College or Brunswick, and sometimes on Harbord to get them slaughtered. And then my parents would pluck the chickens on Thursday night. That was the ritual. **[0:23:00]** And we would have chicken on Friday night.

Interviewer: But you remember the plucking.

Respondent: I remember the plucking, and I also remember the grieben, which we would all never eat now unless we really saw it there and we could mash it into our potatoes.

Interviewer: That was delicious.

Respondent: That was delicious. [Laughs] That's chicken fat, so.

Voice: I know. That's grieben. Ivanka and I did the same.

Respondent: Oh, she likes it. **[0:23:30]** She's East European, so she's still into that. Yeah. It's delicious. Terrible for you, but…

Interviewer: Do you have any particular memories from any of these stores?

Respondent: I have a particular memory from a College Street store because after school when I went to Hebrew school, my habit was that after school, by the time I was going to Hebrew school, my father had started to spend some time **[0:24:00]** in the store, as opposed to being on the road. And so I used to – but my uncle was also there. So I always went after school to my dad's store, and I got a nickel. And I went next door to Heime's Cigar Store, and I bought a Jersey Milk chocolate bar, and then I went to Hebrew school.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Lovely.

Respondent: That was my habit every, **[0:24:30]** you know, four days a week. That's what I did.

Interviewer: And for a nickel.

Respondent: For a nickel. When they brought the price of chocolate bars up from five cents to seven cents, I wrote a letter to the Nielsen company. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Oh, what a fabulous story.

Respondent: Complaining that, you know, it was very – a nickel was so easy to carry, and seven cents was complicated, and **[0:25:00]** I don't know. I think my mother probably helped me compose all the reasons why I was against their, you know – however, Nielsen's was not moved. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Did they respond?

Respondent: No. [Laughs]

Interviewer: But that's a fabulous story.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: You were an activist. A seven-year-old activist.

Respondent: Exactly. Well, my mother was very justice-oriented, and I have lots of stories about my mom. That's not **[0:25:30]** for this, but I do have a lot of stories about my mother and her sense of justice. She was very into asserting yourself and seeing that people got justice. That was very important to her. And it was a lesson she really taught me from a very young age.

Interviewer: It's a good lesson.

Respondent: And it was interesting in her family. I think she stood out. I think partly **[0:26:00]** it was because she was the youngest and was sort of the most modern and the most pampered, so she had the confidence to behave in that way.

Interviewer: Well, your son, Saul, is sitting here with us. Did your mother pass that onto you?

Voice: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Voice: In different degrees, and different ways, and different – it's in the family.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Voice: Everybody's assertive in some way, or shape, or form.

Respondent: But you're interested in justice and **[0:26:30]** social justice. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. And well, even your being a journalist and dealing with the environment. That's part of the same picture. Yeah, yeah. What about the class structure or the socioeconomic picture?

Respondent: My mother was always very interested in education, as was her father. And she was interested in **[0:27:00]** moving upwards, and she scrimped and she saved. And she was not a snob, but she very much wanted to move upwards, and we did. When I was twelve, we moved to Forest Hill. Her reasoning was that everybody who went to Forest Hill Collegiate went to university, and she was very determined that her children go to **[0:27:30]** university. She was very supportive of any educational endeavours, and so her idea of social mobility wasn't so much money; it was really education. That was a very big motivator for her, as it was for many. But not everyone in her family felt that way. She definitely felt that way. My father went along with it, but it wasn't his motivation. It was **[0:28:00]** her motivation.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Well it's certainly a value that we hold dear to ourself, to our heart, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: I do.

Interviewer: Yeah. What were the languages that you heard in the neighbourhood?

Respondent: Yiddish, English, Polish. I think there were several Polish families in the neighbourhood. Those were the languages I mostly remember. I do not remember hearing any **[0:28:30]** Italian yet…

Interviewer: Yet.

Respondent: …when I lived there. I know it came later, but at that time, I think it was Eastern European, Yiddish, or English.

Interviewer: What language did your family speak at home?

Respondent: English, but my grandparents all spoke Yiddish, so I had a – I didn't speak a lot of Yiddish, but I understood everything that everybody was saying. They used to speak in Yiddish if they didn't want you to know **[0:29:00]** what they were saying, but we all understood it, right?

Voice: When you say Polish, Christian or Jewish?

Respondent: Christian and Jewish. The Jewish Poles tended to speak Yiddish, and Polish Christians tended to speak Polish, is the way I recall it.

Interviewer: Bev, as far as you knew, were there some mothers who were working outside the **[0:29:30]** home?

Respondent: I only knew of one. I had a friend across the street whose mother worked outside the home. My mother personally, she wanted to, but my father was against it. He felt that he would be embarrassed. That's how many men felt, that it would mean that they couldn't earn a good enough living. **[0:30:00]** So my mother was not crazy for babies. She liked children, but she really wanted – she was a very good organizer, and she would have managed that store that my father worked in. My mother would have been fabulous, but there was no way that she was getting in there. I think she was quite frustrated by that. She would liked to have worked. I **[0:30:30]** had an aunt who worked outside the home, but she – they had no children. That was my father's sister-in-law. My mother, my mother had sisters who worked, but they worked with their husbands in businesses like the bargain business. I had an aunt who – she and her husband **[0:31:00]** had a store on Bloor near Ossington, and

they ran a bargain clothing business together, and I had another aunt who worked with her husband out in the Danforth. Another one of my mother' sisters. And that was also, though, a joint venture. They had three children, but they lived – in both those cases, they lived where they worked. They lived upstairs, the store was downstairs.

Interviewer: **[0:31:30]** That was quite common at that time.

Respondent: It was common. That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Do you know of any families, the men and/or the women, who had businesses in their homes? Any cottage industries?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: No, they all went somewhere.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. You talked about the coal.

Respondent: I should qualify that. There were two sisters who lived on Robert Street who were seamstresses.

Interviewer: **[0:32:00]** Uh-huh.

Respondent: And they worked out of their homes. They lived just north of the candy store that was across the road from Lansdowne School.

Interviewer: That just closed about ten years ago. It was a wonderful place with a wooden floor.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And they sold all those old-fashioned – you know, penny candies. And we always went there after school if we were lucky, and if we had a penny or two you could buy gumballs and…

Interviewer: **[0:32:30]** Yeah.

Respondent: …such things in there.

Interviewer: And then you got your five-cent chocolate bar on your way to cheder. [Laughter] You did very well.

Respondent: That was from Heime's Cigar Store.

Interviewer: You did very well.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So to come back to – thank you for adding that about cottage industry. Where was I going with that? The stores on College Street. Anything else that…

Respondent: Well, on that particular block, there **[0:33:00]** was – what I remember is the Mission was always there. The Scott Mission sort of coming down to the corner of Spadina. Fox the Tailor, who owned – I think he probably owned the building, a couple of buildings there, and I think he may have owned the building where my dad's store was. Victory Florists was another place. The **[0:33:30]** Garden Theatre, which was a movie show, was still on that block between Spadina and Harbord. There were three movies, movie houses, on College Street on the north side. The Garden, which was east of Robert Street, the Playhouse, which was farther west, and the Bellevue…

Interviewer: Wow, that's a lot.

Respondent: …which was even **[0:34:00]** farther west, but everybody went to the movies. And those were the days. I remember that our dishes came from the Garden, because if you went to the movies on certain nights, you got a dish. And I remember that we got our – we ate on dishes that came from the Garden.

Interviewer: So you collected them slowly through the months and years.

Respondent: And we – I went sometimes with my parents – it was in the evening – and with my friends to matinees. **[0:34:30]** Yeah. There were three movies.

Interviewer: That's a lot in that small…

Respondent: Yeah. One on each block.

Interviewer: What about synagogues and churches?

Respondent: I went to – I don't remember the churches. I remember the synagogues. My father's parents went to the Londoner Shul, which was on Spadina across the road – sort of across **[0:35:00]** the road from St. Andrew's. You know where St. Andrew's Street is? It was on the east side of Spadina, the Londoner Shul. My mother and I went there quite often, and it was an Orthodox synagogue. And most of what I did there was play with the other kids. The women sat in the balcony and the men sat downstairs. My **[0:35:30]** mother's father – now to the Londoner shul, both my grandparents went. My grandfather, my mother's father, he went to the D'Arcy Street shul. And when I went there, I sat with him because my grandmother did not – I'm not sure if my grandmother was literate or not. **[0:36:00]** And none of the girls, none of – my mother had four sisters. There were five girls, were the family, and I don't know that any of them ever learned to actually – despite my grandfather's great interest in education, all of the girls were sent out to work at very young ages, and I don't think they ever learned to read Hebrew. Any of them. They were all literate, **[0:36:30]** and they, you know – that was – because they went to school here. But my mother was taken out of school when she was thirteen, possibly younger. We're not exactly sure, but she had…

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. But your family needed her to work.

Respondent: I don't think she actually went past grade five or six.

Interviewer: But your family in terms of the synagogues, your family was kind of divided. [Laughs]

Respondent: They were. Well, **[0:37:00]** they were devout, you know? They were kosher. My mother kept a kosher house all the time. Her – any of the parents, the grandparents were alive so that they would eat at her house. She didn't care so much, but she wanted them to be able to eat at her house. So they were all quite religious, yes. I did go quite often with my **[0:37:30]** grandfather.

Interviewer: So that must have been a nice…

Respondent: Yeah. I liked it. I always enjoyed anything that had to do with reading stuff, or learning stuff, and I did find it interesting. And I did speak Hebrew with my grandfather that lived on Major Street. That was why I would be stopping by on my way to and from Hebrew school because he liked to…

Interviewer: You actually spoke Hebrew with him?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: That's impressive.

Respondent: Yeah. **[0:38:00]** Well I went every day from the time I was five until I was twelve.

Interviewer: Right. And he spoke Hebrew and Yiddish?

Respondent: Yeah. It wouldn't have been the Hebrew that you hear now because it's been quite modified, but it was – yeah. We spoke Hebrew together.

Interviewer: So it's not as modern Hebrew as it is now.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah. That changed in 1948. I remember being in Hebrew school in 1948 and they changed it because of the state of Israel.

Respondent: That's right. And they began to work on the **[0:38:30]** language and create a language that was very modern.

Interviewer: I want to come back briefly to the coal that – you didn't go into the basement. The coal was just down the chute.

Respondent: The coal was delivered.

Interviewer: While your family was there, did they change from coal or it remained coal the whole time?

Respondent: It remained coal the whole time I was there, and just in terms of the life of the street, there were also – when we – during the **[0:39:00]** period that I lived on Robert Street, there were still horses delivering – wagons that were delivering milk and ice. We had ice delivered for the iceboxes, and we had coal delivered, and milk was delivered. And seltzer.

Interviewer: Oh, the bottles. Yeah.

Respondent: The spritz bottles. The seltzer bottles were delivered as well. And we all had **[0:39:30]** seltzer in the house.

Interviewer: It was really fundamental. [Laughs]

Voice: I still have a bottle at the cottage in my cabin. I was going to – I'm going to switch tapes.

Interviewer: So the coal was delivered. The milk. Those were glass milk bottles?:

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Yeah. And your family would leave them out and…

Respondent: On the porch.

Interviewer: Were they using trucks, or were they using horses?

Respondent: When I was very young, there were a lot of horses. I do remember **[0:40:00]** horses. And then I remember that there was a changeover during the period that I lived on Robert Street. So I think by the time the war was beginning to end, things were – you got more motorized vehicles. And part of the thing about trucks may have been that parts were needed for the war. And cars and trucks – that you didn't see a lot of cars and trucks until **[0:40:30]** the wear was nearing an end.

Interviewer: That's a wonderful association that you've made. I wouldn't have thought of that. Talking about the war, do you remember when it ended? And do you remember whether there was…

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you remember?

Respondent: Yes. I remember that everybody celebrated when the war was over. There were men on our street who were in the army, and/or in the armed **[0:41:00]** forces. And there was just general flag-waving and excitement, and I remember that very, very well. Yeah. I do.

Interviewer: That's quite an experience to remember the end of a World War.

Respondent: Well, I remember the whole – you know, I remember a lot about my parents always reading the news, listening to the news, huddled **[0:41:30]** around the radio, talking about the war. Talking – all the conversations about the concentration camps, when that news started to become available widely. It was a huge thing. It was a huge thing.

Interviewer: I guess in some ways we're privileged to have lived through that and to remember it.

Respondent: Yeah. **[0:42:00]** I think so. It marks you.

Interviewer: You talked about maybe they couldn't use cars because they needed the parts. Were there rations at the time, food stamps, anything like that?

Respondent: You know, I do not remember anything like that. My parents, I think – what money my mother wasn't saving, and she was very, **[0:42:30]** very good at saving, was not devoted to food. Food was always ample in our house, and my mother was – my mother was unusual in that she was extremely nutrition-conscious.

Interviewer: That is unusual for our generation.

Respondent: Yes. For her lack of formal education and the class in which she was brought up, **[0:43:00]** and all that, I never even knew what a sandwich or Kraft Dinner was until I was in high school. I didn't know what Kraft Dinner was until I was married actually, but I got a salad every day for lunch. My mother was – she wouldn't peel her carrots or her apples, and she was a – I don't know where she learned it actually, **[0:43:30]** but she and one of her sisters were – they went to the – my mother went to the gym and she was very nutrition-conscious.

Interviewer: Modern woman.

Respondent: Yes. She was – and she was the first one to drive of anybody we knew as well. She got her driver's license right after the war.

Interviewer: It's as if she was born forty years later.

Respondent: It was. That's why I say her whole sense of how the world should work, her ideas about women's rights, **[0:44:00]** everything, she was more advanced than a lot of her friends.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We were talking about horses versus trucks. What about other people? Did other people use horses? Or…

Respondent: Peddlers.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: There were still peddlers. Not a lot, but there still were. And – but my father, I was used **[0:44:30]** to vehicles personally because my dad travelled all over Ontario selling automotive parts, so obviously that – my exposure was a little bit more too.

Interviewer: And your neighbours?

Respondent: No, but very few people owned a car. I think we were one of the few people. I remember being driven around a lot when I was very young in a truck. **[0:45:00]** My grandparents, my father's parents who had a chicken store, they had a truck because my father's first job before he – and how he met my mother actually was driving chickens from his father's store to Bell Ewart, to the Jewish community there where he would sell kosher chickens.

Interviewer: These were **[0:45:30]** alive.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So they were in some kind of crate.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: But smelly and noisy, I assume.

Respondent: Yes. And then they got taken to the shochet. [Laughter] And then later…

Interviewer: You have colourful memories.

Respondent: …I think they may have slaughtered them and kept them on ice, but my father drove a truck there. And I remember my grandparents driving me around, and I don't know if I actually remember this, but I have been **[0:46:00]** told many times – they used to tell stories about my father's parents and my uncle and aunt who had no children driving me around as a baby in the truck to put me to sleep because I always, apparently, said "shuckle me." I don't know if that's true or not. [Laughter] I don't personally remember that, but we did drive around. People had trucks because **[0:46:30]** they worked with them, but very few people owned pleasure cars.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: We were one of the first on our street for sure. Dodges and – I think Dodges were my father's favourite make of car.

Interviewer: Heating, the coal. Do you remember any change? Or as long as you were there it was coal?

Respondent: We had – I remember it always being **[0:47:00]** coal.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. I can ask you a question which is totally different form this, and that is socially and dating, what was dating like in…

Respondent: Well I was twelve when I moved, but there actually were dates before that. I think it started in grade six, and I remember being called by boys, either from my **[0:47:30]** school or in the neighbourhood, or from – I belonged to a group, a Jewish group, Habonim, and I got called from boys there too. My parents would not let me go out with a boy alone, but they did allow us to go in groups. And so I do remember being taken for a birthday, **[0:48:00]** for my birthday by a boy who wanted to take me out, and he arranged for it to be a whole group. And we went to a live performance of Wayne and Shuster.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: And then we went to Bassel's afterwards for ice cream or something like that. Sodas. And then came home. And of course, my parents were waiting for us all to arrive.

Voice: **[0:48:30]** How old would you have been?

Respondent: I was eleven maybe.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So you couldn't go out with a boy alone, but you could walk through a dark lane by yourself. [Laughter]

Respondent: That's right. [Laughter]

Interviewer: So dark lanes were safer.

Respondent: Dark lanes with guys urinating were okay, but going out with a boy alone was definitely a no-no. But you could go out in groups. That was – but then again, not all my friends were allowed to do that. My **[0:49:00]** mother was very – she had that modern attitude, a more modern attitude, than some of the other – some of her sisters, for instance. And even when I was older, my mother's attitude of my father – my father would wait up. My mother would say, "I trust her because I was trustworthy. You probably won't trust her because you weren't trustworthy." That's what she used to say. [Laughter] **[0:49:30]** With girls she meant.

Interviewer: Yeah, very cute. One other – to leave this, do you remember garbage pick-up?

Respondent: You know, I don't.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: I was thinking about that actually, and thinking about what you might be interested in, but I actually do not remember anything about garbage pick-up.

Interviewer: I think we…

Respondent: Have you learned about that…

Interviewer: Not much.

Respondent: …up until now?

Interviewer: Not much.

Respondent: No. **[0:50:00]** Isn't that odd? I don't remember a thing.

Interviewer: Animals. Did people have pets at that time?

Respondent: Yes. We had a dog. Lots of people had dogs and cats. I think many cats were for the purpose of catching mice. We never had a cat. My parents were extremely fond of dogs. We always had – almost always had a dog.

Interviewer: Do you remember the names?

Respondent: Skippy **[0:50:30]** I remember in particular because he was a very smart dog. And I remember him also because I remember finding him cold on the landing down to the cellar. I think that's where we fed him and one morning, I found him there dead. And he was a wonderful dog.

Interviewer: What kind of dog was he?

Respondent: He was a mongrel. We got him at the Humane Society. We took him **[0:51:00]** – we went to New York quite often to visit my mother's sister and her family in the New York area, not New York City, and we took that dog with us. I remember the trips where he was on the floor in the car. He was a very smart little dog.

Interviewer: Yeah. I had one relative who had a dog, and the name was Skippy. [Laughs]

Respondent: Was very popular at the time. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. **[0:51:30]** But you had other dogs.

Respondent: We often had dogs in our family, but he's the one that I remember. We didn't have a dog when we moved up to Forest Hill. And you know, I don't remember why, because my mother was very fond of dogs. I don't remember why we didn't. Maybe because she then didn't – wasn't spending a lot of time at home. May have been the reason.

Interviewer: You moved up north. What high school did you go to? **[0:52:00]** You didn't come down to Harbord Collegiate.

Respondent: No. I went to Forest Hill. That was my mother's whole thing.

Interviewer: Would you talk a little bit about Kensington Market please?

Respondent: Kensington. Well, my grandparents lived at number 6 Kensington. My father's parents. And my father's oldest brother and his wife.

They lived with my grandparents. **[0:52:30]** One of my relatives still lives in that house.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: Originally, there was a chicken store in the front and they lived in the back and upstairs. They had in the back, a kitchen and a bedroom. And I think that the dining room and stuff, **[0:53:00]** I remember it as being upstairs, but I could be wrong. It may have been a dining room, a kitchen, a bedroom in the back, and then an upstairs, but it did house my aunt and uncle, and both my grandparents. Up the street, north of number 6, was Daiter's. I remember Daiter's **[0:53:30]** cottage cheese, which I still eat, and go out of my way to get, the same way I go to the Harbord Bakery. I went to the store on Kensington until it closed, also because of my feeling associated with it. Mrs. Daiter was a very good friend of my grandmother's, and they used to play cards, Casino and Rummy, in the back of Mrs. Daiter's store, and I often **[0:54:00]** was with my grandmother when they did that. So I remember that store in particular. There were butcher shops. I remember also in particular the store that's on the corner of Augusta and Baldwin because – on the north side that sells all the coffees and things like **[indiscernible 0:54:24]**, and that store – nuts, all – that store was always that **[0:54:30]** kind of store.

Interviewer: Is that store the one that's there right now?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: I shop there.

Respondent: And it's always been that kind of store. And I always – I shopped at Kensington for many, many years, including the years I've lived in this house. I often went to Kensington. I was drawn to those areas really because I felt very attached to them, and I **[0:55:00]** always bought my coffee, my nuts, my baking goods at that corner store. I especially went – and there was a grocery store where my husband used to shop every Friday before he came to my grandmother's and aunt's and uncle's cottage, which is where I often spent a few summers with them when my kids were young. And my husband

would shop **[0:55:30]** in Kensington before coming up. We shopped at Perlmuttar's. The black bread at Perlmuttar's was especially something. My grandmother baked blueberry buns, so we didn't have to buy blueberry buns, although the Harbord's are very good. And what else do I remember? I remember – oh, I do have a story about Kensington, and **[0:56:00]** I have actually got a picture of my mother's father's store on Augusta where my mother worked from the time she was thirteen. My mother was a very tiny person and people talked about her all the time. At the time, she was called Mary. She changed her name to Marilyn, after Marilyn Miller, the dancer, when she was a teenager. But when she was **[0:56:30]** younger, she was known as Mary. I remember Mr. Goodman's store. Mr. Goodman had a grocery store on the west side of Kensington Avenue, and I believe some of his family tried to make a go of that store up until fairly recent years. But one day, when I was – my mother was **[0:57:00]** probably in her mid-sixties. She was born in 1912. She was around in her mid-sixties and I took her down to Kensington shopping with me, and Mr. Goodman actually came running out of his store yelling, "Mary, Mary Treiman. Mary Treiman. How are you?" So they – the merchants there remembered my mother from **[0:57:30]** the area.

Voice: And she was already living in Florida at that point.

Respondent: She was living in Florida. So many years later. Like they hadn't seen her for – since she was a little girl.

Interviewer: Some decades.

Respondent: Everybody knew her. She was a whiz at math…

Voice: She had that experience on **[indiscernible 0:57:47]** Road when I was there one time with her, and their next-door neighbour…

Respondent: My friends…

Voice: …he was out working in his yard and they remembered each other.

Respondent: Yeah. My mother was – made herself memorable. She had a lot of **[0:58:00]** personality. And she was very interested in people, and I

think probably it was interesting that my grandfather trusted her with the money in the store so that that was how he would have treated a son. And she always said he treated her more like a son than he treated any of the other girls.

Interviewer: **[0:58:30]** When you were living on Robert Street, did your family use the Market, Kensington Market?

Respondent: All the time.

Interviewer: So they did most of their shopping there.

Respondent: A lot of it. Yeah. We shopped on Harbord and we shopped in Kensington.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. So it was an important place for your family.

Respondent: I spent a lot of my young years in Kensington because my aunt and uncle were childless, and my **[0:59:00]** – they lived with my grandparents, and I was the first grandchild. So I was completely – everybody wanted to look after me. I was a really coveted kid, and quite well treated by my father's family. I mean it was a big deal to them to have a little kid, and I was really well treated.

Interviewer: So you had close relationships with both sets of **[0:59:30]** grandparents.

Respondent: Very close. Every Sunday.

Interviewer: And they all lived in the neighbourhood.

Respondent: More or less. Lippincott Street. You know, Bloor and Ossington and the Danforth were far, but everybody congregated on Sunday afternoons. Everybody, all my families, got together.

Interviewer: At the same place? Or you…

Respondent: Different places, different times. It was – my **[1:00:00]** mother's family in particular were very close with each other, but my father worked with his oldest brother. And there were relationships, but

one of my father's brothers married somebody who wasn't Jewish. My grandmother would never recognize her. My parents were very friendly with her, and I remember going to their house for Christmas dinner and eating goose. **[1:00:30]** You know, because my parents were – my mother, as I said, she wasn't thrilled with – I mean I think she would have probably had a hard time adjusting to my marrying someone who wasn't Jewish. She had no trouble with my children doing that. And she had no trouble with her – she was just too fond of people to cut anyone out of her life.

Interviewer: Boy, it sounds as if you were all very lucky to have had her in your life.

Respondent: Yeah. **[1:01:00]** She was an interesting person.

Interviewer: Did you know her at all?

Voice: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Voice: Oh yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I wanted to talk about security, but I think you've made it very clear that it was a safe place.

Respondent: I don't think my parents ever locked the door, except once when my mother locked me out. [Laughter] But they didn't. It was not their habit to. And in fact, it wasn't my habit to lock **[1:01:30]** the door until almost 1970. I didn't lock my door. Quite often after I moved to this house, I would leave the door open, or at least the side door open in case one of the kids came home early, or I was delayed or something.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Coming back to the neighbourhood downtown, now you're not living there, but you go down there…

Respondent: All the time.

Interviewer: **[1:02:00]** What's your impression of some of the changes that have happened, even though you don't live there?

Respondent: Well the university has taken up more space there, so I do notice that certain things that were familiar – I noticed that there are many, many upscale restaurants until – I mean Toronto – that's been one of the most significant changes in Toronto since **[1:02:30]** we were young. When I was going out with my husband in the mid-'50s, there were about three restaurants to go out to in Toronto, unless you belonged to a club or you were going to Winston's or one of the hotels, there were very, very few restaurants. With the influx, starting at the end of **[1:03:00]** the '50s, of immigrants of all over, and a much – not only were they more diverse, but they were so many more in number – did ethnic food, ethnic restaurants, more restaurants. And then I think more people were more affluent, and you began to see many more restaurants develop. So now on Harbord Street, it's a **[1:03:30]** restaurant heaven, and of all sorts that was never – people didn't go out to eat. They couldn't afford it. For the most part, people living there, that was not – you wouldn't waste your money that way. Was important to be saving your money that way, and you just did – weren't earning that much.

Interviewer: And it was such a different kind. You know, you described fish stores and **[1:04:00]** corner stores, so they were more practical kinds of stores.

Respondent: Yeah. That is very different. And the same goes for College Street. There are many more – there were restaurants on College Street because there were at least three delicatessens where the movie theatres were, you know? There was Becker's. I don't remember the name of all of them. Becker's was one. I mean Shopsy's was on **[1:04:30]** Spadina. What's the one that we always went to for the brisket? Switzer's was on Spadina. That was the best one. But College Street had a few as well of delicatessens.

Voice: Switzer's. That was – yeah. That was – yeah.

Interviewer: That was on Spadina.

Respondent: Switzer's was on Spadina across from Shopsy's.

Voice: Yeah. It was on the west side, Switzer's.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Voice: I think Emma Goldman lived above that in that same…

Interviewer: Oh really?

Voice: Way back…

Respondent: **[1:05:00]** I didn't know that.

Voice: Obviously the first Switzer's. Yeah.

Respondent: I didn't know that.

Voice: And she ended up on Vaughan Road in the end.

Interviewer: Well we've covered a lot of territory, and you have so many wonderful stories. When you knew that I was going to be coming to speak to you and, as you said, you gave it some thought, is there anything I haven't asked at all about that you would like to share with me?

Respondent: Well just maybe the public school, Lansdowne. Just for the **[1:05:30]** difference in the kind of – in the way that education was delivered in those days. I do remember many of my teachers and many of their names. Miss Watson taught grade three, and Miss Bigg taught grade five. And the women teachers were all unmarried, which was a requirement. I think that if they were married, **[1:06:00]** they no longer had a job. I'm not one hundred percent sure about that, but you can inquire about that. But I seem to recall that that was the case for a long time.

Voice: The Toronto District School Board might be able to answer that one. They might have records.

Respondent: You know, it had been like that. I don't remember how long exactly it lasted.

Interviewer: I think when you and I were children, if you wanted to be a stewardess, you had to be a nurse and you could not be married.

Respondent: **[1:06:30]** Yeah.

Interviewer: So things have changed.

Respondent: I mean there were all these restrictions. There were lots of restrictions of many sorts and with respect to women, you know, that was one of the areas. So that was one thing. I don't think any of my elementary school teachers at Lansdowne was ever married. The men, yes, but the women, no. I remember Mr. Scott. So I mean they did make impressions on me. I do remember that. And I remember **[1:07:00]** that the school nurse checked our heads for lice on a regular basis. [Laughter] They have much more lice in the schools now than then, but maybe that's why. I don't know. And – but we had resident nurses, right?

Interviewer: A school nurse.

Respondent: A school nurse that was always in the school. So if you were not well, you went to the nurse's office.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But I'll tell you one. **[1:07:30]** The boys went in one entrance, the girls went in another entrance. The schoolyards were mainly gravel and cement. You played skipping, marbles, and sports on the gravel. There was no grass. I don't ever remember grass on the school grounds. Lansdowne has been completely rebuilt. It no **[1:08:00]** longer looks anything like it looked when I was a student there. But the discipline was quite different. You got hit on your hands with a ruler if you were bad or for any other reason. And I remember one of my teachers taking me aside in a cloakroom one day to **[1:08:30]** – and she thought she – I'm sure she meant to be helpful. She was warning me about one of my friends who she

didn't think was a suitable friend. And this is not something that you – I can't believe something like that would actually happen today. I was ten. It was in grade five. And I told her that this girl was a really nice girl, and that I was going to be friends with her **[1:09:00]** anyway, and I remember getting hit the next opportunity she had. You had to put your hands on the table and you weren't allowed to take them off when the ruler came down.

Interviewer: So you think she was angry that you didn't take her…

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: …good advice.

Respondent: Yes. And she was – we all felt so sorry for her because she was so miserable, that we actually got together and bought her a very nice Christmas present because we made up this story about her that she **[1:09:30]** must be a very unhappy person, so we would go out of our way to be nice to her. I mean this – it's interesting. I remember these things because I wonder how we ever came to those conclusions, or what impelled us. I don't know whether we talked to our parents about it or not. And then there was the illustration of how parents behaved. So **[1:10:00]** I always remember that part in "Radio Days." Do you remember that Woody Allen movie when his – he's bad, the Hebrew teacher says he's bad, and they go to the Hebrew school and they – the parents fight over, "I'll hit him." No, "You hit him," "No, I'll hit him" because they always took the teacher's word. But **[1:10:30]** as an illustration of the discipline and the difference in the way different parents were still behaving at that time with respect to authority figures, one of my cousins from New York was visiting on an American holiday, so I took him to school with me. And I told him that he had to go in the boys' door, and I had to go in the girls' door, and I told him what room I was **[1:11:00]** in, and what room he was to go to. And I think I had arranged this beforehand, or my mother had arranged this. And as we were going up the stairs, he waved to me. "Hey, Bev!" And he got hauled out of line and he didn't show up in class. And I was – spent the whole class being extremely worried about where he was, and where **[1:11:30]** he was was in the principal's office where he had gotten the strap…

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: …for yelling out loud going up the stairs. And so I was quite indignant. So that's the first thing. The second thing was I was quite indignant about this, and I said to him on the way home, "That's just terrible. I'm going to tell my mother what happened and she'll complain to the school." And he said, "Don't **[1:12:00]** tell your mother." I said, "Why not?" "Don't tell your mother." "Why not?" "Don't tell your mother." "Don't be ridiculous. Of course I'm going to tell her. That's not right." So I went home and told my mother, who was going to – you know, went to discuss it with his mother, whereupon he got smacked.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: Now that was my mother's sister because obviously, he **[1:12:30]** had done something wrong and he had better listen. That was Arnold.

Interviewer: But at that time, the school was right.

Respondent: The school was right. Not for my mother, but my mother was, you know, on my side. But his mother – and he said, "See? I told you not to tell." [Laughs]

Interviewer: Well – and so his mother was more traditional and your mother sought justice.

Respondent: Yeah. But the school still had **[1:13:00]** corporal punishment.

Interviewer: I know. Yeah.

Respondent: And that's what it – and those were the non-serious types of offenses that you could be punished for, which is so amazing today. And I do remember all the arguments about corporal punishment as my children were growing up, and how limits were put on that with respect to parents and to teachers.

Interviewer: **[1:13:30]** And now they wouldn't dare touch a child.

Respondent: They can't. Sometimes they maybe should, but you know, of course they don't now.

Interviewer: But those are good examples of how things have changed.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Really changed radically, drastically.

Respondent: Yeah. But I – but then we had a principal who was sensitive enough to suggest that I start at a new school, so it's **[1:14:00]** interesting that there were very humane educators, and that was my finding with most of the teachers, that they – you know, that they were very lovely. But the system condoned, or the traditions were that you would be treated in those ways.

Interviewer: Well, I think we've covered a lot. Saul, did you…

Voice: No, I…

Interviewer: Anything new that you're hearing?

Voice: No. I was just **[1:14:30]** here for the ride.

Respondent: You've heard…

Interviewer: No, but I'm wondering whether you know all these stories or some?

Voice: Some of them.

Interviewer: Yeah. Some.

Voice: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, Bev, I just want to say thank you very much.

Respondent: You're very welcome. [Laughs]

Interviewer: It was a pleasure for me to listen to you and learn so much.

Respondent: Eleanor, it was my pleasure really.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well thank you. Thank you.

Respondent: So…

[01:14:49]

[End of recording]