

111 Len Lewis

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

Interviewer: The date today is the 3rd of June, 2013, and I'm meeting with Len Lewis, whose family bought the house in 1963, and Len was ten years old. [Laughs] And your brother's at that time were eight and thirteen. So thank you very, very much. You did mention to me that you submitted a request that one of the lanes be named after [0:00:30] your family. And it's been accepted, and on the fifteenth of June of 2013, they're going to have the naming. Please tell me what made you think that your family should be honoured in that way? What was special?

Respondent: What was special is that I really wanted to sort of honour or remember my parents actually. When we first moved here from a small town called St. Mary's, Ontario to Toronto, my parents were elderly at that time, and [0:01:00] they were just really hardworking immigrants.

Interviewer: Immigrants from where?

Respondent: Of Chinese descent.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. From really the Toisan district, which basically where much of the Chinese population came to – for various reasons to go to the Golden Mountain looking for the gold rush, or building the railroad across Canada. So those were the indigenous people who basically came from the Toisan area to work [0:01:30] in North America. That was the province in China. So in a way, to honour them, I just wanted to pay some respect to them. So when we first moved here back in '63, we were as far as I remember, one of two Chinese families in the area. There was a Lee family just down the street at 37 Major Street, but growing up here, I didn't really recall that many Chinese people really – so I just thought it would be fitting to honour them [0:02:00] in that respect.

Interviewer: They lived at 37 and you lived at 52 Major.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So you were quite close to them physically.

Respondent: Yeah. We went – actually, they were younger than I, so we sort of hung out sort of together. We were kids, so obviously yes. Time went on and we never really knew them. I just know them as Walter Lee and his sister. I believe they're still there.

Interviewer: When you went to school, were there any **[0:02:30]** other Chinese families, Chinese children at that time?

Respondent: Yeah, there were Chinese families, but they weren't actually at the – in our local area. Some of them, I think one was actually on Brunswick Avenue, I believe. Some of them were maybe down on D'Arcy, Cecil, towards Chinatown.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: Or the Chinatown that was to be.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Because the old Chinatown back then was still on Chestnut at Dundas, and the Spadina Chinatown had not really emerged yet actually as a **[0:03:00]** vital economy.

Interviewer: So your parents bought this place on Major Street fifty years ago. Long time ago. And there were very few other Chinese families. Do you have any idea what made them buy in that neighbourhood and not where there were more Chinese families?

Respondent: Honestly I have no idea. You know? My dad, apparently, he just took a bus from St. Mary's, Ontario, which is actually near Stratford. **[0:03:30]** Took a bus and came back and purchased a home in cash apparently.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: My mother was really upset because that was a lot of money back then. I think back then it was worth – I think he paid fourteen, or eighteen, or sixteen thousand in cash back in 1963, so that probably depleted the whole savings. Because we at that point, my parents had a restaurant. It was called the Lewis Café in St. Mary's, Ontario, [0:04:00] so they sold the business in order to move to Toronto.

Interviewer: Any understanding of why they chose to leave to come here?

Respondent: Oh, they chose because my father was elderly at that time, so my father was already pushing sixty-eight that year. We were from a small town of five thousand people. A Scottish town called St. Mary's, Ontario, so actually this is where all the building material came around in developing much of part of the area of Stratford and southern Ontario. So there was a quarry. There was two quarries there, which [0:04:30] they're mining the stones to build the municipal buildings, etcetera. So I believe the decision was made because my father was getting elderly, we were children growing up, and my mother, I guess, wanted really to come to a larger place for the benefit of us and maybe for her also. The whole family. That's all I recall.

Interviewer: So he came here, he bought the house, he went back to St. Mary's and said, "We own a home." [Laughs] And that was it.

Respondent: Yeah. That's [0:05:00] as far as I recollect, yeah.

Interviewer: And your family moved here in the summer of '63. There were already five of you clearly. Did you use the whole house? Or were there other people who eventually moved into the house with you?

Respondent: Yeah. We basically – my parents ran it as a boarding house back then because it's – yeah. Really – either we paid it outright in cash, or you know, they were struggling actually because my mother – when my mother came, she had no command of the English language.

Interviewer: Did your [0:05:30] father speak some English?

- Respondent:** No. He had a little bit. See, that's where I'm really amazed. He had a very limited command of the language too, and yet, you know, he went here, purchased a home, did all this, and came back. Really did all that.
- Interviewer:** Where were you and your brothers born? Were you born in Canada, or were you born...
- Respondent:** No, we were born in Canada in St. Mary's, Ontario.
- Interviewer:** Okay. I see. So there – their English was very limited, yet he came, bought a house, went back, and brought you all here? [Laughs]
- Respondent:** That's correct. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, he did a lot of things. When, you know, [0:06:00] the same thing. When he was married early and his first wife had passed away, so back in the 1949, I believe, he decided – he was in St. Mary's with his brothers at that time, in St. Mary's opening up a restaurant. He actually started out west in Victoria and actually migrated east. Actually he was ten years old when he came. No, fourteen.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Yeah, fourteen. 1910 he came. [0:06:30] He came looking for his dad who was in Seattle, Washington.
- Interviewer:** And he never went back.
- Respondent:** Never went back.
- Interviewer:** Did he find his dad?
- Respondent:** Yeah. Oh yeah. He did, yeah. That's right. Well, he sponsored – I guess my grandfather would have sponsored. He went back when he was ten years old. That's right. So.
- Interviewer:** Your family moved to Toronto. What work did your father do? I mean he couldn't continue his restaurant. That was quite far away.

- Respondent:** See, that was a struggle too actually. So my father got a job as a sort of a – [0:07:00] a line cook? A chef? Not a chef. A cook. It was at the 300 Tavern. Now the 300 Tavern, which is basically located at Robert and College, what it was – what it is now, it's called the Rancho Relaxo.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** That's the 300 Tavern. That was the 300 Tavern. That's where my father worked actually, and it was so close because we went to Lansdowne, which was actually called Lord Lansdowne later.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Yeah. So that – so he worked for a few years, maybe four [0:07:30] years there.
- Interviewer:** And what did he do after that four years?
- Respondent:** He retired.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah, because he was pushing on seventy – yeah. Mid-seventies actually. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So you went to Lord Lansdowne. I'm going to move into your education now.
- Respondent:** Sure.
- Interviewer:** When you went to school, well I want to backtrack. What language did you speak at home?
- Respondent:** English. Chinese actually. You know, [0:08:00] Chinese, English. But the thing was, which is actually – oh, good lord. See, when we were growing up as kids in St. Mary's, my father and mother, they ran the family business. It was just a restaurant, but you know, they were so occupied with the business. My father would probably begin work at, oh gosh, seven in the morning, type up the new

menu. He wouldn't – the restaurant wouldn't close until elevenish.
[0:08:30]

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: So really long hours. I'd say fifteen, sixteen hours a day really. So they really didn't have that much time with us. Even my mother really, right? She didn't have no language because she was basically a recent bride from China really, because that's why my father went back to China, looking for a second wife, you see? Back in 1949, '50 when my brother was born actually. That's when my mother came actually, you know? So she had quite the shock for her from China coming here. No language. [0:09:00] Just Chinese.

Interviewer: Did she also raise the children from your father's first family?

Respondent: No, no, no.

Interviewer: They were already grown up.

Respondent: They were grown up and on their own. That's correct. Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. So she was a stay-at-home mom.

Respondent: Yes. Or just contributed to the function of the family restaurant. The usual Chinese Canadian restaurant in a small town. So that being said, [0:09:30] we never got to learn Chinese very well, which was really – creates a very dysfunctional family actually. So you know, that being said, because of our limited language, we had a huge language barrier actually because, you know, as kids, we just grew up with the local peers. You know, we just spoke English, but actually because my parents were so busy, we really didn't have much to converse about. And then over time, during our formative [0:10:00] years of trying to learn the language, I certainly had really forgotten – not forgotten, but never really learned the language, so there was huge language barriers as we grew older over time really, right? Yeah.

Interviewer: But your mother didn't speak English. Did she understand English?

- Respondent:** Not really.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** No.
- Interviewer:** Strange communication in your house.
- Respondent:** It was very rudimentary our communication, you know?
- Interviewer:** [0:10:30] Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** It was sad in many ways, as I realize down the road, you know? I just lack the language skills to converse on any deeper level.
- Interviewer:** So was your family able to have some kind of community with other Chinese-speaking people? I mean could your mother have some friends is what I'm asking?
- Respondent:** She had, you know – not really actually. [0:11:00] She was basically a stay-at-home mom, you know? I'm sorry. She wasn't a stay-at-home mom. She worked when she came to Toronto because of a lack of language. She got whatever low-paying labour job there was. You know? Which probably would have been like four to six dollars an hour.
- Interviewer:** Not easy. Not easy.
- Respondent:** No. It was not easy. No, no. Yeah. I remember her saying she said she was just struggling, you know, just to put food on the table, etcetera, you know? [0:11:30] That's why she – that's why she ran the boarding. The house was a boarding....
- Interviewer:** That's just what I'm coming to. Obviously because your father was somewhat elderly, and he retired, so you needed money to come in. Okay. How many floors are there in your house?
- Respondent:** At the time there was three, four including the basement. So three floors. First, second, and third.

Interviewer: You were a family of five. Three sons and two parents. Where did you all live in **[0:12:00]** that building of three plus?

Respondent: We lived on the ground floor.

Interviewer: All five of you.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. And then were these strangers who lived with you? Or family?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: On the second and third floor?

Respondent: They were strangers.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. And that was enough to help the family get through and pay for food and the essentials of life?

Respondent: That's right. Or to help them save for whatever they needed to do in the end.

Interviewer: But it shows how important it **[0:12:30]** was for your father to own property.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: He took everything that he had and bought the house with it.

Respondent: That's right. I guess back then exactly maybe he didn't understand what a mortgage was, or you know? I suppose lot of things. The mentality was if you could afford it, you buy it, or you just buy it outright, right? There's no point in owing somebody any money, I guess.

Interviewer: That's right. What was it like for you – as you said, there was one Chinese, other Chinese family, and then when you went to school there were some others.

Respondent: [0:13:00] Yes.

Interviewer: What was it like for you, being in a – well, I'll backtrack again. Who else made up the neighbourhood at that time?

Respondent: Oh. It was predominately – as I recall, there was only the two Chinese in my immediate area on Major Street. There was lots of Portuguese families who are still there. Italians. There was the odd Jewish family. The Greenbergs I remember. Predominately Portuguese and – [0:13:30] only mainly Portuguese actually. A few Italians.

Interviewer: And what was it like for you as a child going to school with these mainly Portuguese children? How was that? Get along well? Or?

Respondent: Yeah. I got along well. Actually, I did actually. I was the first – so the first day of school, because you were the only, you were the newbie, so the classmates, they were taunting me to get into a fight. So I got into a little fisticuff probably during the first year I went to school. I got into a fight with this other small Asian person who's Japanese. I don't know. They sort of force us to get into this little fight in the laneway between Major and Robert.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Going up – yeah. I remember today, we had a little fight and I'm not sure who ended up with the bloody nose. Maybe I did. [Laughter] And that was the end of it. Really. You had people [0:14:30] cheering people on.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: That was the end of it. And then, you know, I talked to Dana years later. Says, "Oh, what was that all about?" He doesn't know either why it just happened. I guess it was just part of some sort of initiation.

- Interviewer:** I'm wondering. It sounds – that was the word that came into my mind when you said that.
- Respondent:** Right.
- Interviewer:** Did the children realize that you were different from each other? You said you're Chinese and this person was Japanese. Did they – do you have any idea what they were thinking?
- Respondent:** No. Not really. No.
- Interviewer:** **[0:15:00]** Yeah. And then what happened with you and all the other children?
- Respondent:** Well, we all became friends after that, actually. I don't know what. Yeah. I guess it was just sort of a rite of passage, I suppose, just to get in there. Strange.
- Interviewer:** Did you go – in relation to the other children, did you go into each other's homes? Where did you play, and how did you play?
- Respondent:** Oh yeah. We played – the friends that I had were from the street. From Major Street, let's say. We played **[0:15:30]** on the streets, which is actually quite different than what it is these days actually. During the summers we actually – the City of Toronto had programs in Lansdowne sort of for the summer. They had – I'm not sure if they were counsellors or they just sort of ran activities during the day, which was great.
- Interviewer:** That's great.
- Respondent:** It was great. Yeah. And we had baseball, we had some track, we had...
- Interviewer:** **[0:16:00]** So they organized – I mean it was certainly not an affluent neighbourhood, and the children could go to Lansdowne and have organized activities, supervised.

Respondent: That's right. Exactly. But I believe each elementary school had that because we used to have competitions against other schools. Certainly they don't have that kind of stuff anymore, I don't think.

Interviewer: I don't think so. Yeah.

Respondent: No. It was great. It was a great gathering place to meet people, you know? And just to expend your energy actually. So the activities that **[0:16:30]** we did on the street, all sorts of silly games that we wouldn't even – I don't think children of today would know. So we had something like tops.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: They were basically a top about yea big.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: You wrap a string around it. We were very destructive when we were kids. So basically the idea was to spin the top, but the idea was actually to demolish your opponent's top. [Laughter] Right. But it had to spin.

Interviewer: Spin.

Respondent: **[0:17:00]** Yeah.

Interviewer: And whack it against theirs?

Respondent: Well you whacked the top. It would be lying on the side and we would whack it, because basically the top had a metallic point.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And that's where you would try it. And then it would spin, it would spin, and then you would pick it up apparently and then hit it again in order for you to continue on playing.

Interviewer: Would it actually destroy the others, or just push it over?

- Respondent:** Well the intention was try to.
- Interviewer:** Did you make these? Or did you buy them?
- Respondent:** You could buy. No, we bought these tops actually.
- Interviewer:** But then you would destroy them and you [0:17:30] had to buy some more.
- Respondent:** That's correct. Yeah. You had to replace it. Exactly. Yeah. [Laughter] But the other game that I don't see any children playing, maybe, is horse chestnuts. We...
- Interviewer:** Horse chestnuts?
- Respondent:** Chestnuts that grew out of the trees. So basically what we did was that – there is a destructive little game too. [Laughter] We get these hefty little chestnuts. We either attach a string to it, we put it on the sidewalk, and our idea was to whack the chestnut and break your opponent's chestnut, so we [0:18:00] attached it with a string...
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** ...or possibly attached through a coat hanger.
- Interviewer:** And whack them. Did you eat the chestnuts or roast them or something?
- Respondent:** Oh no. They're poisonous.
- Interviewer:** Oh, are they?
- Respondent:** The horse chestnuts that are on the street right now, they're...
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Okay.
- Respondent:** No, no. Only the squirrels can eat them.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.

- Respondent:** Oh, I remember my mother actually. When she first came to Toronto, she said, "Oh my god, look at all these chestnuts." But then she realized...
- Interviewer:** Not the kind you can eat because I know chestnuts...
- Respondent:** Not the kind that are edible. That's correct. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** That's right.
- Interviewer:** And what were some of the games that you played besides whacking [0:18:30] each other's chestnuts or tops?
- Respondent:** Oh, we'd ride our bicycles everywhere really, right? So.
- Interviewer:** Where did you play? You played at the school. Where else?
- Respondent:** We played at the school, we played on actual Major Street actually. There was a – further Major Street where the Kensington Garden is, actually there used to be the Doctors Hospital. Used to be also another – yeah. We played in the local area really.
- Interviewer:** What about the back lanes? [0:19:00] Did you play in the lanes?
- Respondent:** We actually didn't play in the lanes really. We were more on the street actually, because back then things were different actually. I imagine they're probably lesser cars, so the whole family life back in the '60s – because I guess it was either the Portuguese or the Italian community living there. The family that was actually in the front of the house as opposed to now, [0:19:30] it's sort of away from the front of the house, but rather a little bit more privacy. You would have your backyard, but back then you had the families on the porch, the children running around making all sorts of noises on the street, on the streets, on the road.
- Interviewer:** So it was a lively cityscape.
- Respondent:** That is correct, yeah.

Interviewer: With the parents on the front porch and the kids on the sidewalks, on the roads.

Respondent: And they'd run around the porch. Exactly. Yeah.

Interviewer: Did your parents sit on the porch? Did you sit on the porch?

Respondent: [0:20:00] I sat on the porch. My parents, not so much really, right? No. My parents were basically sort of stuck to themselves more or less really, right? So yeah. But us, you know, growing – all these activities going because I would be on the street actually.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: With the other kids.

Respondent: That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Were you able to or did you want to invite the children into your home at all, or did they invite you [0:20:30] into their homes? Or was it all really on the street?

Respondent: It was all on the street actually, you know?

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: My parents weren't terribly receptive of that.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. So yeah, the occasion I would go to a friend's house, but it was all – basically all confined to...

Interviewer: Outdoors.

Respondent: ...outdoor activities. That's right. Yeah.

- Interviewer:** Did your family belong to any kind of church? [0:21:00] Temple? Anything?
- Respondent:** No, no. My parents no. Not at all.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** We went to – what was that? A Presbyterian church actually to learn Chinese at one point, but my parents never attended. My mother eventually later on in her life attended a Baptist church after my father passed away, but that was that. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** The people who lived upstairs from you, [0:21:30] you were five of you on the first floor.
- Respondent:** Mm-hm.
- Interviewer:** How many more people were living under your roof?
- Respondent:** Good lord.
- Interviewer:** At one time.
- Respondent:** No, no. I just think at one point, yeah, I think about four to five boarders.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Did they have a kitchen of their own, or did they eat in your kitchen?
- Respondent:** No, they didn't eat in our kitchen. Sometimes my parents would make them something. Basically there was really just [0:22:00] boarding is really...
- Interviewer:** So they had to eat their meals somewhere else.
- Respondent:** Correct.
- Interviewer:** Did they have a refrigerator, do you know? Or did they share yours?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. So all their meals were eaten out.

Respondent: That's correct.

Interviewer: How many bathrooms were there?

Respondent: They would have to share a bathroom upstairs with them.

Interviewer: They all shared a bathroom with each other?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you have a bathroom with your family?

Respondent: Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: So your family had a bathroom and they had a second bathroom for the boarders.

Respondent: That's correct. Yes.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. **[0:22:30]** What was happening downstairs in your basement? Something? Nothing?

Respondent: Oh actually it was kind of strange actually. Sorry. We actually had a family. Sorry. We used the basement. We had the kitchen. We had a kitchen in the basement. That's what we used. In fact, the back half of the first floor – sorry. The back half of the first floor was actually rented out to a family. A kitchen and a room.

Interviewer: So you were living...

Respondent: **[0:23:00]** We – actually, we only lived actually in the front half of the first floor.

Interviewer: Okay. What was the sleeping arrangement? Did the three children share one space and your parents have another? Or?

- Respondent:** Yeah. My parents would have shared the one area. I think my parents subdivided, put a partition between the living room, and I slept with my, yeah, with my brother.
- Interviewer:** And another family behind you on the main floor.
- Respondent:** Yeah. That's right.
- Interviewer:** And about four or **[0:23:30]** five more people upstairs.
- Respondent:** Upstairs. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And your kitchen was downstairs.
- Respondent:** Yeah, in the basement. That's correct. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. There were a lot of people living under that roof.
- Respondent:** That's right. There was.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So that's fifty years ago. Please give me a picture of – because you're living in that place now, so what's happened over the last fifty years in terms of who's lived there, and the physical situation. **[0:24:00]** Because I know that you've divided it into some apartments or something, so please describe the changes.
- Respondent:** Yeah. So the early '80s came around. I guess my father was still alive then. I guess my mother always wanted to have a new home, so she and my father were able to purchase a home. Can you believe that? Cash, again.
- Interviewer:** Where was **[0:24:30]** the home they bought?
- Respondent:** On Nassau Street right next to the **[indiscernible 0:24:34]** restaurant.
- Interviewer:** Yes. I know that place.
- Respondent:** Yeah. So they bought it in 1980. A home.

Interviewer: But they didn't sell the one you're in.

Respondent: They didn't sell Major Street. No.

Interviewer: So they bought another house. Isn't that amazing?

Respondent: It's truly amazing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Like so obviously they – I mean my mother held the financial reins. [Laughter] She did. She couldn't trust my father. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: **[0:25:00]** Because he spent money, and I think also that she was fearful that he would...

Interviewer: Lose it.

Respondent: ...lose it or help support his first family.

Interviewer: Oh. Okay.

Respondent: Actually my mother would just separate, because she was obviously concerned with her immediate family, I suppose, to – you know, so that's probably why she took over **[0:25:30]** the financial reins.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: But yeah, after those years, eighteen years, yeah, they managed to scrimp and save and paid cash for the house.

Interviewer: So they moved to Nassau, and you stayed on Major?

Respondent: My brother and my sister-in-law stayed in Major Street. I moved to Nassau for a little bit, for a little bit, then I left and came back to Major Street.

Interviewer: [0:26:00] Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: So it was at that time, the middle-'80s, because it was actually – it needed to be retrofitted actually because someone decided to totally renovate the place actually. And basically at that time actually, my sister-in-law was living there. What else did we had? My brother was there at one point. [0:26:30] We had some other family members from China that came. Basically it would have been the children. There would be my step-nephews actually from my father's first marriage.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Their son. My father's first eldest son who lived in China. Both of them actually served in the [0:27:00] war, World War II, for the Americans because they had – yeah. Fought for the American Forces actually, whereas one of them stayed on, got his architectural – landscape and architecture degree. The eldest one wanted nothing to do with America, went back to China, to communist China.

Interviewer: Boy, your [0:27:30] family has a lot of interesting stories and history. Yeah.

Respondent: So yeah. And my father tried all these years to get his first side of the family over, which I don't – yeah. I was too young. He made trips to Ottawa. He was trying to get them over. It's probably during that point during the '60s, he tried for quite a few years. '60s, '70s. [0:28:00] Tried to get them over really, right? Because through the Liberal government that they allowed more migration of people from Asia, and – yeah.

Interviewer: So he wanted to sponsor them.

Respondent: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: And it was difficult.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And I feel like probably not even know all the legal wranglings they thought of, you know? Yeah. But they did [0:28:30] – he did sponsor – they did come actually, two of them, you know, came over. They lived in the same house where we...

Interviewer: So you got to know your father's first family, or some of them.

Respondent: Yeah. I got to meet the older stepbrother eventually because he was able to migrate to America along with his wife because, [0:29:00] I believe because they had served with the Armed Forces.

Interviewer: Oh. So they earned that.

Respondent: Yeah. I guess so. They allowed it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: That was the easier way to get in. The parents were able to come and take the children with them, so they're all actually living in California, San Francisco.

Interviewer: So you have family to visit there if you want to.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Let's come back to the changes. You moved into this house fifty years ago. In the '80s, you did some [0:29:30] major renovations.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you describe what you've done, some of the changes, and who's living there now?

Respondent: Did some major renovations. Like in fact, total renovations. We, in fact, gutted the whole place out and then made it into separate

units actually, to which we could all live actually. So basically it's four units.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: It's four.

Interviewer: And where are you? So each floor is another unit [0:30:00] I suppose?

Respondent: Yes. So basically...

Interviewer: Where are you living now?

Respondent: The first floor is one unit.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Including a third in the basement.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Second and third floors are bi-level apartments.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: So the front half apartment, which is where Ann lives, is the front...

Interviewer: And who's Ann?

Respondent: She's my, I guess, tenant and friend.

Interviewer: Okay. Mm-hm.

Respondent: She lives in the front half, and then the second [0:30:30] and the third floor. I live on the back half of the second and third floor.

Interviewer: Ah. What an interesting thing to have done, rather than one floor per – as a unit they have, as you say, bi-level. Uh-huh.

- Respondent:** Because the third floor is smaller than the second floor, so it would have been difficult for us, I suppose. So yeah, so right now, my niece lives there with her family. The ground floor. I live on the back half of the second and third floor.
- Interviewer:** And Ann lives in the front of the second and third floor.
- Respondent:** [0:31:00] Yeah. So they're totally self-contained apartments actually with...
- Interviewer:** And redone in the '80s.
- Respondent:** Redone in the '80s. That's correct. Yes.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. And your brothers – I guess you own it with your brothers, or did you buy it from them?
- Respondent:** Well actually it's concurrently owned by me and my two brothers. The house.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So your parents left it to the three of you.
- Respondent:** That's right.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** They all have homes except me. Or they have, [0:31:30] you know, they have homes already, but I'm the only one that doesn't actually have a home. I live in this one.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. My brother lives in the east end, my older brother lives in Burlington with his wife.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: And we're still adult children. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well those of us who live in this neighbourhood are very happy to live here, so you know, they – your brothers have moved away, but you're in a neighbourhood that we – many of us like very much. That's why we're here.

Respondent: [0:32:00] Oh absolutely. Exactly. Well, yeah. My brother lived in Burlington all his life, but after he graduated from school really he just – it was just part, I guess, when he finished school he ended up working at Stelco, so basically that's sort of the whole Hamilton area. Where my brother, he wanted a home on his own, but he sort of – he was out west actually. Like west Toronto, but he sort of [0:32:30] decided east was his thing. It was probably more affordable for him. He liked it too. Yeah. I mean there's a whole migration of people going to the east around Pape and Queen area really, right? There's a whole movement of people. Whole. Probably the same time as what was happening in little pockets throughout Toronto really, right? Picking up some homes, doing some renovation, and making it really livable [0:33:00] communities.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Leslieville.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: That's where he was.

Interviewer: Well Toronto has a lot of very lovely, livable areas.

Respondent: Correct. Oh yeah.

Interviewer: What do you feel about the safety of this neighbourhood, the way it was and the way it is now?

Respondent: I've never had a problem. I thought it was always safe. I certainly, you know – it was different back then in the '60s growing up as a child. I don't recall any sort of [0:33:30] crime, per se.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Or break-ins.

Interviewer: And now? How do you feel about it right now?

Respondent: There was a, you know, about twenty years ago, there was a, say, a bit of vandalism, I suppose. You know? I don't know where the kids came from, whether they're from Tech or whatever, you know? They were scratching cars, slashing tires. Five years ago. Yeah. There was like – more than that. **[0:34:00]** Ten, fifteen years ago perhaps, someone tried to break-in to my home actually. To the startle of my tenant back there.

Interviewer: Did they actually get in? Or did they get frightened off because somebody was there?

Respondent: Yeah. Got frightened off. They came through the side. Side window.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And your tenant made herself or himself clear that somebody was there.

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. It was quite the fright, I would imagine.

Interviewer: I'd bet. **[0:34:30]** Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: But you're saying, I think, that – so those incidents happened, but I think you're saying that you feel that it's a safe...

Respondent: Oh, it is safe. It's isolated.

Interviewer: Yeah.

- Respondent:** Probably any neighbourhood really has isolated crime elements really, right? But on the whole, I think it's very safe. I think it's why people, in fact, reside here because of its beauty, [0:35:00] its lack of any crime element. Its proximity to a lot of things downtown. The Market, Kensington Market, Chinatown, the entertainment district. I like this area. I could not fathom to move further south, which is the Rogers Centre. Oh my god, I can't. I can't believe. It's so high-density there. Or anywhere. All the places, [0:35:30] I guess. Liberty Village, they all seem like really high-density areas. This is – I love the idea that you could actually walk in on the ground level.
- Interviewer:** You've just describe exactly how I feel about it. I love living here. And I can walk, or if I want to go to TIFF, I can go there easily. Either walk there or just get on the streetcar going south.
- Respondent:** That's right.
- Interviewer:** There's so much to walk to in this neighbourhood.
- Respondent:** That's right.
- Interviewer:** And the Bloor Cinema.
- Respondent:** That's right. Exactly. Yeah. Because I get around by walking or [0:36:00] bicycling. Even though I have a vehicle.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Me too.
- Respondent:** I love walking.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Vehicle's there because I need it sometimes really, right? So a luxury. No, I wouldn't say a luxury item. Yeah, it's a luxury because I don't really need it, I suppose, but it's there if you need it. I suppose I could go to AutoShare for some car, but...
- Interviewer:** I feel the same way. I use the subway, I walk, I use my bike, and I like having my car when I want it.

- Respondent:** Yeah. That's right. Yeah. I do most of my – [0:36:30] I'm not a great walker, Eleanor. I like to bike. [Laughter]
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** It's more efficient.
- Interviewer:** It is.
- Respondent:** And I can get there much quicker.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. What were your feelings or thoughts when the roads got changed? When you lived here at first, you could go straight from Bloor to College or College to Bloor. What are your thoughts about the changes that happened?
- Respondent:** I guess in the beginning [0:37:00] actually, I probably didn't like it because it was sort of an interruption, actually. Whether it'd be vehicular. But you know, in the end, it's great because maybe the whole issue of, I imagine, of segmenting the streets was to – the number one priority was to slow traffic down really, right?
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** So people could – oh yeah. Because I remember, yeah, cars just go speeding up the streets.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. They would be full-throttle. [Laughter] Really, right? I remember [0:37:30] that.
- Interviewer:** So you're saying at first it felt inconvenient.
- Respondent:** That's because it was – this is like, you know, you have to get used to the change actually. Probably I didn't really think about the larger implications of why it was being done really, that's all. It was an inconvenience at the time because, yeah, because like I wasn't used to the change.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. And also, I guess, it was difficult as a cyclist now because, you know, if you don't [0:38:00] [laughter]...

Interviewer: If you pay attention. [Laughs]

Respondent: That's right. I'm guilty of that in that I don't pay attention. Actually no. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Me too. [Laughs]

Respondent: Yeah. That was that. But you know, for the cars, sure. You just go around a little. Yeah. It'd be interesting why – yeah. It's good. But I still see that people still speed up from College up to Ulster.

Interviewer: Yeah. What I see a lot of is on Sussex, [0:38:30] there are a lot of cars that'll go in the wrong direction. I mean they're heading towards Spadina, or they're heading from Spadina towards Brunswick, and they say, "Oh, really. I should – I have to make a left or a right. I'm not going to bother." And I see a lot of the cars going in the wrong direction, especially on Sussex.

Respondent: Oh, I see. Oh, yeah. I see. Because they don't want to be bothered to go around in a loop in order to get out of this. "Okay, nobody's here. I'll make a quick little dash."

Interviewer: But I'm there, and I'm watching. [Laughs]

Respondent: No one's going to see it.

Interviewer: [Laughs] I'm usually there walking. [0:39:00] I see that happening a lot. Did your family have a backyard, and what was behind your house?

Respondent: It was a garage. A wooden garage. A car garage, which actually burnt down.

Interviewer: Oh.

- Respondent:** Electrical fire, it must have been burnt down. My parents never replaced it, so it became just an open lot.
- Interviewer:** Was it used at all for playing, for gardening, anything at all? Or not used much?
- Respondent:** **[0:39:30]** No, it wasn't at all. It's still basically used as a car park now.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Yeah. My parents never drove either.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Yeah. Did you make some changes in the heating system?
- Respondent:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** What did you change?
- Respondent:** So back then it was a forced gas furnace.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Which was very inefficient for it because it would be downstairs. So basically, no. In order to convert – we wanted to convert it because I wanted, **[0:40:00]** I guess, number one, to live there. Secondly, to make it self-sufficient units, and the only way around it, I suppose, was to eliminate the idea of a forced furnace, but rather go baseboard, electric heating.
- Interviewer:** So that's what you have.
- Respondent:** That's what I have. Yeah. With, you know, modern wire, modern plumbing, full amenities, you know?
- Interviewer:** And what about air conditioning?
- Respondent:** Their air conditioners, **[0:40:30]** in the wall unit, in the window unit. Not a central. Each pays for their own.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. So each one is an independent unit for heating, cooling...

Respondent: That's right. They had their own hydro. Exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And their own water bill, which is the way it just structured out actually. It was good actually because when I remember renting it out it was great because people would be just totally blown away [0:41:00] by how much electricity they were consuming. Once they realize how much – once they realized that they were actually on the toll for it really, right?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And then – which was a great exercise in actually obviously conservation for tenants.

Interviewer: Yes. That's right. If they're going to pay for it, they might not turn it on.

Respondent: That's right. Exactly. It's the same thing with condo living, I guess, you know? It's always on full tilt, I suppose, really, right? [0:41:30] It all goes as part of your condo management fees. It's probably run not that efficient really, right? Yeah. Yeah. So everyone basically has sort of bought into their own consumption of hydro, because that's really the major – because really, you've got your appliances, you've got your heating, and your air conditioning's all run by hydro.

Interviewer: But you were smart that way because people will be more responsible.

Respondent: Well there was no other way out at the time really. I mean [0:42:00] we couldn't introduce a forced area. Sorry, a forced furnace unit because then you had to install a furnace.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: And who controls the furnace really, right? So.

- Interviewer:** Right. I just want to talk about the kind of work that people did. As far as you knew – two questions – were mothers working when you were – were you aware of whether mothers [0:42:30] were working, the women were working when you were growing up?
- Respondent:** I always thought that mothers worked actually.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Well and your mother did.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. So it was your impression that the mothers were working.
- Respondent:** That's right. Because basically, yeah. Because I think we were all of immigrant families, I suppose, and that's what the – I think everyone needed a dual income.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** I didn't necessarily know people from another area, which [0:43:00] we would have been middle-class, might have been a stay-at-home mom or whatever really, right? So.
- Interviewer:** Did you know anyone who had what we call cottage industry working at home? The men or the women? Any kind of...
- Respondent:** Say that again.
- Interviewer:** Working at home. Like sewing or...
- Respondent:** Oh. Yeah, well you know, I do – my parents, or my mother, or I was aware of some families that were doing piecemeal.
- Interviewer:** Sewing.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

- Respondent:** So such as [0:43:30] putting on sequins.
- Interviewer:** Whoa. Someone was doing very specialized work. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** I think anybody can do it. It's just, oh, it's just tedious and laborious, right?
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** So yeah. Those are all piecemeal, so you would take them home, do it, and then...
- Interviewer:** So these were women who were working at home and doing that.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** That's correct. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. It was the sequins. I think my mom tried it. Sequins.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** How do you [0:44:00] think the changes have occurred in terms of socioeconomic changes? Who was living here in 1963? Who was living here in 1993? And who's living here in 2013?
- Respondent:** Well back in the '60s, I think it was predominately immigrant families living here. English was definitely not their first language, and probably a lot of them did not speak [0:44:30] English as the years progressed. Actually, you had – those families had moved on. Some of the Portuguese families had moved on to other locations. Some of the Italians might have moved further up to St. Clair, some of them might have moved up to Vaughan. I guess during the '80s we had renovators coming in purchasing homes with the idea of [0:45:00] a quick flip.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. That happened...

Interviewer: And a quick buck. [Laughs]

Respondent: That happened a lot of places. And then probably later on after that, because, you know, because the areas had very unique properties, I guess, people either from the 'burbs or they were downsizing, they came into downtown Toronto to live. I'm not quite sure if the right word is the gentrification of...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: [0:45:30] ...downtown Toronto whereby – so the immigrants all left because they – so their idea, and it probably included the Chinese, they migrated wherever the affluent was. So the people who lived downtown when they were young got a bit more money. They thought the affluence was to the 'burbs.

Interviewer: So that was a measure of their success, to move north.

Respondent: That's correct. Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And that was whatever nationality you were really, right? So it was the opposite probably of the [0:46:00], I don't know, I'll just say "Wasp," whatever. Whoever actually would be a part of that group. And they came to look downtown as a different thing. They renovated, they did their – so yeah. They did the – yeah. The backyards became lovely. There was – minus that activity that I grew up with, the kids in the '60s where all the activities were the forefront of the porch house, was just the hub of activity was really, [0:46:30] right? There was no really activity on the street anymore, which is fine. But that's just the times, I suppose, you know? Back in the '60s, the Portuguese came from – just like where my parents came. I think the Portuguese came from a certain area in Portugal.

Interviewer: The Azores largely.

Respondent: Is that where was it?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And yeah. All the houses were all – all the bricks, façade, were all painted in these pastels, right? [Laughter] It was lovely really, [0:47:00] right? It was different feel really, right? Whereas, you know, during the '80s, '90s, paint was not in, so they all sandblasted it, which they tried to restore the Victorian nature. So yeah, I guess it's come full-circle from what the families were at one point. I thought that actually there was a large Caribbean population here at one point in this area. I'm not sure if that's true or not actually.

Interviewer: Not that I'm aware of.

Respondent: No? [0:47:30] I wouldn't say a large, but some.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Could be. I don't – I'm not the expert. [Laughter] And who's here now? You talked about the immigrants, they made a little money, they moved up north. They felt that they were moving to a better place, a better life. Who's here now?

Respondent: I think, yeah, I think probably the crowd here now is probably a little bit more definitely urbane, actually. More sophisticated. More educated.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: [0:48:00] Definitely more educated. They...

Interviewer: It's good. You've been here through a lot of changes.

Respondent: I've seen people from professors coming in, right?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: From U of T. Look – and raise their family in close proximity to the U of T. People who obviously, yeah, definitely more affluent because my gosh, but the real estate prices, are you kidding me? They're still way out of this planet. I mean it's everywhere, I suppose, but you know, yeah. **[0:48:30]** I'm not even sure what the average price of a home here – we're talking eight hundred to a million dollars, right? It's outrageous.

Interviewer: Yeah. When you consider that your father bought yours for cash for fourteen thousand.

Respondent: Sixteen or eighteen thousand dollars.

Interviewer: Sixteen thousand dollars.

Respondent: Yeah. [Laughter] But yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But the – even the 1980s, early '80, yeah, my house untouched would have been worth – you could have bought it for fifty-four thousand dollars.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. And now **[0:49:00]** much more. And of course, you've...

Respondent: It would have been probably – you probably just to buy without reno, probably a mil too. Probably renovated, probably a mil-six, or whatever. I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Because it's one of the few detached houses, Eleanor, actually on the street.

Interviewer: Oh. I'll have to go and look at it.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. That's a very lovely description that you gave of what it was like fifty years ago and the changes that have occurred since then.

Respondent: Yeah. Oh, I remember as a kid actually, [0:49:30] on Victoria's Day, I was just telling people, you know, the whole street was littered, littered, seriously littered in red firecracker paper.

Interviewer: Oh. So everybody lit the firecrackers and left them there?

Respondent: No. They would blow up, but there was much more pyro-activity. Like people blew fire – I just think that maybe it's the sales of fireworks is restricted, right? I mean, as a child, [0:50:00] I can go as a child to a store and buy it when I was ten years old. That probably is not allowed.

Interviewer: Yeah. I guess a few bad accidents and they...

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: ...restricted it. Yeah.

Respondent: But I'm not sure what made us when we were kids growing up. I mean things have changed really, whether it's you or I growing up as kids, things were – I don't recall, but then again, there might have been. Maybe it's because of the press. It's more open now. There's more revealing of what's happening on the [0:50:30] news or whatever really. But I didn't really hear about any incidents. Not to say that there wasn't any incidents or anything, or the kids misbehave more now than then. I don't know. You know? I mean really the families allowed you to blow up things or whatever, you know?

Interviewer: Children, I think, did have much more freedom. They were out on the street for hours at a time.

Respondent: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. It is different now. I don't think it's more dangerous. That's my own personal impression. That it's not more dangerous, but I agree

with you that **[0:51:00]** the media shares everything so widely, so rapidly, that anything that is bad, wrong, difficult, we hear about it. Ten times a day.

Respondent: Exactly. Yeah. The accessibility of media, it's like CNN Live. Everything's just...

Interviewer: That's right.

Respondent: ...pumped through.

Interviewer: Breaking news. Breaking...

Respondent: Breaking news. That's right.

Interviewer: Please talk about Kensington Market and your family. Did your family use the Market? And how did they do it?

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah. My parents **[0:51:30]** went down to Kensington Market on Baldwin Street. Much different then. Yeah. When you had actually – she used the bakery, the Portuguese bakery where we bought our bread from the Portuguese. I remember like six cents, big piece of the Portuguese sort of like a torpedo-shaped bread.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Torpedo-shaped.

Respondent: Yeah. They go to Kensington Market to buy live produce, which would be live, like, like chicken.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Live **[0:52:00]** duck. I remember my father, he didn't go to the Market. He didn't go down – you know that Market across from the City TV on Queen Street, well that used to be a live market there. My father would go there and buy himself a chicken. Alive.

Interviewer: Bring it home live? Or they would kill it there for you?

Respondent: My father was always going. He'd buy it live. You could buy things live then.

Interviewer: And bring it home and who would kill it? And who would clean it?

Respondent: My father.

Interviewer: He killed it and he'd clean it.

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah. I was there. I saw all this.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you participate in it?

Respondent: [0:52:30] No.

Interviewer: No. Yeah. Uh-huh.

Respondent: No. I saw my dad do everything.

Interviewer: Did your dad do more cooking than your mother?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: He did. When my father was alive, yes, yeah. Because he was the cook that ran the Lewis Café.

Interviewer: Oh, that's right.

Respondent: The family business.

Interviewer: So he had been a – right. Before they came to Toronto.

Respondent: That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

- Respondent:** Now the Lewis Café, actually – sorry. This was a side bar.
[0:53:00] People always ask me, yeah, because there was a little thing when we first talked about the lane changes, I'm not sure if it was the Globe, about a Chinese family with a Lewis name.
[Laughter] So they're asking – they had a problem with the name Lewis. So my understanding actually, how the Lewis – because my father's name is Lew, L-E-W, or L-O-W, L-A-U. It's that Chinese character. In Cantonese, it's [0:53:30] called Lau. And different dialects, in my dialect it would be Lew. In my dialect it's called – my parents spoke Toisan because it's from the Toisan area in – the Toisan district in the province of Guangdong in China.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Which is where all the immigrants came to. Because at that time, I guess, at the turn of the century, China – that was the only economically depressed area, I guess, and China allowed people from that district to [0:54:00] emigrate to North America, so it's a very choppy language. So we get this stereotypical – people mocking the Chinese language, you know? Oh no, back then, I mean.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Because it is. It's very choppy. It's not like Mandarin, which is very soft-spoken, right? And anyways, the Lewis family – [0:54:30] sorry. So my father's name is Low or Lau, whatever. So he had this café; my father didn't really have a great command of the language.
- Interviewer:** Of the English language.
- Respondent:** That's correct.
- Interviewer:** Good. Okay. Yeah.
- Respondent:** So he wanted a sign painted on his restaurant. I guess he wanted something called the "Lew's Café"...
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

Respondent: Like L-E-W apostrophe S, Lew's Café, but the St. Mary's, Ontario was really a Scottish town really, so they must have didn't understand what my father – so he must have misinterpreted and [0:55:00] said instead of Lew's Café, Lewis Café. [Laughter] So that's the – so, but see, on my father's social insurance number, it's not Lewis. It's just L-O-W, but on the hospital records for the children, it's all under Lewis, you see?

Interviewer: So the painter of the sign determined your family's name, I think. [Laughs]

Respondent: I guess. That's what I gather. Exactly. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Pretty influential person.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So I guess it just stuck, you know? [0:55:30] Lewis. Lewis Café.

Interviewer: You know, I was going to ask you that question because it doesn't sound like a typical – it's more Canadian name.

Respondent: That's correct. Yeah. Yeah. But I guess, you know, as any immigrant coming to North America or – no, this is just North America – they would probably try to Anglicize your name regardless, for the right to make things simpler really, right?

Interviewer: It's such a common thing. [0:56:00] Yeah.

Respondent: I mean that's the story, and I like that story actually. Whether it's somebody else decided that Lewis wasn't so fit, who decided "I-S" Lewis, but Lew's Café, Lewis Café, that sells. Because this was the story that was – when I visited St. Mary's many years later after I left, we left to Toronto, there was one of the elderly citizens who knew my father. This is the story he told me, so I'm going to take that s the gospel truth.

Interviewer: It's a nice story. Yeah. [Laughs] It's the gospel truth. **[0:56:30]** So Kensington Market was a factor in your lives. I mean your father shopped there, and went even south of there for his shopping. What about the University of Toronto? Do you have any thoughts about the university as our neighbour just to the east of us?

Respondent: Do I have any thoughts?

Interviewer: Yeah. We're, you know...

Respondent: Well I was aware of, obviously, the university. We used to visit Varsity Stadium, we used to – but now, it was less **[0:57:00]** as a force to be reckoned with now, I mean with the university. Everybody's aware of the University of Toronto these days now because it's relentless expansion actually.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: At the sake of where it is really, right? I didn't realize until quite a few years back that it's quite the **[0:57:30]** extensive land-holder.

Interviewer: Oh yes.

Respondent: Like it holds an enormous amount of property in the area really, right? So I guess it was just trying to exercise...

Interviewer: Flex its muscles a bit.

Respondent: Flex its muscles.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. Look at the, what do you call it, the one on Hoskin Avenue? The whole field.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: The development of the – some new residence complexes along College Street. That's kind of crazy really, right?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: [0:58:00] So, I mean I didn't go to University of Toronto, but yeah, I'm sure it's a great university, but it's just being felt – its presence is being felt for sure as it expands.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. You know, there are a lot of people in the neighbourhood who have quite strong feelings about it as it expands and it's – because it's our neighbour.

Respondent: That's right. Exactly.

Interviewer: And how's it affecting us. Yeah.

Respondent: Absolutely.

Interviewer: So you seem to have some of those thoughts too.

Respondent: [0:58:30] That's right. Because we saw, yeah, the first development. It affected us quite a few with the swimming area. It was quite a big structure, but it was okay, I guess. You know, the swimming pool?

Interviewer: Just on Harbord and...

Respondent: Harbord and Spadina.

Interviewer: ...Spadina. Yeah.

Respondent: And then later on, they had the sort of kind of ugly graduate housing complex across from...

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: That's bunker-style. I don't know. But...

Interviewer: And of course, there's a library. Robarts Library. That big...

Respondent: [0:59:00] Yeah, that's huge. Actually, you know, in the end I didn't really – I don't know. Didn't object to it too much. I know it's a huge,

a huge piece of architecture. Occupied tremendous land. Hate the wind drafts that it creates. That's probably why they planted the cherry trees or whatever trees that they have, because it used to be extreme wind tunnels there.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So they're trying to do something about it to modify it, to [0:59:30] improve the situation slightly.

Respondent: Yeah. That's right. Yeah. Yeah, that library, correct me if I'm wrong, it looks like a – maybe that's what it is. It looks like a big turkey from an aerial view.

Interviewer: [Laughs] You're right.

Respondent: It is. It looks like a bird, and...

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. When you and I spoke to each other and you said you had some time and we could talk about the neighbourhood, I don't know if you had any thoughts about, oh, [1:00:00] since I'm talking about the neighbourhood, there's some stories I'd like to share with Eleanor. Was there anything that I have not asked about that you were thinking about that I just never got close to, but would be interesting for us to include?

Respondent: No. I think we covered most of it. I was just trying to get the stories of what life was like as children growing up fifty years ago as to the same children growing up now, or [1:00:30] things are so different, you know? That's, you know?

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: Yeah. There's moments. For instance, as I said on Victoria Day, it was just seriously the streets were just covered in red, expended firecrackers.

Interviewer: So it must have been very lively and noisy...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...when all those firecrackers were going off, exploding.

Respondent: Yeah. It was great because you could purchase – people had those little baby fingers, Eleanor. You just **[1:01:00]** light one, and it comes out in a little sheet about that big. There were probably like a hundred of them, and you just....

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. I don't even hear those anymore actually.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now they seem to, for the most part, have a few areas where they do a big show and families aren't doing it, or streets aren't doing it as much as they used to be.

Respondent: Right. But we didn't even actually launch fireworks. These were firecrackers.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: As the name implies. It was to make sound.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. **[1:01:30]** Well, I think we've covered pretty much everything. Oh, let me just – one more question. The stores in the neighbourhood, the commercial life in the neighbourhood. Stores, theatres – any thoughts? Now you lived between College and...

Respondent: Ulster.

Interviewer: ...Ulster? Can you talk about the stores?

Respondent: Yeah. I'd been to some of the old stores when we were growing up. You know the one on 90 Major Street? 90 Major, **[1:02:00]** as I came – I'm walking up Ulster and Major? That used to be a corner store when I used to grow up. All these little corners had corner mom and pop shops. I kind of miss those actually.

- Interviewer:** And what did they sell on those shops? Those mom and papa shops?
- Respondent:** Just little – anything that was – a convenience store. You know? Popsicles, ice cream. Probably some canned goods, maybe some milk, some bread. But we just went to get candy, of course.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Yeah. Did you [1:02:30] know the owners? Did they know you? Was it a personal experience, or was it just, okay, can I have five cents of candy? [Laughs]
- Respondent:** Well the one by – the one that I knew on a personal – her name was Anna, which was across on Robert Street, across from Lord Lansdowne.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Yeah, we would go there and buy Lola bars. She would also – they would make sandwiches on Kaisers too, right? So it was all very inexpensive back then. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** She was a major factor in the neighbourhood, [1:03:00] Anna.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Other people have spoken to me about her.
- Respondent:** That's right. Yeah. Oh my gosh, she must have been there for – I don't know. The last time I saw her was probably, I don't know, quite a few years ago. She's probably passed away, but yeah.
- Interviewer:** But you remember her.
- Respondent:** She was – yeah. She was an institution there.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** All the kids would, you know, either after school or during lunchtime would go to her little store, really, right? To buy candy, all sorts of little things really.

Interviewer: [1:03:30] What do you remember about her?

Respondent: She was always – she was a wonderful lady. Always smiling. She was blonde hair, obviously European background, but too young to know what – to tell you what nationality she may have been.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: She might have been Polish or something of that area. You know, I don't – you know? Yeah. Yeah. She would always have the stuff prepared for you because you knew she was going to be bombarded by children coming in at lunch.

Interviewer: At lunchtime. Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. [1:04:00] Purchasing things at that thing, you know? Yeah. We used her laneway, which is now blocked off, as a shortcut to come home [laughter] after school, right? A lot of people used that. Yeah. Yeah. The whole – on College Street has changed. I remember growing up, the Home Hardware store, which is, okay, this is actually by the 300 Tavern where the Rancho Relaxo – the Home Hardware store is now.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Well, that used to be a [1:04:30] – growing up, it used to be – we went there as a pool hall. It was called The Gardens Pool Hall. Then it became a dojo, like a martial arts thing, and then it became a theatre.

Interviewer: Wow. It had a...

Respondent: Cinema Lumiere. I don't know if you ever heard of the...

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: That's where it was. Cinema Lumiere. And then its latest incarnation is the Home Hardware store, and on College and Bathurst, that whole strip from Major, there was another pool hall

[1:05:00] at the corner of College and Brunswick. It was in the basement. It was kind of dingy and dark. It was called The Hole. We called it The Hole.

Interviewer: What was its real name? Or was that its real name?

Respondent: Well we all called it – yeah. If we all said, "We're going to The Hole," we know that was a hole.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. We played pool. We played billiards or pool when we were young actually, so we would have [1:05:30] been – yeah. You could go there twelve, thirteen years old, go there.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: So you play for money.

Interviewer: The gambling.

Respondent: The gamblers. Exactly. Right, right. And then where Caplansky's is...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: ...that used to be – I miss it years ago. It used to be Harvey's.

Interviewer: Harvey's hamburger?

Respondent: Yeah. That's right. Then it became the Golden Lion, and what was it? Yeah. I remember it. Harvey's. That was great. [1:06:00] And then at Major and College, where the computer store is now, it's now Frank's Hot Dog. That used to – yeah, that used to be Weinstein's Drugstore, right? That was my first job.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Respondent: Yeah. I was on my bicycle and I'd deliver prescriptions to wherever he sent me to. First paying job, Eleanor. Sixty-five cents an hour.
[Laughter]

Interviewer: [1:06:30] How old were you?

Respondent: Eleven.

Interviewer: [Laughs] You were a young earner.

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah. It was good. I think it was my first paying job. Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. And then I – then when my first paying job was – I was working at Silverstein's. Silverstein's Bakery on McCaul Street. Yeah.

Interviewer: And what did you do there?

Respondent: One summer, oh my god, I was near the ovens.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: It was hot. Brutal. I think it was 1969 at that time. [1:07:00] Oh, just stuffing.

Interviewer: Oh. And you were young.

Respondent: I was fifteen, sixteen.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: You were stuffing?

Respondent: Oh, baked Kaisers.

Interviewer: Into bags?

- Respondent:** Into bags. Cutting up, putting the loaves of bread into a cutter and then...
- Interviewer:** Slicing?
- Respondent:** Yeah. Just stuffing. That's all it was.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** So I remember some of the people working there. Oh, it was just brutal. It was so hot.
- Interviewer:** Oh, the ovens.
- Respondent:** The oven.
- Interviewer:** [1:07:30] In the summer. It's a hundred degrees in there.
- Respondent:** Oh. More. Yeah. It was ruthless.
- Interviewer:** Wow.
- Respondent:** It was bad.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** But yeah, on Spadina Avenue I remember all sorts of – both brothers worked at Switzer's, the deli...
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** ...that would have been on the west side. On the east side would have been Shopsy's.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** And next to Shopsy's would have been an LCBO, so back then, the LCBO, not like the one today, was [1:08:00] – probably had a very

limited order sheet. So you'd actually tick off what you wanted, and you'd give it to the clerk behind and they'd get it for you.

Interviewer: Oh boy. That's changed. [Laughs]

Respondent: Just like, yeah, just like what do you call it? Canadian Tire on Davenport and Church used to give you an order, and people back then, same thing. They would be on the rollerblades [laughter] and they'd get your stuff for you, right? Yeah. And next, **[1:08:30]** next to Switzer's, I guess, I guess by the Bank of Nova Scotia, that used to be a lumberyard. Central Lumber. Yeah.

Interviewer: Any other memories of our part of College or Spadina? What was there, or what's there now?

Respondent: A lot of that whole strip between Brunswick – sorry, Robert has remained intact actually, except – yeah. Yeah, because Home Hardware had been there for **[1:09:00]** probably since I remember, as a child actually, until it decided to...

Interviewer: Just move east.

Respondent: Yeah. Because it was actually purchased by new owners, I guess.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Certainly a lot of computer stores there now.

Respondent: That's right. Yeah. Computer stores proliferated. I'm not even sure when they proliferated. They probably – in the '90s, I guess. Yeah. There's really only one dominant player there actually now. A lot of the ones have sort of moved on because there's only so much **[1:09:30]** competition, really, that you can have, really, right? So.

Interviewer: Last question, what about restaurants? Are there any – were there restaurants, are there restaurants that your family used, didn't use, or that are just notable for some reason or other?

Respondent: I don't know where my parents took me. I remember the Mars restaurant.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. Because that's a [1:10:00] – it's been there for ages really, right? Same with the Harbord Bakery. I don't think there is – I don't remember the restaurants really.

Interviewer: So Harbord Bakery and Mars have both been there a very long time.

Respondent: Very long time. Absolutely. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, Len Lewis of Major Street for fifty years, this has been a pleasure, [1:10:30] and thank you very much.

Respondent: Oh, it's a pleasure talking to you.

[1:10:33]

[End of recording]