112 Jay Jackman

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

Interviewer: The date today is the 4th of June, 2013. I'm sitting in my kitchen with Jay Jackson. I just want to say thank you very much for coming to meet with me.

Respondent: My pleasure, and it's a mutual kind of commitment, I think. I think yours is probably a lot more formalized, but I like what you've described is taking place.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, I want to start – I'm going to start by asking you to tell me **[0:00:30]** when you lived in the neighbourhood, and then we're going to digress because you and I have had a friendship for many years.

Respondent: Indeed.

Interviewer: So let's just start with when your family lived in this neighbourhood and where.

Respondent: The Jackson family, at least this wing of it, my grandfather being Harold A. Jackson Senior, Harold Augustus Jackson, built the house that I and my father were born in at 238 Brunswick Avenue. It was a semidetached next to his brother at **[0:01:00]** 234, and that was Bruce Jackson. So the two Jackson brothers, or two of the Jackson brothers, simultaneously dug their foundations in basements and built the houses adjoining one another, and they still stand to this day, at least the property is still, I believe, Jackson property. The 238 certainly is. 234 I'm not clear what ownership remains, but I believe it's still in Faith Jackson and **[0:01:30]** Bruce Jackson's family. That's the wing.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Respondent: When they were built?

Interviewer: Yes. Approximately.

Respondent: My father was born in – I guess 1918 after the First World War maybe.

Interviewer: Yeah. Generally.

Respondent: Generally, yeah, because my dad was born in 1922, and he was the first and oldest of – he was Harold Augustus Jackson Junior.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: Thank god my mother refused **[0:02:00]** to let them do a third on me. [Laughs] But the family, as far as I knew up until 1952, I didn't know the Jacksons lived anyplace else beside Brunswick Avenue, only to discover certainly a lot of other properties that were part of the family's portfolio. But there were so many other relatives either occupying or managing them, and they were throughout downtown in a couple of areas. Roxton Road was one. **[0:02:30]** There was some talk of my great-grandmother having held the property that later became City Hall and Eaton's. That was because of her ignorance – the story, the tale goes that it was X-ed away with – she signed off on a document not recognizing what she had signed. So that's either myth or fact, and we've never been able to establish that, but there was considerable property in the Jackson, as I say, portfolio.

Interviewer: So that was something that your family valued. **[0:03:00]** Owning property.

Respondent: Yeah. If you can appreciate the deeper background of the escape from slavery via the underground railroad to be not only free, but to be a property owner was a complete, and new, and remarkable phenomena for people who were essentially illiterate. And with the promise of forty acres and a mule if you fought for the British and a number of other incentives that brought a lot of those who were fortunate enough to make the trip **[0:03:30]** and not be recaptured or killed, those who made it here had a chance at really being a property owner. Unimaginable in the States in the 1830s and '40s. I believe Carolyn Smart-Frost, the author, had us arriving in Toronto or Canada around 1840, I believe, as the first escaped slaves.

Henrietta Jackson and six kids by herself, the youngest being my great-grandfather, Albert C. Jackson.

Interviewer: **[0:04:00]** So I wanted to clarify that Albert C. Jackson was your great-grandfather.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Okay. And Henrietta came with six children?

Respondent: Six children, and I think there were four or five left behind for a variety of reasons, none of which are completely clear, but the story goes not only does she get the six up here, others escaped and later rejoined, and we had what was **[0:04:30]** probably considered a full family, and a bit of a miracle that two sections of the family were able to get free and get up here. My great-great-grandfather apparently provided the camouflage and the behaviour erratically so that his wife and the kids could escape. They were chasing him while he made an escape to across the river.

Interviewer: So he took them on a different…

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: …scent, so to speak.

Respondent: **[0:05:00]** He was pretending to be crazy and everything, which they were getting ready to sell her down the river and he got wind of it, and the kids were going to be motherless, and he wifeless, and before the deal was consummated, or that she was to be sent away, he feigned insanity, ran away, attacked master. It became quite a consummate – all of this distraction on the plantation in Kentucky was taking place, she made her escape.

Interviewer: What happened to him?

Respondent: I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Yeah. **[0:05:30]** I mean…

Respondent: He never got to Canada.

Interviewer: Okay. So he might have sacrificed his life.

Respondent: Pretty much.

Interviewer: Or probably sacrificed his life so he could distract them and he…

Respondent: That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's a brave man.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. And he had watched that – from again, the oral history that's been shared with us. He just had watched too many people on his plantation have their families – and the devastation that it caused to the remaining spouse or partner, and the term "Being sold down the river," **[0:06:00]** is originally, as you know, from slavery days. They were literally sold down – depending upon what duties or expectations. If you were a half-breed, usually the child or progeny of the slave master, and the skin was lighter, there was a good chance – if you were a female, you would have been sent down to New Orleans to one of the houses to work. Other than that, it was strictly hard labour. They wanted big bucks and that kind of thing to withstand heat, **[0:06:30]** and Louisiana was very, very cotton-rich at the time, of course, along with several other states. Mississippi and everything else. So there was a variety of reasons for the master, but mostly it was bottom line, it was profit, but certain requests or needs for certain plantations, if your plantation was able to provide it, you could make a good living buying and selling slaves over and above your crop and whatever.

Interviewer: But the girls were sold – was that into **[0:07:00]** prostitution?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So they went down the river to…

Respondent: Yes, but not always to prostitution. I think some of them were, as they used to say, quote, unquote, "house niggers." They knew how to serve, and they knew how to do a bunch of other things.

Interviewer: So they were all used.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Now let me understand. Henrietta…

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Was Albert one of the children of Henrietta's children?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Got it Okay. So Henrietta's husband sacrificed his life.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Probably.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And Albert was one **[0:07:30]** of the children that escaped…

Respondent: The youngest that escaped. Yes.

Interviewer: The youngest.

Respondent: I think he was less than three or four when he arrived here.

Interviewer: And that was right into Toronto?

Respondent: Well I think the first half, the first stops or crossings were in the Windsor, Detroit area.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Ultimately to Buxton and Chatham, Amherstburg, some of them north of Windsor, but the settlement areas were closest to where they could get to Canada quickest, and that's why we had such a major black community in **[0:08:00]** southwestern Ontario, all through Chatham, Windsor, Buxton, Amherstburg, even as far up as Sarnia in those days. That's because they're right across the river from Detroit, and that was really a major crossing point.

Interviewer: So I think you're saying that Canada was a better place. Maybe not all of Canada, but Ontario was.

Respondent: Ontario was where the network had been somewhat established to receive slaves.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And a lot of the general **[0:08:30]** population of Canada was in Upper Canada and in these areas, so there was already communal living, and a black community that escaped and arrived here became part of those established communities. In a couple of cases, they actually started a smaller one. I think Buxton had the distinction of being predominately a black village in the day. But most of all that area of our country of Canada, unless you went **[0:09:00]** right to the Maritimes, the settlement was here. Here, and Upper Canada, which we know is south of everything else. Long story longer, those were the areas that if you got and registered with John Graves Simcoe, I think was the Lieutenant Governor at the time – "I'm a runaway slave, I'm prepared to fight for Britain, I want my land that's been promised if I arrive here safely." So that was a bit of Collingwood, Medonte, all thorough the Orillia area. That was where some of the **[0:09:30]** forty acres were distributed to. The town of Stayner, few people know, is a black man. Stayner was a black man. He started that town. So those kinds of historical anecdotal kinds of things are just that in a lot of cases, is anecdotal and oral.

Interviewer: Well that's how they pass history down.

Respondent: Little documentation. Yeah.

Interviewer: When you were growing up, first of all, did you ever meet your great-grandfather?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Albert.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: No. So he had died before.

Respondent: Yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: I'm not so sure **[0:10:00]** even – yeah. My dad knew him, but I did meet Albert's wife.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Now she was – I've confused the names. She was in a unit too. Or instead of – my great-grandmother was Henrietta, and my great-great-grandmother, I can't remember her name. Forgive me. And I can certainly, for your notes, clean that up for you.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I've given her the wrong name. My great-grandmother's Henrietta. They lived on Palmerston, another…

Interviewer: Okay. So your great-grandmother was Henrietta…

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: …and that's Albert's…

Respondent: Wife.

Interviewer: **[0:10:30]** Okay. Okay. So it wasn't his mother. Okay.

Respondent: Yup.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: The Henrietta that I thought was his mother's name that brought him up here just dawned on me is wrong, what I'm saying to you, because I can't – just went blank on it. I'm sorry.

Interviewer: Okay. When you were growing up…

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: …you didn't meet your great-grandfather, Albert.

Respondent: No. I met on my…

Interviewer: You met Henrietta.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay.

Respondent: Go ahead.

Interviewer: Did you – **[0:11:00]** and you knew that he had been the first black postman?

Respondent: Yeah. I knew that at an early age.

Interviewer: Did that feel significant? Or was it just that's what my great-grandfather did?

Respondent: I think it was significant insofar as a five- or six-year-old can see with his own eyes the differences.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: And whether or not it was pronounced or discussed or examined at our house a lot was never the case, but it was certainly a discussion point about the lot of the **[0:11:30]** black man in Toronto,

and in Canada in general, so yeah, there was some pride attached to it, and a uniqueness that was sort of passed on in the telling of how special this one guy was.

Interviewer: Did anybody else in your family go work for the post office?

Respondent: Yeah. My dad.

Interviewer: Oh yes?

Respondent: His brother, Calvin.

Interviewer: Oh. [Laughs]

Respondent: And my Uncle Arnold. Of the four sons, three worked for the post office.

Interviewer: Oh. [Laughs]

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, so your grandfather was a pioneer, a trailblazer…

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: …and three of **[0:12:00]** the sons…

Respondent: No, all of them didn't stay. My father didn't stay there that long. He was a mailman, but he was, I think about three or four years, a postman.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: And my Uncle Calvin, the second-oldest son, was a career postman. He, I think, got thirty-five years in, and knew every single person on a beat that he ran for god knows how many years. They all knew Calvin Jackson. And the second-youngest, Arnold, **[0:12:30]** was a clerk at the post office for years and raised his family. He later moved in across the street here after we left…

Interviewer: On Borden Street.

Respondent: …105. He lived in the house after us. His family.

Interviewer: Okay. So let's move on to – well let's just briefly talk about the JCC because that's where you and I met each other.

Respondent: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Interviewer: And then we're going to come back to all this property that your family owned, okay? How many years ago do you think you and I met at the JCC? **[0:13:00]** When did you start going there?

Respondent: 1958, '57.

Interviewer: Oh my – oh, well I wasn't…

Respondent: I started – yeah.

Interviewer: As a kid.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: You were an adolescent.

Respondent: Fifty-eight years. Yeah. I've been going there since.

Interviewer: Oh. [Laughs] Okay.

Respondent: Fifty-eight, fifty-nine years. Yeah. I started at twelve, I believe.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. And I wasn't in Toronto yet. I was in Montreal, then California.

Respondent: Oh okay.

Interviewer: So I didn't start going to the JCC until 1974.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So we must have met mid- to late-'70s.

Interviewer: Yeah. So tell me how you use the JCC. **[0:13:30]** You started really as an adolescent.

Respondent: Okay. I think the best example is we're in the late '40s, early '50s, and Brunswick Avenue is like so many of the neighbouring streets, an immigrant catchment area. North of Kensington where business was done and some lived, depending upon how quickly you progressed north from Kensington, which was a big settlement area for the Jewish community, as you know. A lot of the people started to do the Roberts and **[0:14:00]** Majors and Brunswicks, then they started to get property. My whole street from Brunswick to, I would guess, College was a mixture of everything, but predominately Jewish. My grandfather spoke a very passable Yiddish. [Laughter] Yes.

Interviewer: I love it.

Respondent: Yeah. [Laughter] For sure. Across the street on the northeast corner of Sussex and Brunswick, and I can't remember the synagogue shul, but I was the Shabbos goy for the…

Interviewer: The Narayever?

Respondent: Narayever's further **[0:14:30]** south.

Interviewer: That's right.

Respondent: That's right. But I didn't – had friends live on both sides of the Narayever.

Interviewer: So you were the Shabbos goy, which means?

Respondent: It's an art gallery right now on Sussex and…

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Okay? That was a very active synagogue. I would – and this was worth fighting for with the other kids because it was a quarter every Friday. [Laughter] To come in with the "beards," as we called them.

Interviewer: The "beards"?

Respondent: And you had to climb above the pews into an old slat because that's where the light board was.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And you had to be a certain age and size to lay down on this slat, **[0:15:00]** as you click, and click, click, click, click, right? **[indiscernible 0:15:02]**. [Laughter] All right? I was the guy.

Interviewer: You were the goy.

Respondent: And I had to fight off guys that were trying to get my quarter a week, you know? That was automatically guaranteed before I had a paper route. Long story longer…

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: …the kids I played with, their fathers went to the original Y on Brunswick and College.

Interviewer: Oh right.

Respondent: So they'd be at the Y and I'd be around the corner on Major **[0:15:30]** at the bottom. They used to have cheder there. [Laughter] So a lot of the kids were getting beat up, okay? The kids with the payas, and they had the yarmulkas and all that. I was sort of the bodyguard because they were my buddies at King Edward school. And that was it.

Interviewer: So you would go and protect them.

Respondent: Yeah. And then I think the rabbi sometimes let me sit in, you know?

Interviewer: You attended the services or to the school?

Respondent: The school.

Interviewer: Cheder. The school.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh. [Laughs]

Respondent: Some of them got to know me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: You know? So my involvement with the Jewish community, as my mother **[0:16:00]** says, "You've been out of the closet since you were six." [Laughter] It's so – it was like that. And when they built the new one, it was only natural that's where my buddies went. So Moishe and everybody, and Jay, and everybody went to the new one. It was cool.

Interviewer: The new one at Bloor and Spadina.

Respondent: Yeah. Bloor and Spadina was the new one. It was gleaming, and the best gym, and the greatest-looking building, and all the old guys – all the kids who hung around with their fathers were, you know, **[0:16:30]** some of them were big shooters on fundraising and stuff. So you know, I got a little preferred treatment there, and there wasn't too many black kids going at the time, but there was a lot in our neighbourhood who – trust me. My description of what happened on Brunswick Street is not unique to the members of the black community. And that time, we lived in pretty much the areas that the Jewish community did. Upon arrival, this is like second-generation now. They're established in leader business or on Spadina, the shmatta business, whatever it was. [Laughter] **[0:17:00]** It was such a natural progression. So there was so many – there was only five or six thousand black people in the city at the time I'm talking about, but I would say forty-five hundred of them were living in and around the Jewish community downtown. So what I've just described is, oh, I can name you ten black guys who had that kind of a status in the Jewish community, or an awareness

of the Jewish community. And the Jewish kids get to learn about the **[0:17:30]** black community a little bit through our families too.

Interviewer: As children, did you go in and out of each other's homes?

Respondent: Constantly.

Interviewer: You did.

Respondent: During the Depression on Brunswick Avenue, very few of them middle or working. My grandfather was one of the fortunate ones. He worked for a company on Adelaide called the Fred W. Hall Paper Company. 637 Adelaide, I think. Anyway, he was bringing home a regular paycheque, a lot – a good number on the street on food stamps.

Interviewer: **[0:18:00]** Oh.

Respondent: Our door – we had six, my grandparents had six kids. I think five were living at home including my mom and dad and myself, so we were doubling up in beds and everything else. But at our dining room table at five-thirty every night, we had a good part of the neighbourhood in shifts because he could afford to buy some stuff and feed the block.

Interviewer: Oh. So he was feeding a lot of neighbours.

Respondent: Mm-hm. Yeah. Yeah. He was an honorary Yid.

Interviewer: Yeah. And you too.

Respondent: Yeah. We were. And **[0:18:30]** my dad, a little bit so much, but he grew up a lot and then went to war very early. I think he was drafted at nineteen or twenty. So by the time he got back, his contemporaries were either starting to move north in migration, and started to come up to us in the '40s. And then the kids that I grew up with, the next generation, they started to move up to Eglinton, right? And they started leaving me. "Jay, we're going." And as the community grew, it went further **[0:19:00]** north and that kind of thing, and then another influx came. But then by that point, I had

left Brunswick Street in 1952. Very, very – Brunswick Avenue. Very, very despondent. But what happened where we moved was even more **[indiscernible 0:19:17]** for me because I moved below Dundas. Well, I'm right in the heart of exactly the same thing…

Interviewer: More Jews.

Respondent: …only a little newer. Some of them were more, you know, **[0:19:30]** it's the first settlement area.

Interviewer: More recent and…

Respondent: More recently arrived. Yes. So it was a quick and easy transition, and more so than then kids I grew up with on Brunswick, the ones that I later grew up with on Grange Avenue are the ones I still have as friends today, that I still go to the JCC with, and who'd gone on and our kids are friends. I mean it was generational now. Although we don't all live on the same street as I once did, they're all over the city, but we make a point of having stayed **[0:20:00]** together and then **[indiscernible 0:19:59]**.

Interviewer: So your entire life – I mean that first twenty years of your life, which are significant years…

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: …you were surrounded by Jewish people, you were in money, they were your friends, and you went to the JCC with them.

Respondent: Yeah. Exactly.

Interviewer: And you're still at the JCC. You just turned…

Respondent: Can't get out of it.

Interviewer: …seventy-one…

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: …and you are still at the JCC.

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah. And still love it, but both of my sons were raised there. The little guy **[0:20:30]** used to be spoiled. The older guy, especially Sunday mornings. "Come here, Jackson." The bagels and cream cheese. [Laughter] He'd run around and hide in lockers. I mean they had their own run of the place.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And they were the favourite kids. [Laughter] There's a couple of other kids that were the same age as Nathaniel and Marlon. Marlon, not so much because he was older when he started to come. He was like twelve or thirteen.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: But my youngest son, I started bringing around three or four, and he learned how to **[0:21:00]** wrap a towel on his head and shower.

Interviewer: [Laughs] As if he had something…

Respondent: Yeah. Like a **[indiscernible 0:21:02]**. [Laughter] I want to go in the **[indiscernible 0:21:06]**. [Laughter]

Interviewer: It's several generations of…

Respondent: Jacksons and Jews. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah. Right, right, right.

Respondent: You have to forgive me again for a second.

Interviewer: Okay. I'm going to bring us back to the JCC.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: This is decades later.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: And you and I see each other there, and I haven't seen you there for years.

Respondent: But I think it was more the **[0:21:30]** '80s.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: More likely than the '70s. I'm thinking of our recognizing – we had some mutual friends in Harold and Shirley at one point, or Shirley was at the hospital. I haven't seen much of her since he passed, by the way. But I got to believe that's around the '80s.

Interviewer: Well I was at the JCC every day. I jogged with a noon-hour group. I was leading the fitness classes, and we all spent a lot of time there.

Respondent: That's the truth.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And I can remember **[0:22:00]** at one point, certainly in the mid-'70s, three or four days a week minimum, and that was sacrilege if it was less, you know?

Interviewer: And now it's 2013 and you're still there.

Respondent: A lot less, but [laughter] being vertical still is good. [Laughter] So I like that part. But it's down to a couple of visits a week, mostly because I'm not inclined, and I'm kind of monitoring a lot of what **[0:22:30]** I do physically just based on some medical things.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: But it's no less attractive to me, or no less a commitment for me. So I may do it less, but it's still important. It's still very important for me.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well I think we both share that enjoying the ambiance.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: And enjoying the people there.

Respondent: And even that part's changed. And I guess it's better if you're an outsider looking in, but there was a culture **[0:23:00]** that was for, at least generationally, since I've been involved with the Y, that was so rich in the composition of it. The players, the membership kinds of guys. There was a – what they used to tell me was the downtown Jews, and then there was the uptown Jews. Well the downtown guys were the guys that built Spadina and the delis, and that's who the membership was. These people would go to the Y and stay there for **[0:23:30]** the day. Sometimes to avoid their wives, sometimes just because it was the place to be.

Interviewer: Well I think they played cards there, and they drank there…

Respondent: They did everything. They drank.

Interviewer: Some pretty strong stuff for the morning.

Respondent: Very strong. [Laughter] They had their own keys, a number of them.

Interviewer: That's right.

Respondent: To get in, you know? And so there was a special – and it wasn't abused. There was a special kind of, oh, environment, I guess, that they had created that's now missing for me.

Interviewer: It is different. Yeah.

Respondent: **[0:24:00]** You know? And it's not just the physical plant that's different. The membership composition.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Respondent: Doesn't reflect that old environment.

Interviewer: Well what we used to think of as the "old guys," I hate to say it, but it's us now really. How old are those old guys? Our age.

Respondent: Oh, they were very old. Not us.

Interviewer: **[Indiscernible 0:24:17]**

Respondent: Yeah, the **[indiscernible 0:24:18]**. Right.

Interviewer: Okay. Let's come back to – you said that a lot of people were being fed at the table, and sometimes in shift. Right.

Respondent: **[0:24:30]** Now you have to appreciate, this is at the Depression. I was not there. This has been told to me.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: But that was a fairly – I won't say a regular occurrence, but it happened often where there was enough to share after feeding the lot and then bringing in a couple of different settings, or a couple of different sittings to, you know, smoke them or something.

Interviewer: But that's true generosity.

Respondent: That's how it was then.

Interviewer: Because if one person is **[0:25:00]** working, doesn't mean he's wealthy.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: But he's sharing what he's earning.

Respondent: That's right. That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And these are the days my grandfather was a heller, I'm told. He was a hard-drinking, run to the bootleg, make a baby, and then go to work, and then go drink or something, you know? [Laughter] So he hadn't found God yet, but his house, his generosity of spirit and his family always – you always knew there was a very good positive, **[0:25:30]** God-fearing side to my grandfather, which later hit him like a ton of bricks. But there was a period where he was

just, oh, the little black James Cagney, is what they used to kind of refer to him as.

Interviewer: Did he become religious after that?

Respondent: He found God more actively. He couldn't quit drinking. He was a notorious drinker. I was going to mention something else to you about Brunswick Avenue. **[0:26:00]** It'll come back to me.

Interviewer: When you were living there…

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: …your parents, you, your sister…

Respondent: Mm-hm. She was just born. Yeah.

Interviewer: Right. Were there other people living with you, or did you…

Respondent: Yeah. Both my grandparents, a couple of cousins, and one of the daughters of the…

Interviewer: So you were three generations…

Respondent: One, two – yes.

Interviewer: Three generations. Okay. How many of you were living under your roof? Your grandparents…

Respondent: Two, four, six – I **[0:26:30]** would say nine. Nine or ten in that little two-bedroom house.

Interviewer: Yeah. In a little two-bedroom house.

Respondent: It was a two-bedroom house. It's not unlike Faye's across the – or A.C. Jackson's on Brunswick. The one where Faith used to live.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: A little bigger. It had, I think, more square footage inside, but it was effectively a two-bedroom. We converted what was later the **[0:27:00]** living room was a bedroom. We made a third out of one that wasn't, but that was only the way you could get accommodated. And as you walked through the old, long hallway some more, you'd go right, of course, right into the dining room as you came in the door. So that's where we could seat people, but surrounding that were the three bedrooms. One, two – yeah.

Interviewer: So that's what it was. You had bedrooms and a place to eat, which you called kitchen and/or dining room, whatever.

Respondent: Well that was a dining room. It was a **[0:27:30]** fairly extended kitchen with – and at the end of that kitchen, believe it or not, was the washroom where they built it. That way it was personally built, so I guess that's what they could do at the time. I always find it odd that the washroom's right on the kitchen.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right. Right. So. Which means that all the spaces other than where you were cooking or eating or peeing, all of the spaces were used for bodies to sleep pretty much.

Respondent: Yup. And that only part.

Interviewer: **[0:28:00]** Well two bedrooms and eight or nine people.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: One kitchen, one bathroom?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: It was tough. But I didn't know it. I didn't know.

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: Well you've heard the same cliché forever. I was poor, but nobody told me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: When the kids were playing, where did you play?

Respondent: We did a lot in the lanes and on the streets. This lane right here.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Where am I? [Laughs] Yeah. The one between Brunswick…

Interviewer: **[0:28:30]** Uh-huh.

Respondent: …and Borden. That laneway, but north. North of Harbord. Actually north of Sussex.

Interviewer: So the kids played a lot in the lane.

Respondent: Oh god…

Interviewer: Boys and girls, or what?

Respondent: During my first ten years of life, there were the odd girl who would come with us on bikes or something. We had our bikes. But mostly it was the same bunch of guys, kicked the can. Two Maxie Schwartz's.

Interviewer: Two Maxie Schwartz's?

Respondent: Yeah. Two Maxie Schwartz's, Billy Trainor, Donny Hatch, Izzy **[0:29:00]** Sedore.

Interviewer: I love how you remember those names from sixty-five years ago.

Respondent: Yeah. Ralphie. Oh, anyway, it was a group. A group. And we played…

Interviewer: And what did you play? You play kick the can?

Respondent: Kick the can. **[Indiscernible 0:29:14]** cars. Every time there was a construction site, there'd be mounds and mounds of sand.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Well we'd make a village in the sand with these little cars from Woolworth's, right on the side of Central Tech. We used to always pile it right on the Lippincott side.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: No. The Borden side. This one. .**[0:29:30]** Yeah. It's now the art building now. But that used to be open space, and a bit of a football…

Interviewer: Oh, so you remember before the building was there.

Respondent: Oh yeah. I went to that school. I went to the art college, or to the art course there. The original first four years. They built that after, just after I left. I think it's the Goldhammer Building. He was the head of the art department and they named it after him.

Interviewer: But in the lanes it was more boys than girls.

Respondent: Yes. I would say ninety percent.

Interviewer: **[0:30:00]** Uh-huh.

Respondent: Ninety percent of boys, and ninety percent of the time.

Interviewer: Yeah. That was your favourite spot to play at.

Respondent: Well the lane was good. We could go to Christie Pits. In the summer, the Toronto Parks and Rec had great summer programs. I mean everything from baseball, quoit competition, beanbags. I mean you could go to Moss Park, you'd go to Christie Pits, you could go to play other training groups or other community groups that this…

Interviewer: So the city provided activities during the summer.

Respondent: Absolutely. **[0:30:30]** Swimming.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: A lot at Christie Pits. Wading pools not so much. And that continued right down into – when I left Brunswick to move to Grange, they had the same program there at Alexander Park, way before the projects and the public housing was built. It was a wide-open great park then. You could play ball all day. All day we played ball.

Interviewer: What elementary school – you left just for three years, so I'm just going to talk about that first twenty years, other than that…

Respondent: Six, seven, and eight I was at Ryerson Public School. One through **[0:31:00]** five, King Edward.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Bathurst and College, right? So I was always in the area. There was great rivalries between King Edward, for example, and Lansdowne, just down the street, you know? Another six blocks, eight blocks. So…

Interviewer: Rivalries in what ways?

Respondent: All the sports. "Listen, my father went to Lansdowne." "Yeah, well mine went to Huron," and "Mine went to King Edward," you know? And then on and on. So those little territorial things. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And the parents continued it to, you know? I mean they kind of said, you know, **[0:31:30]** when we were in school we never spoke to them. You know, the school. And the guys would laugh. We'd call them the next day, kind of thing. Well they carried it on with their offspring, and it got to be, you know, little community rivalries and stuff like that, but it was always – this structured activity that the kids are into today, I know it's demand, it's **[indiscernible 0:31:48]**,

soccer mom syndrome, and all of that kind of thing, but we hopped on a streetcar for four cents and we went to Eaton's, and then we got on a streetcar and came back to swim at Christie Pits **[0:32:00]** with the same transfer [laughs], you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So you were much more independent and…

Respondent: We were, and it was – I defy anybody to tell me that they've had more fun doing the computer stuff that they do now, or the kind of not active involvement that they engage in.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: It's very disappointing to me. My kids and children, my grandchildren, are even out of that. They do all of the, you know, the social media stuff, but they're active. **[0:32:30]** They play ball.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And they're now twenty. They're in university, so it's something we wouldn't let be established in our family. I didn't, and my sons didn't, and the grandkids are not going to…

Interviewer: Go play outside. [Laughs]

Respondent: They're going to do something.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And what high school did you go to?

Respondent: I went to Central Tech for four-and-a-half years, and I did grade thirteen at Northern Secondary.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: And then I was, not very long, in the States on a **[0:33:00]** bit of a track scholarship, but they insist you have to go to – I was bad and I lost it.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: But I finally did finish after the government sent…

Interviewer: Having a little too much fun, Jay?

Respondent: Yeah. [Laughter] And I simply…

Interviewer: It's hard not to, eh? You know? Freedom, and far away.

Respondent: Yeah. Away from home.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you have any stories that stand out about being at Central Tech in the '50s?

Respondent: A little anecdote was both of my parents went there.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: And they – **[0:33:30]** they kind of met there sort of.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: But they, immediately after getting to know each other, went to Central Tech. My mother often talked about her favourite teachers who taught her, and there was a history teacher, Mrs. Pine, and she was so engrossed in her history, in the telling of whether it was through Sir Walter Raleigh, or whatever the topic might have been, my mother said her oral recitation of this stuff was such – she started to cry and she got really into – just that kind of a committed **[0:34:00]** person to history who happened to be a teacher. Well, sure enough grade nine, my first history teacher is Mrs. Pine.

Interviewer: Oh. A generation later.

Respondent: Yeah. A generation later.

Interviewer: Oh. And she's twenty years older.

Respondent: She was close to retirement. She was doddering when I got there. But I swear to you by the third history class, she was shaking and

reciting history, and we started to cry. [Laughter] I said, "My mother told me." [Laughter]

Interviewer: You tell her that?

Respondent: I tried to make her remember, and she kind of did because there was so few black **[0:34:30]** people and kids enrolled at the school. So she claimed to, but you know, at the time I'm suggesting she would know my parents, she's, as I say, lucid enough but on her way to retirement, you know? Probably past retirement. But it was a unique little Central Tech…

Interviewer: That's such a lovely story.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Who made up Central Tech at that time?

Respondent: Who made? The composition?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: At the **[0:35:00]** time, and it still may be, the biggest technical school in the British Commonwealth, okay? So that was the flag waving. What they offered better than most, and if you understood the Toronto secondary school board of education was that every area of the city, what was then identified as the City of Toronto, has three kinds of high schools. You had a collegiate, which was predominately streamed for university attendance, there was the commercial for our female students **[0:35:30]** who entered with the penmanship and the shorthand, and the accounting, and that, and that was Central Commerce. The collegiate in this case is Harbord Collegiate.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Excuse me. Or the trades.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: So you had aircraft mechanics, tin-smithing, sheet metal work, and that were the trades that they would provide for you, including dry cleaning. I mean they had a major dry cleaning thing. And also they had the regular student body, regular academic, **[0:36:00]** and a couple of specialties, i.e. the art course, one of the two or three given in the city at the time. And this was the configuration for downtown Toronto. Out west it was the same. And if you went past Dufferin, Bloor Collegiate, Western Tech, which is Central Tech's counterpart, and I forget. The commercial school out there.

Interviewer: But that category. Three different ones.

Respondent: Three different ones in every part of the city, so you had a choice of which were – **[0:36:30]** but it was a quasi-streaming is what – the effect we got proven to be.

Interviewer: And what did you study, because then you went to Northern so you graduated…

Respondent: Yeah. I had a regular general curriculum with an art option, right? So I had about five or six art classes a week. And when I was asked to leave Central Tech very politely, I had to sit out the rest of the year, and I got – they allowed me to enrol in Northern, who also had an art course, **[0:37:00]** and they were North Toronto, Northern Secondary, and what the heck was the commercial one? Lawrence Park.

Interviewer: Were you naughty at that time? Is that why you were asked…

Respondent: I was a very, very, very aggressive child. Anti-authority. Yeah. Really. No trouble with authority now. You know?

Interviewer: You'd certainly been a success in your life, but authority was something that you could take in limited amounts.

Respondent: Yes. And it depends who was exercising the authority.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Some people weren't **[0:37:30]** qualified to.

Interviewer: Yeah. So if it was somebody you didn't respect, you didn't want to take it from…

Respondent: Pretty much.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And that usually was the one that was in my face the most, you know, and that wasn't a good thing to do. A little aggressive boy. Yeah. A little aggressive.

Interviewer: Thank you for talking about the schools.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: I had asked you about the composition of the schools. I'm wondering about the composition of…

Respondent: The student body?

Interviewer: The neighbourhood as you were growing up.

Respondent: **[0:38:00]** Sure I didn't?

Interviewer: You talked about Jewish people and…

Respondent: Yeah. And a healthy dose of Catholicism.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: One of the community centres that was really big in the '40s and '50s that I attended was the Kiwanis Club. Bathurst and Lennox, right there at the corner of Bathurst. It's now the Bathurst Street Theatre.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Downstairs was the Kiwanis club, of which there were, again, spotted throughout the city. Central, downtown, eastern, and all of

that. Gerrard. **[0:38:30]** And that one was across the road from several public Catholic schools, so there was that component. There was the Jewish component. A very strong and healthy Ukrainian and Polish component as well. And that's still reflected on Beverley, up and down St. George, and then that's sort of out of what we're describing as the Harbord Village area, but of course, we weren't aware of any boundaries or anything at that – **[0:39:00]** of that nature at the time. So they were certainly the extended part of the community, but also quite recognizable. Quite a lot of the butcher shops along Bloor Street were the Ukrainian and Polish, you know, between Spadina and Christie.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: North and south sides. And depending on the further west you went, sometimes it became the Italian kind of signage and goods and services. So it was reflected that way. **[0:39:30]** Identifiable, but very, very homogenous, you know? It really did – everybody had their pride thing. This is way before multiculturalism was vogue and cliché.

Interviewer: And when you say homogenous, are you talking about how people got along?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: In terms of that kind of…

Interviewer: That's where I wanted to go with that.

Respondent: Yes. The interaction with almost all communities was one of pride, one of **[0:40:00]** – the common denominator was the immigrant experience.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So everybody could talk on that level about what they've experienced. "I will go to this, and there's a guy to do this." "Ah, you

don't know, on Spadina it's this," and that kind of thing was a very, very common thread for everybody. They can share that experience, no matter what the accent or what the culture.

Interviewer: And are you saying that for you as a child, the children got along, **[0:40:30]** the parents got along?

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Where were there tensions? Or were there not?

Respondent: Oh, there were tensions. I mean I wasn't a witness to it, but I think late '40s is a very famous riot of non-Jews and Jews at Christie Pits.

Interviewer: Christie Pits.

Respondent: Sure. My wife's father was very much in there, Sammy Gold and Bill Gold. They were two of the – the Dunkelmans who have written a book on it.

Interviewer: And there was **[0:41:00]** a movie made of it too, I think.

Respondent: I think so. Yeah, I think it was the CBC or something did a good docudrama kind of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, right.

Respondent: And they weren't – there were more geographical tensions, I think, than actual racial tensions, but those were the days of stereotypes. Well, the Chinese were the "chinks" there, the Jews were the "hebs" there, and the black people were the "niggers" there, you know? And they wouldn't do it to your face, but that was the distinctions being made. There wasn't political correctness, **[0:41:30]** you know? The easiest way to sort of maybe explain that. But on the surface of the things that a seven-, eight-, nine-year-old kid would see, everybody got along. Now…

Interviewer: So you felt safe and comfortable.

Respondent: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Well that's what I'm really talking about.

Respondent: And I was a little oblivious. If there were some real divisions in different communities, and I happened to be in a friend's house or where a division was supposedly in place, I wasn't aware of it. **[0:42:00]** I was aware – I was always aware I was black.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: But I was always – I felt well raised, and I could accommodate most anything. Doesn't matter that I'm black. I'm going to charm them, I'm going to, you know, use something that I wasn't very confident about, so I would never experience the true feelings. And as a kid, I wasn't a threat to them. So it was fun that I was probably more or less the host culture in my community because **[0:42:30]** everybody else was new to it until their kids came along, or my family was – more accurately, my family was more the host culture of that generation that arrived. They spoke fluidly, they knew the systems, the ins and outs of the city. So there was a certain degree of respect that came by virtue of being here before them.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Yeah.

Respondent: So that was – and that was deferred to, and they deferred that to us.

Interviewer: **[0:43:00]** We talked maybe twenty minutes ago about there was more property that your family owned.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: And I think a lot of immigrants have that feeling. Let's try to buy property.

Respondent: That's the buzzword.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: That's the buzzword.

Interviewer: But you said something about they owned a fair amount of property. Was it where Central Tech is, or across from Central Tech?

Respondent: It's north of Central Tech actually on Borden, and the width from Borden from Lippincott, where the **[0:43:30]** parking lot is now, just south of Bloor. Okay? That was Jackson property. There was a series of row houses coming south from Bloor down to Lennart, or Lennox Avenue, rather.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: About six properties there that were taken essentially, because my grandfather and his brother, who was still alive then, were being smart and would hold out and stick the city in. Well they just…

Interviewer: Oh, so they…

Respondent: They gave them the money, but it wasn't what they were hoping to get or try…

Interviewer: **[0:44:00]** Not market value.

Respondent: Not market value, no. There's a number of properties, or two or three where my great-grandmother lived. A.C.'s wife on Palmerston. We had a lot of that one. That's south of College. I don't think there was any property north where the big bulbs – lights are, I don't think.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: That was sort of the gentry and carriage set in there at the time, and in their time. It was dying when I was growing up. Roxton Road I know over in the **[0:44:30]** Dufferin, Dovercourt area.

Interviewer: Oh, that's amazing.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: The amount of property. But…

Respondent: And Brunswick Avenue, two or three, four maybe on Brunswick.

Interviewer: Does your family own any property there now? Or it's all been sold?

Respondent: I think 105 was…

Interviewer: Brunswick?

Respondent: No. 105 Borden was one. I think most of the estate has been sold off, and I know with my grandfather being the last living of the brothers, **[0:45:00]** he gave a lot – the Brunswick Avenue property he gave to his daughter…

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: …who gave it to her son, Monty, who remodeled the whole house. Not sure what the status is now, but it was a nice job. He didn't compromise it in any way. It's a whole new building. The old house, other than the lot, is gone. I don't know that there's anything that you could call a portfolio anymore.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Almost all of the family has either enjoyed or sold off and enjoyed it. **[0:45:30]** I was just a little too late, I guess. I didn't get any. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But I don't know – but there was quite a number. I would guess somewhere in the area of fifteen to twenty properties at one point.

Interviewer: Whoa.

Respondent: And I could be exaggerating. It's not accurate information.

Interviewer: Or you might be accurate.

Respondent: I could be. Yeah. I know there were numbers.

Interviewer: But it had to do with having freedom and establishing yourselves.

Respondent: The acquisition of it. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Respondent: And at the time, I think – I'd guess and say they were testing the boundaries of the **[0:46:00]** host society. They've written it by being in a position – how it came about, I don't know – to have the dollars to raise, to purchase these. Now I know there was a whole thing about the first taxicabs that one of my relatives was a part of. The first taxi cabs were by the people who are really the stars of the book that Carolyn wrote, the Blackburns, who was a partner of one of the uncles that came **[0:46:30]** up underground.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: They started Toronto's first taxicabs. They had hansoms. To this day, the colours orange and yellow, that's Jackson colours. We started our first cabs with that, with this Blackburn guy. The TTC in its inception incorporated those colours, and they were – that's ours. Yeah.

Interviewer: Your family has some wonderful stories to be very proud of.

Respondent: It's true. Yes. It's true. That one's been documented.

Interviewer: They came from such hardship and they've – and you, **[0:47:00]** I mean here you are. You've had a very nice life, nice career.

Respondent: I had a very nice – I'm a very blessed person.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I am.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I am. Over and above all my foibles, and shambles, and screw-ups. [Laughter] He's looked after me, or She has. I don't know. And it's appreciated. Truly do enjoy this phase of my life.

Interviewer: I'm wondering whether really we've – I've talked a lot with you.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: **[0:47:30]** Do you have any sense of the neighbourhood as it is now? Or is it you feel too much of an outsider to comment?

Respondent: I think there's enough of the – my recollections and memories here to still make it a valid emotional walk-through for me.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Do you have…

Respondent: Some of the people in their generations are still here too, as are the physical plants that I remember. Some renovated, some updated, **[0:48:00]** but the integrity is still there of what I used to recall with a lot of warmth.

Interviewer: That's where I was going with it. What's your sense of the major changes or what was good that's still good? Just your observation. You do come to the JCC.

Respondent: Yeah. Sit in your home and knowing it's vintage and it's on a street that I had a very good part of my childhood, **[0:48:30]** my first love affair I lived on Borden Street, [laughter] all of those kinds of things, so this street holds great memories. The structures here that I'm looking at your wonderful house, and I'm saying there is some quality in the antiquity of the neighbourhood, you know? There is something that's been maintained that over the forty years that I haven't lived here, or whatever, it still makes it valid. **[0:49:00]** It's credible, and they haven't sold out. I still get that architectural

honesty here. It's still honest on Borden, and Major, and Robert as I look back here.

Interviewer: So as people might have renovated or upgraded…

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: …they've still kind of kept the integrity of the neighbourhood.

Respondent: Yes. I sense that yeah, the faces have changed, but it's the neighbourhood, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: It looks pretty good.

Interviewer: Well I think we'll stop.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: **[0:49:30]** It's been such a – let me ask just one more question.

Respondent: Sure.

Interviewer: Did your family use Kensington Market at all?

Respondent: Constantly.

Interviewer: How?

Respondent: Constantly. Well, especially when my father and grandfather couldn't get the best kippers anyplace else. [Laughter] Except in Kensington. Fresh fowl, you know? Pricing. You know? Your produce and stuff, yeah. Go and wash it a little bit, but you're feeding a whole pile. Kensington was the answer. **[0:50:00]** The A&P I think was a big chain at the time. Loblaws was just starting to grow to what it became, but A&P was a big one.

Interviewer: Where was A&P?

Respondent: A&P's used to be on Bloor near Christie.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: They weren't that handy, but they were one of the big megillahs at the time. The Atlantic and Pacific. This was the acronym. And they were butted, I think, eventually by Loblaws.

Interviewer: **[0:50:30]** Mm-hm.

Respondent: There was a couple of chains we lost, but they were middle and up market, you know, so if I've got fourteen mouths at the table and I need this many potatoes and that much chicken chopped, and that's when they used to give you neck bones, you know? For your dog. Dog had to hustle for himself.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: We made soup, you know? That kind of thing.

Interviewer: But your family, to go back to Kensington Market, that was…

Respondent: A regular stop for us.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: A regular one. Especially Saturday **[0:51:00]** mornings. It was a little bit of a ritual. My grandfather, he had to go to work and drop off my father and mother, and pick up the groceries because he worked at the paper company, and I'd ride with him, you know, sometimes. And by the time he got back, he helped to unpack the bags, and it was a bit of a pleasant ritual.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: You know, to do that. Food coming in the house in all of its forms was always a good thing.

Interviewer: I just – you know, what I find such fun to listen **[0:51:30]** to you, all these Yiddish expressions that just are part of your vocabulary because you grew up in this neighbourhood.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And surprise of all surprises, my third and final wife is Jewish. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Well.

Respondent: Is that one.

Interviewer: On that note.

Respondent: On that note, yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Jay Jackson, thank you very much. It's been a total pleasure.

Respondent: Thank you. Thank you, Eleanor.

[0:51:53]

[End of recording]