

122 Percy Brik

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

Interviewer: I want to say welcome to Percy Brik. Thank you very much for coming to speak to me. And Percy, you lived at 184 Major Street from 1953 to 1966. You were born on this street, and you left after your bar mitzvah. So I know that you were here the first thirteen years of your life, right?

Respondent: That's true.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I grew up on Major Street. My older brother, **[0:00:30]** Gordon, was born in a rented house in 1950. In 1952, my mother was pregnant. My father said, "I don't want my second son born in a rented house," and he bought 184 Major, so that was my cradle. That was the first house that I lived in. [Laughter] So yeah, I was born in the Annex.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do me a favour, before we were speaking, you were saying you live at Bayview north somewhere, but you compare that with **[0:01:00]** this part of the city, which you left many, many – a couple of decades ago. Would you make that comparison for me now that you're taping please?

Respondent: Okay. I'd love to. I guess the biggest transformation that I had when we left the Annex was I lived in an insulated neighbourhood. Everything was reachable by car, you know? If we had to get groceries, we took the car. If we wanted to see a movie, we took the car. If I wanted to see a friend, **[0:01:30]** I was driven there by car. It was a very non-walking neighbourhood. On Major Street, I guess my word for it would be organic. It's part of Bloor, it's part of Harbord, it's part of College. We would see our neighbours, our friends walking by our house. We would walk by their house. People would call each other in for a cup of tea or a cup of coffee and chat. I would see people I didn't know all the time walking on their **[0:02:00]** way to work, walking to restaurants, walking on

dates with their girlfriends or boyfriends. The first gay couple I saw were on Major Street walking together. You know, the world walked by our house. [Laughter] You know, I really – I thought that's the way it was for everybody. We had no car. We didn't own a car. We walked everywhere. We walked as far as University and Dundas if we had to go to Mount Sinai Hospital. We walked up as far as [0:02:30] Casa Loma if we wanted to, you know, take a little stroll, and if it was too far, when we – sometimes we picnicked at High Park, we would take a streetcar ride. I think the price at that time was eight tickets for twenty-five cents.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: It was something like that. [Laughter] So you know, if that was too far, we took the streetcar in August. We would go to the CNE. There was no Canada's Wonderland, so we got a free ticket to the [0:03:00] CNE at the end of every school year. You got the report card, you would have one free ticket for the CNE that you'd save for August. You would have one free ticket for the Toronto Maple Leaf baseball team. We had a semi-pro baseball team in Toronto at that time at old Maple Leaf Stadium, so we had something to do in the summer. We'd go to see one baseball game, and then we'd go to the CNE. So that was the end of every school year – grade one, grade two, grade three. [0:03:30] You'd get those two tickets in your little report card package. So the experience was wonderful. I just – I loved seeing people walking to work, coming home. You know, loved like crazy seeing my dad coming home from work.

Interviewer: Some sad memories with that. Touching memories. Yeah. But you're talking about this neighbourhood having been – well, what Jane Jacobs called "sidewalk living."

Respondent: Is that right?

Interviewer: [0:04:00] Hold on one second. It's what Jane Jacobs called "sidewalk living." People using the streets, using the fronts of their homes. It was a neighbourhood. Yeah.

Respondent: Absolutely. Everybody was identifiable. It was very much a village feel, you know?

- Interviewer:** Oh yeah. You know, I've lived here now for twenty-five years and you're confirming everything that I feel about **[0:04:30]** this part of the city. And that struck you as soon as you came back here and you walked up the stairs into my house. Yeah. Yeah.
- Respondent:** The houses are all very, very similar. They have the entrance and then the staircase upstairs.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** We had a little bit of a different staircase from you, but the layout is very much the Annex.
- Interviewer:** But you remember it clearly.
- Respondent:** I remember it clearly.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you have any idea what made your parents **[0:05:00]** choose to live in what we now call Harbord Village?
- Respondent:** I think part of it was community. My parents were Holocaust survivors and into Jewish culture, and there were two synagogues very close to our house on Brunswick Street, and one of which remains today.
- Interviewer:** That's the Narayever.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** Which – in fact, our backyard was adjacent to **[0:05:30]** that synagogue, so when my parents would walk to the synagogue like real people, my brother and I would climb over the fence [laughter] and we'd be in the backyard of the synagogue because it was right kitty-corner to...
- Interviewer:** Right. It was back-to-back.

Respondent: ...our house.

Interviewer: Yes, yes, yes.

Respondent: Back-to-back. So...

Interviewer: So your family went to that synagogue.

Respondent: They went to that synagogue. They were members there, and you know, so it was the Jewish culture, I think, that was attractive to my dad, and he worked at Spadina and **[0:06:00]** Dundas, so this was walking distance. You know, on all but the worst weather days, you know? The, you know, hail storms and blizzards, he would spend five cents and take a streetcar, otherwise he walked to work and he walked home. And walking was our – we walked everywhere, as I said, except for the very, very far destinations. And at that time, Toronto basically ended at St. Clair. When we would, you know, go up north, and that happened **[0:06:30]** rarely until I was twelve years – twelve years old, I had exhausted all of the parochial Jewish schools in Toronto. There were – everybody had made the north migration, and there were no more, as we called them, cheders to go to. So I then went to Eitz Chaim, which is opposite Bialik.

Interviewer: Yes, I know that. Yeah.

Respondent: And to get there, I took the streetcar, which ended at St. Clair, **[0:07:00]** and there was a loop and the streetcar would turn around and go south again, and then I had to take a bus north of St. Clair to Eglinton to where I was going to that school and pay a second fare because this was not Toronto.

Interviewer: Oh, fascinating.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: From St. Clair, you paid a...

Respondent: A second – in fact...

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: I can't remember the streets now, but there was one point in that Bathurst bus [0:07:30] where it reached some kind of a boundary, and the bus driver would stop the bus. Everybody would get off the bus and board again, and when they boarded, they paid their second ticket. So this is the way they made sure everybody paid, you know, the right fare because there was – it was after Toronto. So I remember it was kind of a waste of time, you know, and we'd sort of rushed to the exit, as he approached that boundary, so [0:08:00] if you were the first on the bus, you'd get a seat. Right? So.

Interviewer: When you got back on the bus?

Respondent: When you got back on the bus.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right. Right.

Respondent: So it was a way to...

Interviewer: So that was somewhere between St. Clair – no. So okay. So the first one that you took did a circle at St. Clair and it went back.

Respondent: The streetcar went as far as St. Clair and went around the loop and came back down south.

Interviewer: Okay. You got onto something else on St. Clair.

Respondent: And we got on an Eglinton bus. I think what I may remember, because it was so long ago, is maybe when you got on the bus, you didn't pay. But when it [0:08:30] reached Eglinton, you know, boom.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: You had to get off the bus, board a second time, and pay a second ticket.

Interviewer: At Eglinton.

Respondent: At Eglinton.

Interviewer: And then it would take you north to Eitz Chaim, which is on Viewmount.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Well that is the first I've heard that. Very interesting.

Respondent: Yeah. It's probably somewhere down in the TTC history.

Interviewer: Oh. Fascinating. Just wonderful. Yeah. Yeah.

Respondent: That was – and you expected that, you know? You knew that Toronto was within its boundaries, and I never went to **[0:09:00]** Scarborough or Etobicoke, but I'm guessing that they did the same thing. You know, you would go to the west or east boundary of Toronto, and then you'd have to pay a second fare to get into Scarborough or Etobicoke. I'm guessing.

Interviewer: Yeah. Once we're talking about transportation, I'm wondering, do you remember what other transportation existed in this neighbourhood? You talked about going along Spadina.

Respondent: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: You talk about going north along Bathurst. What was there going east, west? **[0:09:30]** Buses, streetcars.

Respondent: Well, there's the Bloor subway on Bloor, which, you know, for me and my friends was your summer air conditioner. [Laughter] We would ride back and forth between – I think Kipling was one stop, and I can't remember the east, but it was air conditioned, so we'd sit there. We weren't going anywhere. [Laughter] And for like three or four hours, we would stay out of the heat on the subway.

Interviewer: Oh. And entertain each other.

- Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah. You know? And you'd learn the subway stops along the way, **[0:10:00]** and without a destination. You would just, you know, as my parents would call it, **[indiscernible 0:10:05]**. You know...
- Interviewer:** Meaning – yeah, right.
- Respondent:** So it was our air conditioner. So there was the Bloor subway, was the big east, west carrier.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** The Harbord streetcar turned at Spadina. It went around what was called the Connaught Laboratories at that time where they discovered...
- Interviewer:** At Spadina.
- Respondent:** ...insulin.
- Interviewer:** Oh my god.
- Respondent:** And that's – so Spadina **[0:10:30]** was called Spadina Avenue at Harbord, but where it went around the laboratory, it sort of curved a little bit. You've probably driven around that.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** And that becomes Spadina Crescent, and where it straightens out, it's back to Spadina Avenue again. So they would go down to, I guess, Dundas or Queen, and I don't know where – you know, we never went that far in my lifetime. [Laughter] And those I remember.
- Interviewer:** **[0:11:00]** But there were streetcar tracks on Harbord, that means.
- Respondent:** There were streetcar tracks on Harbord, sure. The streetcar, if we went west, you know, if you went east, you turned down Spadina and went down and around the laboratories. If you went west, it went as far as Ossington, then the streetcar would turn right at

Ossington and go up to Bloor and turn left, and go along Bloor to Dovercourt, and turn up Dovercourt.

Interviewer: Up meaning north [0:11:30] or south?

Respondent: Up is always north.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So it would turn north on Dovercourt and go up, I think, and I only went again – because I would be going to a Hebrew school at that time, I never went north of the school. So it would be – I would go about two or three blocks north of Bloor and get off, and again, I suspect it must have gone to Davenport or something like – so the one streetcar, you know, it went [0:12:00] along the width of Harbord, north on Ossington to Bloor, and then would go west on Bloor to Dovercourt, and then north on Dover – you know, it was a bit of an erratic...

Interviewer: Yeah, it was.

Respondent: Huge.

Interviewer: But for people who were going there, that would have been very convenient.

Respondent: For me it was great because it went right in front of my school.

Interviewer: There was a cheder there.

Respondent: There was a cheder there. A recycled Canada Legion became a cheder.

Interviewer: Became a cheder. And a cheder for our tape, it's a...

Respondent: Parochial...

Interviewer: [0:12:30] Afternoon school.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Right, right. Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. So that was the Harbord streetcars, and that was your main east-west carrier. Bloor Street was the Bloor subway. Bathurst had a streetcar that went north and south. I mentioned the loop at St. Clair, and then south as far as – went right onto the CNE grounds.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: It would go down south on Bathurst to Fleet Street and turn west on **[0:13:00]** Fleet Street, and also go around a bit of a curve, and go right into the CNE grounds, drop the customers off – because that's the only people that ever took that streetcar in the summertime – and then loop around and come back up Bathurst again.

Interviewer: So as much as you walked a lot, the public transportation was also excellent.

Respondent: It was great, you know?

Interviewer: And still.

Respondent: Toronto wasn't the Toronto of today. You know, it was basically inner-city Toronto, so the TTC that we had served, **[0:13:30]** you know, the people very well. I think once we spread out and became the GTA, then it became difficult to reach where you were going and the cars took over.

Interviewer: Right. And talking about cars, what was the situation? You said your family did not have a car.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: What was the situation with other families? Cars – who had them? Who didn't?

Respondent: I think, and again I'm not sure, **[0:14:00]** the neighbours who had been in Toronto for a long time, born here or had lived here for twenty years or so – because we had all kinds of different cultured

families. We had Jamaican families, Portuguese families, Italian families, Jewish families, Scottish families, you know, every flavour that there was.

Interviewer: So it was a very mixed neighbourhood, you're saying.

Respondent: Very mixed. Very mixed neighbourhood. [0:14:30] And that showed again in the classroom. Right? The kids you'd go to school with were all, you know, from all cultures. Wakes of life too.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: So I think the people that were here for a while, you know, ten years, twenty years, they gravitated to cars. My parents had been in the country maybe five or ten years by the time I was ten years old, and my father had never driven a car. [0:15:00] So it wasn't a question of buying a car. So the people that had cars parked on the street. You know, our street – I don't know about all the different streets in the Annex, but we had a laneway on one side, and no laneway on the other. My house had no laneway, so there was nowhere to park a car. And so for those folks that did not have [0:15:30] a parking pad or a garage parked on the street. And I think there were no limitations. I never saw parking tickets on any cars, but what did happen was because of all the parked cars, our Major Street was parked from Bloor all the way to Harbord, solid, right? So parking spots, I guess, were a bit of a commodity. And kids, you know, don't understand, you know, the visibility of drivers, [0:16:00] so lots of kids – you know, the big game was chase someone. Run and chase. So kids would run, run, run, run, run, and then you know, dart out between parked cars, and you know, every hour you'd hear the screech of brakes. And you know, when the screech happened, every mother on the street ran out of the house to see if her kid was okay, and every now and then there was a kid under a car.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: So that was, you know, [0:16:30] you know, our normal every day.

Interviewer: The street was your playground, is what you're saying.

- Respondent:** It was our playground and there was a real inundation of safety messages from teachers, and community people, and the big rule that, you know, they tried to ingrain on us was "Do not run out from between parked cars." You know, that – you know, in the excitement of playing tag, you run where you can. **[0:17:00]** So that would happen a lot.
- Interviewer:** There was some...
- Respondent:** I think that's why now you have the street-calming in the Annex. You've turned the streets halfway north, halfway south.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** So they're no longer throughways. In those days, you didn't have that street-calming.
- Interviewer:** So that – so you left in 1963 and that wasn't...
- Respondent:** '66.
- Interviewer:** '66. And that didn't exist yet.
- Respondent:** That did not exist. Major Street was southbound from Bloor all the way to College, you know, so it was a throughway.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** And every street – **[0:17:30]** Brunswick is like that, Borden was like that. Every street was one-way, all the way. So cars would take a shortcut from Bathurst or whatever...
- Interviewer:** And slide down.
- Respondent:** And I think the older drivers knew there were kids, but you know, there are lots of sixteen-, seventeen-year-old drivers and when you're young, you drive fast, and accidents would happen.

- Interviewer:** Well this person that I described to you who got the Trillium Foundation fund money for our – [0:18:00] for this study, he's the one who worked very hard to get the streets changed so people couldn't do what they did.
- Respondent:** Oh, is that right?
- Interviewer:** Very – yeah. His name is Richard Gilbert, and he's the one who made that happen in this neighbourhood.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah, I think that changed everything.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Oh yeah. Much safer. And I know a lot of families – I didn't know when it had happened, but it certainly happened after 1956, clearly. '66, I mean.
- Respondent:** I think it happened very close to the time that I left.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** It was '66 or '67 or '68, [0:18:30] but I know when I started driving at the age of sixteen, and I would come back into the Annex, I would say like, "What the hell is this?" [Laughter] There were these barricades and they'd go halfway down the street and you couldn't get through, so it was very different.
- Interviewer:** And there were fewer cars, but there were still enough cars because you had no lane. The cars would be...
- Respondent:** Yeah. They were parked...
- Interviewer:**up against each other.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah. All the way down the street, so.
- Interviewer:** I'm coming back to something else that you [0:19:00] touched on, but I want to come back to it. Who made up the neighbourhood? You just touched on it very briefly. Who made up the classrooms? Who made up the neighbourhood? And what kind of percentages existed of such a variety of people living here?

- Respondent:** There was – when I was very young, there was a good percentage of Jewish families in the Annex. I think again because the synagogues [0:19:30] were a community centre, and it attracted, you know – it was all European Jewry. It wasn't the kind of Jewry we have today. It was at that time, you know, post-Holocaust Jews from Europe, and Spadina was the street where they worked. Spadina was textiles and clothing fabrication, and these were the skills that the Jews brought [0:20:00] from Europe, so if you worked on Spadina, you lived in the Annex.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** There was no Chinatown. There were very, very elementary Chinatown, not like today.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** So the flavour of Spadina and Dundas was Jewish, not Chinese, and the Jews lived in the Annex, and like my father, would walk to work. Kensington Market was also a very big Jewish centre, but [0:20:30] it was multicultural. One of the fascinating things about Kensington I remember was when we would go and it would be a fruit dealer. He would turn to one person and, you know, say the plums are fifty cents in English, turn to somebody else and say the oranges are whatever in Italian.
- Interviewer:** Oh. [Laughs]
- Respondent:** Turn to another person and speak Portuguese.
- Interviewer:** Oh my gosh.
- Respondent:** Same guy. [Laughter] And I would say to my father, you know, "How does a Jewish guy learn all those languages," and my father would say, "He's not [0:21:00] Jewish," yet the man would speak Yiddish. [Laughter] So that was so interesting. That was the culture. You know, you wanted to do business, you learned everybody else's language.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And it was fascinating to – and that really happened on Kensington. And we had a Dominion supermarket, which today is Metro supermarket. Right near our house. And it was unknown to us. We never went to [0:21:30] the supermarket. We would walk ten times the distance to go to Kensington and my parents, I still remember, had a leather shopping bag. I guess they preceding the recycling, you know...

Interviewer: I bet. Yeah.

Respondent: So they didn't use the plastic or at that time, paper, paper bags. We had a leather shopping bag, and for five dollars they would fill it up with cheese, and fruit, and breads, and everything, and then it was so heavy they couldn't carry it. [Laughter] [0:22:00] So one parent carried one handle, the other carried the other handle, and two people carried the bag back home. So that was...

Interviewer: Your description is so clear, and it's such a wonderful picture. I mean I see this picture. I wish I had a picture of them doing it, but it's – Kensington Market then was the main place where your parents bought food.

Respondent: It was, and the Markets were [0:22:30] all catered very much to the Jewish population. The signage in the windows was bilingual, English and Yiddish.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: You know, like French was unheard of. They had Jewish bakeries, they had Jewish creameries, so it's not to say that they didn't have other cultures there, but the heavy end of the food stores, you know, catered to the Jewish [0:23:00] population. We bought live chickens. You know, I would go to my mother and she would pick a chicken, and they would slaughter it in front of us, you know, and I would watch all this, and then after they slaughtered the chicken, my mother would take it to a table where there was a Bunsen burner, and she would burn off the feather quills from the skin.

- Interviewer:** So she would do it right there while she was still in the Market.
- Respondent:** While she was there. And you know, then they weighed the chicken, and wrapped it, and we brought home a cleaned chicken, but it was living [0:23:30] five minutes before we wrapped it up.
- Interviewer:** But she actually plucked all those feathers, or Bunsen burned them.
- Respondent:** She plucked them and then Bunsen burned them. They had a – I forget what you call it, but...
- Interviewer:** Shoichet.
- Respondent:** ...I was going to say a – shoichet.
- Interviewer:** Shoichet.
- Respondent:** So he did the slaughtering.
- Interviewer:** Oh, so it was a kosher...
- Respondent:** And then he handed over the bird, and then my mother would clean it, and pay for it, and wrap it up, and that's how we took it home.
- Interviewer:** Oh my god.
- Respondent:** It's not like today.
- Interviewer:** It was fresh. [Laughs]
- Respondent:** It was. I still remember they had [0:24:00] these big wooden cages with – just stuffed with chickens. You know, they couldn't move in those cages. Yeah. Today, they would not be politically correct, but in those days, that's how it was. Yeah. And of course, there was the smell of chickens in that. You'd be stepping on feathers when you walked through the store, and feathers, and sawdust, and you know, it was a very sensory experience.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] That's putting it so nicely. [Laughter] [0:24:30] Boy, has Kensington...

Respondent: And fish came the same way, you know? We picked live fish. I guess if you go to a Chinese grocery today, you'll see the big aquariums and you point to the fish that you want, and then they take care of it and prepare it for you. We did the same thing in those days, you know? You would pick a live fish, and if they – if you told them to, they would kill it and cut it up for you, otherwise [0:25:00] you brought home a live fish, and when you were ready for it, they knew who did the cutting.

Interviewer: So it would be squiggling around in a bag?

Respondent: It would be squiggling around and sometimes my parents, you know, didn't need it until the next day. They would actually fill up the bathtub with cold water [laughter] and we'd have a pet fish for a day. [Laughter] Right? So you kept it alive because I guess it was cheaper than a refrigerator.

Interviewer: Oh, that is too funny.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So it would be swimming around...

Respondent: In the bathtub.

Interviewer: ...and you didn't have a bath that night.

Respondent: You did not, [0:25:30] you did not want to bathe with the fish. [Laughter] You know, it would be turned into a scene from "The Godfather" or something, so.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: So it was a very different world. You know, technology wasn't, you know, as prevalent as today. You know, you didn't have the refrigeration as – tiny, tiny little refrigerator, and – although we did have a big TV. I remember our first TV was a twenty-six-inch television.

- Interviewer:** And you said you bought that in 1950?
- Respondent:** Something like that.
- Interviewer:** '58 or something, if I remember.
- Respondent:** 1950 – you know, [0:26:00] I can tell you the shows that I watched. I don't know the year exactly that the TV landed in our house.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** But it was one of those, you know, with the bunny ears...
- Interviewer:** Oh yes.
- Respondent:** ...so when you tried to get a channel, if somebody touched it and the reception was okay, you'd go, "That's perfect. Stay there." [Laughter] And otherwise you got squiggly – you know, it's quite different from the cable generation today.
- Interviewer:** Cable generation, and now the flat screen, and oh.
- Respondent:** And the whole thing. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Right. Right.
- Respondent:** Yeah. But I just want to add, you know, [0:26:30] when you were talking about television, my friend, George, put it very succinctly when he said, "You know, when I was a kid," he said, "we had three channels, and there was always something to watch on those three channels. Today, we have seven hundred channels and there's nothing to watch." [Laughter] Right? And I agree with that.
- Interviewer:** Where was the television in your house?
- Respondent:** We had what you – I guess you could call it a living room, but it also had my parents' [0:27:00] bed. It was a bed with a couch, and an armchair, and a television. So in the daytime, we sat on the couch and watched TV, and at night-time, my parents slept in the bed.

Interviewer: Okay. And okay, let's talk about who else lived there. That was on the first floor.

Respondent: That was on the first floor.

Interviewer: And you and your brother also slept on the first floor.

Respondent: And we rented the second floor...

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: ...and we lived on the first floor, so I [0:27:30] didn't know at the time, but I think what the setup was was if you look at the layout of a house today, you know, the kitchen is the kitchen, and we had a little tiny washroom, which I think, you know, years later – there was a little nook of space, and they put the plumbing in, and that became the downstairs washroom. It was a very tiny washroom.

Interviewer: Just a two-piece? Or did it have...

Respondent: It had a bathtub.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So it was a three-piece. But it [0:28:00] was triangular. Like at one end it was nothing, and then it broadened, and then it was a plywood door, so it looked like a throw-in kind of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well it probably was because most of these homes – this one, they did not start off with a bathroom on this floor.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: So you would have been sharing the bathroom with the people upstairs, so your parents wanted your family to have its own bathroom, I assume, from what you're describing.

Respondent: I think you're right.

Interviewer: And on the second floor?

- Respondent:** And so anyhow, I just want to [0:28:30] finish up on the first floor. So based on what I now know about houses, I think my parents' bedroom doubled, you know, with the living room, as I mentioned. Our bedroom – my brother's and my bedroom – are what you would call a dining room.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** It was right next to the kitchen, so what else would it be?
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** So it had, you know, two lockable doors, one to a hallway and one to the kitchen, and you know, so we slept in a [0:29:00] dining room. My parents slept in a living room. Then upstairs where you had the proper bedrooms it was rented, so my parents had income from the house.
- Interviewer:** So was it rented to individuals, or was there a family there?
- Respondent:** Generally couples. It would be childless couples. I think a couple of times there were other kids in the house, but generally it would be young couples.
- Interviewer:** And there was a second kitchen, I assume.
- Respondent:** Oh, there was.
- Interviewer:** So they had a kitchen and the bathroom that had come with the house.
- Respondent:** Yeah. And the second kitchen actually was [0:29:30] – I think it was something like a Florida room or a sunroom that then had been retrofitted with kitchen plumbing, so it was right on top of the downstairs kitchen, so I guess the plumbing was easy. But I think originally it would have – because it had very, very big glass windows, so I think once upon a time, people sat there and enjoyed the backyard and the sun.

- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** But by the time I lived there, that was the second kitchen, and [0:30:00] the proper washroom was up there too.
- Interviewer:** Right. That's how that's – was there a third floor?
- Respondent:** And there was an attic. There was a third floor attic, and that was kind of fun for us because, you know, there was a bit of a landing at the top of the stairs to the attic, and there was a window out to the roof. So that became kind of like a backyard patio area.
- Interviewer:** So you went outside from the third floor.
- Respondent:** We went out to the flat roof and we, you know, had chaise lounges [0:30:30] out there.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** We sat and got, you know, suntans.
- Interviewer:** Oh, so your family used that in a very nice way.
- Respondent:** It was very enjoyable, yes.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Did the second-floor people use that also?
- Respondent:** No, they didn't. That was...
- Interviewer:** So you walked through the second floor to go up there. That's one of your family...
- Respondent:** Yeah. People would, you know, kind of intercept each other's spaces. The second floor people would come through the main floor to get to the stairway, as they would have to in your house.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** And [0:31:00] we would walk through their space to get up to the attic, you know? You'd say, "Hi, how are you doing?" And...

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now was there anything behind the house? Like a little garden, or?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. We had a backyard. We had quite a small backyard.

Interviewer: How was it used?

Respondent: And it was used mostly as a play area by myself and my brother, so we used to play hockey in the backyard until we broke the kitchen window.

Interviewer: [Laughs] [0:31:30] Suddenly stopped.

Respondent: Yeah. And then we, you know, found other places to play.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. So there was no garden back there. Vegetables or...

Respondent: No, not for eating. We didn't do that.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Respondent: But there were some trees and bushes and things like that.

Interviewer: That property was used very well and intensely...

Respondent: Oh, it was.

Interviewer: ...including the third floor.

Respondent: It was. We had an unfinished basement, and today, you know, people would say [0:32:00] it's a throw – you would keep like boxes and luggage down there, but my dad being a tailor, he put a sewing machine down there, and he did work for people in the community. People would come in to have alterations to their pants or dresses, and that was his place of work downstairs.

Interviewer: So he had a job that he went to, but then he did this for extra income.

Respondent: For extra income. Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Talking about that, do you know of – we often call that a cottage industry, people working from their home. [0:32:30] Your father had a job somewhere else, and then he did extra work for people in the neighbourhood. Do you know of other people who worked – who had businesses at home?

Respondent: Not really. I think it was fairly unique. Most people came home and it was downtime. It was time to relax. There was an older man on this street who had been a cabdriver, so if he needed to ever take a taxi, instead of calling a cab, my father [0:33:00] would call him and they would arrange a price, and he would drive us. So it was kind of like a retired cabdriver who made a few extra bucks.

Interviewer: Yeah. Mm-hm.

Respondent: But otherwise, I think most people, by the time they came home, it was family time. I don't know of cottage industries in the house happening at that time.

Interviewer: And what about the women? Did any of the other – did any of the mothers work, as far as you knew?

Respondent: Pretty close to none.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: You know, all the mothers were mothers. [0:33:30] Not many were educated, and it was basically one-income families. I think my house was fairly routine as far as you had the income of the father, some rental income, and that's what made due for the month.

Interviewer: Yeah. I think that you're right for the most part, that a lot of these people – families felt that it [0:34:00] would be shameful for the wife to work. The men would feel that they weren't supporting their families. And of course, there was much more work. We didn't have all this – washing machines weren't as easy to work with, and...

Respondent: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: ...as they would be now.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. There was something to do. But talking about women working, what I do remember was that the single women did work. You know, when you got married you stopped working, but it's not like our [0:34:30] industry had no women working. All of the single women went off to work in the morning, so that was – a lot of – and I say that because I know that there are a lot of seamstresses associated with my father's work. My father's job was working in a – kind of like a tailoring shop, and they would make coats, and jackets. And it was all men. There were no women there except for the bookkeeper.

Interviewer: [0:35:00] Mm-hm.

Respondent: But they also had dress shops where the seamstresses worked, and there were no men there. It was all women working, and they were generally single women.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: So they were working, but once you got married, you had other things to do.

Interviewer: Right, right. Did you use the JCC, which was called the Y at that time?

Respondent: Yeah. Extensively. In fact, the original – we call it the YMHA.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It used to differentiate from the [0:35:30] Christian Y.

- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** So Young Men's Hebrew Association. The original YMHA was Brunswick and College.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And it was a tiny little place with a swimming pool. That eventually...
- Interviewer:** A tiny swimming pool? Or was it a decent-sized...
- Respondent:** To me it looked big, but it might have been small.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** And right next to it was my original parochial school, the Brunswick Talmud Torah. I don't know if you've heard about...
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** ...about that place. But that was a real **[0:36:00]** community centre because everyone's children went there for Hebrew training because you needed to be able to read and write, so one day you could, you know, do your bar mitzvah and maybe more, and carry on, you know, a Jewish life as an adult. So the YMHA was right next to it, but it was unused. They had a janitor there, and nobody – it was closed, but it – I think it belonged now to the Brunswick Talmud Torah, but nobody swam there, nobody used it, you know? So we got to know the janitor **[0:36:30]** and, you know, ran around the place a little bit. But the YMHA migrated to Spadina and Bloor.
- Interviewer:** That was sixty years ago. Yeah.
- Respondent:** So that's what everybody – but the original was Brunswick and College.
- Interviewer:** Yes.

Respondent: And once it migrated to Spadina and Bloor, again it was called the YMHA, and that was the community hub for the young people. That's where they had a gym. Basketball was the cultural game of the Jewish kids in the city because we didn't play [0:37:00] hockey and we didn't play football, [laughter] so there was a lot of basketball, and then eventually it was opened to, you know, all ethnicities. And you know, people – you know, Ukrainian kids would come and play basketball, and black kids would come – actually, I shouldn't say that because it was a funny thing. In those days, the black kids played cricket and soccer. Black kids, believe it or not, were commonwealth culture.

Interviewer: [0:37:30] Mm-hm.

Respondent: The Jamaican kids had British values and sports, so they'd come to Canada and they wouldn't know anything about basketball because that was an American sport, and the black kids would play soccer, and they'd play cricket, but no basketball. Amazing. You know, believe it or not.

Interviewer: But it's interesting that you know why, because the heritage from which they had come.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. They played what they played on the island, and on the island, basketball was unheard of, and they'd come here and [0:38:00] in our community, basketball was very much a Jewish sport. [Laughter] And in 19- – I think it was 1963 and 1964, Harbord Collegiate won back-to-back city basketball championships with basically all-Jewish teams.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: So if you can believe it, once upon a time, the Jewish kids dominated basketball in the city. And then once it sort of [0:38:30] – the black kids learned about basketball, and I was – in my community, we would go to Central Tech where they had – it was the only school with outdoor baskets. There were no outdoor basketball...

Interviewer: Hoops...

Respondent: Hoops.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So the black kids started to gravitate to basketball, and I would be playing with them because I enjoyed basketball myself. And then in the years following, there's the basketball explosion, and then the black – it became a cultural thing for black kids to play [0:39:00] basketball. But once upon a time, you know, it was all white kids playing basketball in the city.

Interviewer: And in this neighbourhood, all white Jewish kids.

Respondent: In this neighbourhood. Yeah.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. There was actually quite a cultural separation as schools went. When I was in elementary school, you know, we had a combination of, you know, as I said, Portuguese kids, WASP kids, [0:39:30] black kids, Chinese kids, Jewish kids, and once you made it to high school, it seemed like all the Jewish kids went off to Harbord Collegiate, and all the non-Jewish kids went off to Central Tech, so there was kind of a separation there. So Harbord really was dominated by Jewish kids, you know, in those days. You know, maybe eighty percent of Harbord Collegiate was Jewish, as today I understand, it's mostly Chinese [0:40:00] now. So I think, you know, if you ever do a demographic study of the schools, I think you'd find...

Interviewer: It would be interesting. Yeah.

Respondent: You know? Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you start at Harbord, or is that when you moved away?

- Respondent:** I dreamed of starting at Harbord, but my parents...
- Interviewer:** Oh. That's when you moved.
- Respondent:** ...supplanted that idea. Yeah. So I wound up going to another high school. My brother went to Harbord for two years, and I couldn't wait to get there.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** And when I was in grade eight, I moved away, and in grade nine I would have gone to **[0:40:30]** Harbord. So you know, I dreamed of it, but I never did go there.
- Interviewer:** But what you're saying is that's where you would have gone had your family not moved.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah. I visited Harbord because my brother was on the basketball team, so when he'd play, I'd run from my school to Harbord to see him play, so I knew the school, but I never attended.
- Interviewer:** So all your years of going to school for elementary level, that was always at Hebrew day school?
- Respondent:** **[0:41:00]** At elementary level, I went to Lansdowne public school.
- Interviewer:** Oh, you did.
- Respondent:** And at four o'clock or four-thirty, I would move on to the Hebrew parochial school.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** So I basically was in school from nine in the morning until six at night, and get home something like seven.
- Interviewer:** It's a long day.
- Respondent:** And we just thought that was a normal day. Nobody complained.

Interviewer: Any comments about Lansdowne school?

Respondent: The best school ever.

Interviewer: Oh. Whoa.

Respondent: Amazing school. It was [0:41:30] basically two schools. There was an old building that was about a hundred and twenty years old, and oh, I don't know. A hundred and ten years old. And in 1960, that was torn down and they built new Lansdowne, and if you've ever driven by the school...

Interviewer: For sure.

Respondent: ...considering that it was built in 1960, it's a really futuristic school.

Interviewer: It is.

Respondent: It's round.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: The hallways are round. And I've never – I grew up to [0:42:00] become a teacher, and before I had a contract, I was a supply teacher. And I've probably worked in a hundred schools in my – I've seen all kinds of elementary schools, high schools, all kinds of schools, and I've never seen another school like Lansdowne, so I think, you know, today the kids who get to go to Lansdowne are like the luckiest kids in the city. It had all kinds of specialty rooms. And this is for, you know, grade threes, grade fours, grade fives. You could take [0:42:30] industrial arts, you know? There are no other schools in the city that I know of where kids can do that. Girls can take home economics. They have these rooms all setup. So this really was, you know, a 1960s school that had the technology of circa 2000. It was an amazing place. A specialty music room with instruments. Kids don't get that, you know? I don't know how the funding is today and if they still have all those wonderful things, but [0:43:00] I was there the day they cut the ribbon to open the doors. And we had brand new equipment and, you know, brand new

teachers, and brand new everything, and it was just a really stimulating place to be. A wonderful school.

Interviewer: I – you know, I didn't know all of this about it. And to think now that 1960 it's not new anymore...

Respondent: No, no.

Interviewer: ...but they were so forward-thinking.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. I thought every school built after [0:43:30] Lansdowne would emulate that. It was a very successful idea. It was a pleasure, I think, to be there, and probably a bigger pleasure to teach there. And no other schools like it were built again, you know? And I don't understand why not, but I guess I'm just fortunate that I got to go there.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Where did you go immediately after Lansdowne?

Respondent: Right after Lansdowne, as I say, my parents moved to north Toronto.

Interviewer: Oh, so that's when you went up north. I see.

Respondent: Yeah. And then I went to a junior high and a high school.

Interviewer: Yeah. [0:44:00] Yeah. Yeah.

Respondent: But that's another story, right?

Interviewer: Yeah. It is. Let me see. The children who lived in this neighbourhood – oh, you left. I was wondering if you know about the kind of education that they went onto beyond, but you left at thirteen, so.

Respondent: Yeah. I left at thirteen. I didn't stay in touch with a lot of the kids that I went with. The [0:44:30] that I retained touch with I know went on to get bachelor's and master's degrees in university.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: But that's a very small sample. That's probably four or five kids. One I bumped into dropped out of high school, but I had a summer job at Chrysler and I bumped into him, and he was working his way up at Chrysler and he became the union foreman, so he...

Interviewer: So he did well.

Respondent: ...did fine.

Interviewer: [0:45:00] So he didn't do it through the academic route, but he was an intelligent person.

Respondent: He did. And another of my neighbours quit. He went to Central Tech and he got – I can't remember if it was a grade nine or a grade ten diploma, and he quit. And at the age of sixteen or seventeen, he went to work for a car dealership and a month later, he's got a convertible Pontiac parked in front of his house [laughter] at seventeen years old. A year later, [0:45:30] he's got a beautiful blonde girlfriend, and a year later, he's got a baby. So by nineteen – and I think he had a good life too, but you know, in those days, if you could, you know, quit school and get yourself a decent job, people considered that to be a success. Today, quitting school is like a dirty word.

Interviewer: Yeah. But he kind of fast-tracked growing up.

Respondent: He did. You know, he was quite different from the rest of us.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. So that's the few I can tell you about.

Interviewer: Well, [0:46:00] but what you're telling me is all the ones you remember either got a good education, or they did well...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...without a university education.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. I think – and another one that I ran into years later was working for the post office was another high school drop-out.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: But he got a job with the post office and was – I ran into him when he was about forty-five years old. He was a very happy guy.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: So I think our [0:46:30] neighbourhood did pretty well. I think we had pretty positive values because most of the kids were – as I said, Lansdowne was a great school, so we had, you know, good educational values and, you know, although I can't speak for, you know, all the kids in that building, I think most people went on to some kind of post-secondary education.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Yeah. Well I certainly – I think for the most part, they learned good working habits from their parents because the fathers worked hard [0:47:00] and the mothers ran the homes...

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: ...without lots of assistance, so they saw both their parents working.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. You talked about your backyard – that's where you played until you broke a big window. [Laughter] What were the other backyards like? And then also talk to me, please, about the front porches, the verandahs. How were those used?

Respondent: Well the other backyards were similar to mine. [0:47:30] We had fairly low fences, so you could, you know, sort of shout to your neighbours two or three houses down, and everybody had sort of what I thought – excuse me – were long, rectangular backyards, but I'm a bigger person now and I think they were not so long, you know? But they were rectangular. And everybody pretty much used them as, I [0:48:00] think, play areas for their kids. You know, they

were fenced play areas. For mothers who thought about it, you know, the street was a fairly dangerous place because of the cars that I mentioned before, so you know, I think maybe the more educated mothers would herd their kids into the backyard and have a little nursery, kindergarten area.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And it was safe.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: What I do remember [0:48:30] are the dogs, you know? There would be dogs that were not so friendly, you know, jumping around back. If you jumped into somebody's backyard, you took a chance of running into a dog, and you know, we had right next door to my house, a very fierce dog that used to really fight me when I was, you know, eight or nine because I sort of peek over the fence to see what's happening, and he would jump up. He could get his head over the top of the fence. [0:49:00] So I do remember one of the dangers of, you know – and kids do like to jump fences. The dangers of going into somebody else's backyard was running into dogs. I don't know if they were, you know, taking care of their territories, but they weren't...

Interviewer: That's what I was wondering.

Respondent: They weren't like pets. They weren't like nice little doggies.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. So they belonged – they had homes. They had homes with these families.

Respondent: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: But they weren't tame and lapdogs.

Respondent: No, no. They [0:49:30] were more street dogs. I think people may have treated their dogs differently in those days. I don't know. We never had a dog in my house, so I do remember there was a

neighbourhood full of dogs, that if they weren't at the end of a leash, you could get nervous.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. For good reason.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. If the master was with them, that's fine. But if you just ran into a dog on his own, you know, it was like...

Interviewer: So they weren't tame really.

Respondent: Not really.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Or at least not friendly.

Interviewer: [0:50:00] Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And you asked me also...

Interviewer: About the front.

Respondent: ...about the verandahs.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Verandahs, I think that was the magic of my childhood.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: I spent a lot of time out. We had a long, wooden verandah in front of my front door, which by the way, is no longer there. There is the set of steps. They've removed all the verandah. They've put a set of steps up to the front door, and where the [0:50:30] verandah used to be, there's now an air conditioner and a parking pad. What used to be at that house was a verandah, which was probably ten feet wide by six feet deep, and it had room for, like, a long sitting bench, and you would sit on a bench and talk to somebody, or watch people walk by your house, or basically just get out of your hot house because nobody had air conditioners, so you'd sit on

[0:51:00] your porch. And when you'd sit on the porch, you know, that's where, you know, I'd call that living organic because the whole world came together. You'd see your friends from school, you'd see the neighbours, the postman. We had milk trucks with horse – not trucks. Milk carts with horses where the milkman would come and bring milk to your house. The horse would walk on his own to the next house and stop.

Interviewer: [Laughs] The horse knew the route.

Respondent: **[0:51:30]** The horse knew the route. [Laughter] And the milkman would get on and take the next bottle, then the horse would walk on and he'd – and they were partners. The horse and the milkman were partners. And we would run out with apples, and the driver would let us feed apples to the horse.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent: You know, and you know, this is what you'd see from your porch. Everybody was community. People that worked there were community. Ice trucks, you know, people would come with ice trucks...

Interviewer: **[0:52:00]** For iceboxes.

Respondent: ...and I guess for iceboxes – and so little kids like me, like we'd all run to the ice truck and the guy would chip off chunks of ice and we'd – they'd be like popsicles.

Interviewer: Oh. Oh, he would give it to you.

Respondent: Yeah. We'd suck on the ice because, you know, it's hot in the summer, and he was also a horse and cart dealer. And the milk factory was Sealtest, which was at Spadina and Dupont where they now have the **[0:52:30]** townhouses beside Casa Loma.

Interviewer: Oh yes. Yeah.

- Respondent:** That whole area. All those townhouses. Every single last one of them was the Sealtest milk factory, which is where all those horse and carts came from. And...
- Interviewer:** So did they have barns up there?
- Respondent:** They must have. It wasn't accessible to – you couldn't just walk in.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** It was a big enclosed factory. And...
- Interviewer:** **[0:53:00]** So the milk was delivered?
- Respondent:** ...I had a point, but I – so milk was delivered to your house, and of course, the horses left little samples on the streets, so you had different kind of street-cleaning, you know, in those days. [Laughter] And when we played hockey and football in the streets, we had to make sure the streets were clean before we'd go out and play.
- Interviewer:** So would you have a broom to just get it to the side?
- Respondent:** We didn't, but you know, if the street was soiled, we just said, "We'll play somewhere else." We'd find another section of street, but **[0:53:30]** there was lots and lots of street-washing trucks. They'd come by and, you know, clean the streets...
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** ...because – and I guess this was part of what your taxes paid for in those days.
- Interviewer:** But you used the word "magic" when you talk about the verandah or the front porch. And that's what you talked about when we first started to speak to each other today. Just that – being part of this neighbourhood community, but it started from inside the hot houses where you might be sitting outside to avoid – **[0:54:00]** but the verandah was like the gel of the neighbourhood.

Respondent: Oh, it was. And everybody's family was sitting on their own porches, their own verandahs, and it was a real kind of family time too. Like now, nobody in my house ever sits on our verandah ever. And none of my neighbours do. We never see each other. Sometimes we sit in the backyard and we have the barbecue and a patio, but it's insulated. It's our [0:54:30] family and nobody else.

Interviewer: It's insulated and isolated.

Respondent: It's very insulated. [Laughter] And isolated. Very good.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And you're not part of the whole community as you are and were in the Annex, and I kind of – I miss that. And the family time I have now is supertime. I sit down with my wife and kids around a dinner table. Our verandahs were our family time. You know, we would also sit around [0:55:00] the table in the kitchen and eat supper, and get out of there as fast as we could. But on a verandah, we'd sit and we'd chat, we'd play cards. Summertime my father would come back with ice cream cones. We didn't have ice cream in our freezer. You know, we had a corner store. Now they have a sushi restaurant at Major and Harbord.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: That used to be what we called The Stationary. It was comic books, and newspapers, and ice cream, and [0:55:30] soda pop, so that was where we got – if you needed something, you didn't need to go to the grocery. You needed a loaf of bread, you needed a jug of milk, that's where we would go. And summertime, the fellow there – his name was – first there was a man called Julius, and then he sold the store to another man called Sam, and they were up to their elbows in those big ice cream containers, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: One after the other, people would, you know, the Market was all ice cream in [0:56:00] the summertime, so my dad would come back

with four different ice creams and we'd sit and eat ice cream on the porch. And you know, that was family time. And talk, and...

Interviewer: So that was – so that corner store was very much a part of your life. Your summer life.

Respondent: It was a real hub.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. And all the kids – you know, you'd run there for a nickel or a dime, you'd buy like a cold pop, and you know, and they had all kinds of different – I mean it was a real treasure chest for kids. You know, they had [0:56:30] all kinds of flavours, and all kinds of pop manufacturers that we no longer have, I think. The companies must have consolidated and now we have Pepsi and Coke, and a couple of others, but we had, you know, Black Cherry Pop, we had Lime Pop, and red ones, and green ones, and blue ones, and you know, kids just loved that. It was a wonderful place to...

Interviewer: So that was an extension of your verandah in some ways. [Laughs]

Respondent: It was. It was. It's kind of disconcerting now to see the – as a sushi restaurant because I can't [0:57:00] see it serving the community in the same way. And by the way, there were several of these kinds of stationeries all through the Annex. Every – almost – well, I shouldn't say every, but there were plenty of corner properties when you came to something like Borden and Ulster.

Interviewer: Corner stores.

Respondent: Corner stores. And we don't see them so much now.

Interviewer: Oh, many of those have been converted into homes.

Respondent: Oh they have.

Interviewer: You go along these streets, and you'll see a [0:57:30] home that was very clearly a corner store.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah. You'll see a lot of those. So if you take a walk after you leave, although it's too hot – yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. I parked on Ulster.

Interviewer: Yeah. But...

Respondent: So the whole neighbourhood was full of those corner stores and they served all the Annex.

Interviewer: And what I notice is you knew the names of the first owner and the second owner, and I'll bet they knew your name too. Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Again, community.

Interviewer: Yeah. Very, very much so. Yeah. Isn't that – it's so amazing that – **[0:58:00]** and you remember it with such fondness. It's still that similar kind of community, but those corner stores have changed. Either they're people living in those homes that were corner stores, or we have a lot of restaurants on – tell me about the other stores in the neighbourhood. So we had all these corner stores. What other stores?

Respondent: Well at that time, it was very much a middle-class neighbourhood. It wasn't **[0:58:30]** – I should give the context of the houses cost somewhere between ten and twenty thousand dollars.

Interviewer: And people put two or three families in there to pay for it.

Respondent: And two – sorry. Two or three families, or two or three generations.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: You had lots of, you know, grandparents, parents, and children dwellings in those days.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

- Respondent:** So the houses were full, you know? It was bustling. It was a bustling place. [0:59:00] The Harbord Bakery was very much the centre of the community. Everybody went to the Harbord Bakery to get your buns, to get your cakes. We knew the fellows that worked there. The deliverymen – they'd come out with these trays full of pastries on their way to somewhere, and he knew us, so he'd give us pastries and, you know, like we – you know, [0:59:30] we'd say, like you know, "Hi, David" to him, and you know, "What's going on?" And he says, "You've got to try this one." [Laughter] And he'd give away pastries, you know? And again, everybody knew each other.
- Interviewer:** So Harbord Bakery was part of the community.
- Respondent:** It was part of it. And right next to the Harbord Bakery, which now is a restaurant, an upscale restaurant, but it was at that time the Harbord Fish Market, and if you wanted any kind of deli-type fish, it was smoked fish, and [1:00:00] all kinds of delicacies, and it was an incredible pungent odour when you went.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** But not fish odour. It was smoke odour.
- Interviewer:** So they prepared the fish in there for these speciality kinds of fish.
- Respondent:** Yeah. They had...
- Interviewer:** Right on premises.
- Respondent:** They did. They had like the – you know, I guess it was a two-compartment building. In the back would be the factory where they did the smelly part, [laughter], and in the front, the final product was for sale. So they would have counters, and they would have [1:00:30] the smoked fish, and I can't even remember. My mother used to like all that stuff, so she would buy – I think sable was one kind of product they had, but it was all smoky.

Interviewer: So if you wanted to buy a fish that you were going to cook by yourself, like the fish that you sometimes had to share your bathtub with...

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: ...you couldn't buy it there?

Respondent: No, no.

Interviewer: Okay. So you went to the Market for that, and these were...

Respondent: Yeah. They had processed fish here.

Interviewer: Oh. Got it. Okay. You know, I had heard about [1:01:00] it, but I hadn't heard this about it.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. Although it is funny that you couldn't buy a fresh fish there, but that's not what they sold.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: And it was a bit like a – I think they had some cheese products too. They would sell cheese and fish, but it was hand-in-hand with the Harbord Bakery, right? So you'd get your buns and your bread, and then you needed something to eat with it, right?

Interviewer: Yeah. Fish and cheese.

Respondent: And you would go into the Fish Market.

Interviewer: Sounds divine.

Respondent: It was very nice.

Interviewer: What other stores in the neighbourhood?

- Respondent:** And at Robert [1:01:30] and Harbord, they had a big grocery store there. It's opposite – today there's a restaurant on the east side of Robert where I had the fortune to eat a few weeks ago, and I think the – on the west side of Robert and Harbord, it may be a house now. I don't know if it's...
- Interviewer:** So west side it's a corner store...
- Respondent:** Is it a corner store? Okay.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. And they sell lots of flowers [1:02:00] there.
- Respondent:** Okay. So that was a grocery, and it's where I saw my first – what's it called? What's aubergine in English? The French word is aubergine. It's a vegetable. Anyway, it's a big purple eggplant.
- Interviewer:** You know, I knew it too. It just wasn't coming.
- Respondent:** Saw my first eggplant at this place, and I guess it served the Italian community.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And I was like, "What the heck is [1:02:30] that thing?" So I would walk by that grocery on the way to school every morning, and I'd see these big purple vegetables that nobody ever seemed to buy, and I had no idea what they were until years and years later, you know, as an adult, you know, I was with somebody in a grocery and I said, "What are those?" You know? I said they used to have when I'd walk to – and they said, "Eggplant. Haven't you eaten eggplant?" Right? And ever since then, I've been a big eggplant eater, but for years, it was just this alien [1:03:00] vegetable.
- Interviewer:** It wasn't...
- Respondent:** My parents didn't know what it was.
- Interviewer:** So what were the vegetables that you had in your home as a child? Do you remember?

Respondent: Oh, you know, big on potatoes. You know, lots of potatoes and rice. My mother made chicken all the time. Fish, you know, she used to like to make fish steaks.

Interviewer: And vegetables? No eggplant.

Respondent: You know what? My mother was [1:03:30] what we called a [indiscernible 1:03:31].

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: You know, she gave her kids horrible habits, you know? She was big on potato chips. She used to talk about when she was having us as babies, when she was a pregnant mother, you know, the greatest food was this – they have this food in Canada, potato chips. [Laughter] You know, so she used to like her munchies, you know? And unfortunately...

Interviewer: So your potatoes were the main vegetable.

Respondent: Yeah. Big on potatoes. And you know, sandwiches, and mushroom soup was a favourite in my house, chicken noodle soup, of course, and you know, and things like that.

Interviewer: [1:04:00] Anything else about the stores that you feel would be worth mentioning?

Respondent: I think for entertainment, it's important to mention that also a big part of the kids' life in the Annex was to go for movies on the weekend, and on Bloor Street, now you have the Bloor Theatre where they have the documentaries, and I guess that's the only theatre now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: What they used to have were where Lee's [1:04:30] Palace is was a movie theatre. The Bloor Theatre was called the Midtown Theatre, and then across the street from Honest Ed's they had the Alhambra Theatre. So we had three theatres in two blocks of Bloor,

and there had to be something good playing in one of them, right? So every weekend for twenty-five cents, we'd see a double-bill.

Interviewer: A double-bill.

Respondent: A double-bill.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: So two movies for a quarter. [Laughter] And I think popcorn was five [1:05:00] cents or ten cents. And what was I thinking of? Yeah. And then of course in the summertime, the air conditioning was important again.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: You know, you'd see the movie and stay out of the heat. [Laughter] And then you'd be on the Bloor strip, you know? My life was the Harbord Street strip or the Bloor strip. So on the Bloor strip there was a whole different assortment of buildings. It was more grown-up. [1:05:30] Harbord Street, I think at that time, it was more family-oriented. Bloor Street, do you know where you'd have the taverns, you'd have the – you know, the more expensive restaurants, so it was a different kind of flavour. So when you'd go for the movies, you'd run into different people. You'd run into a lot more couples, you know? Young people out on dates. You'd run into drunks, you know. At the Brunswick Tavern, you know, I remember one guy saying to [1:06:00] me, you know, "Excuse me, I'm" – I guess he said something like half-blind or seeing impaired. "Could you help me across the street?" So I said, "Sure, no problem." I took his arm and I helped him walk across the street. So my friend told me, "The guy's not blind. The guy's drunk," you know? Like he needed, you know, somebody to help him from toppling over. So that was part of the Bloor Street crowd. It was a little different from Harbord Street. It was not as safe and [1:06:30] not as insulated, but more interesting and more exciting. I think that's the same today. I think Bloor is still, you know, the more exciting of the two streets, although, you know, I love Harbord, you know?

Interviewer: Well, and Harbord has opened up in terms of a lot of restaurants. Good restaurants. So in that way it's changed, but I guess there's more variation on Bloor Street, like the Brunswick is still there.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. And other clubs. Yeah.

Respondent: And to follow-up on Bloor Street, that was also [1:07:00] where we went in the summer to go swimming, you know? We would walk to Christie and they had Christie Pits, which had a beautiful swimming pool. It was, I think at that time, very close to being brand new. And I'm guessing, and I don't know for sure, that Canada did a lot of building after the World War II, and you know, near – when you're part of the Boomer generation growing up, there was a lot of [1:07:30] community facilities that were brand new. You know, so brand new swimming pool at Christie Pits, and I went, as I said, to Lansdowne, which was a brand new school in 1960. And we seemed to have a lot of money for building this kind of stuff back then as opposed to now.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: So you know, we would walk all the way to Christie Street, and it was an interesting strip. You know, when you'd walk there, you'd walk past the theatres, you'd walk past Honest Ed's, [1:08:00] then there would be a little bit of a strip of Portuguese restaurants and bakeries, and then at Christie you'd have Christie Pits. And Christie Pits was the biggest park in our neighbourhood for kids. So of course, the big thrill was the running down the hill at Christie because we didn't have any other places. And we would go tobogganing there in the wintertime because there were no other toboggan hills. So Christie Pits was, I think, an important part of the Bloor strip.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [1:08:30] Well, and I had asked you earlier about playgrounds. Talking about playgrounds, I just want to go back to that briefly. Back lanes, you didn't have one directly behind you, you said.

Respondent: No, but we had one across the street.

Interviewer: So that's what I want to ask you about. Did you use the lane ever? And if you did, in what ways?

Respondent: We did use the lane, but not extensively. It was, again, a little insulated section. There weren't too many cars, but there were cars.

Interviewer: [1:09:00] Uh-huh.

Respondent: You know, people would drive through the lane to put their cars basically into their backyards, you know? People had movable fences, fences on hinges, and the fence would open and you'd park your car in your backyard and go into your house. There were a few garages, but I think most people had the openable fences back then. And so there were still cars, but you know, kids are always looking for a place to play hockey or baseball, [1:09:30] and we did some of that in those back lanes. But it wasn't the best place to play. You know? It was – there was a lot of gravel, and basically access to people's backyards, or shortcuts to walk through.

Interviewer: When you say there was a lot of gravel, you're saying some of them were not paved?

Respondent: Lots were not paved. You know, I think the only paved one I can remember was [1:10:00] south of Harbord going down Robert Street. The Robert Street laneways...

Interviewer: Yeah. That's a narrow one. It's a really narrow one.

Respondent: But it's a nicely paved one. It was great for cars.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: But the laneway on Major where I lived, it was uneven, and it was bumpy, and it was gravel-y, and you know, if you played and you fell, you'd cut up your knees.

Interviewer: Right. Right.

Respondent: So it wasn't much of a play space for us.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [1:10:30] At that time you were, of course, a young child, but did you have any sense of what it was like being so close to the university?

Respondent: I did. I experienced the university indirectly because the neighbourhood was used by students to – for living in, for their residences. They would rent flats from houses and things. My most [1:11:00] direct experience was on Robert Street, which is not that far from the campus. University kids would park their cars because they could park for free. You didn't have to park in the U of T parking lot and pay. So when I would walk to Lansdowne, this Robert Street was full of parked cars that would – you know, I would be walking – excuse me – at a quarter to nine to get to school, and probably by eight o'clock, eight-thirty, the street [1:11:30] was full of university parked cars. And you know, I was interested in cars as a little kid, and the neat thing was in those days, on the backlights of the cars, on the brake lights, the year of the car was engraved, you know, at the factory. They'd put, you know – so a 1962 car would say '62. 1958 would say '58.

Interviewer: On the light?

Respondent: On the light.

Interviewer: Whoa. Okay.

Respondent: So each car was identified, [1:12:00] you know, for the year of manufacture. So it interested me for some reason, so I would go up to a car and go, "Oh, that's a '58 Pontiac Laurentian." And you know, and I'd see, "Oh, that's a '62 Chevrolet Biscayne." And I learned every car, so I learned – so university kids don't have a lot of money, so there were a lot of foreign compacts. So there were Ford Anglias from Britain, there were Vauxhalls, you know. You had a Vauxhall.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: [1:12:30] There were even Japanese cars. There were Datsuns, which are now Nissans, so I memorized, you know, all these models and the year that they were built, so I can't do it today, but in those days I could say, "That's a '64 Dodge Dart," or whatever it was. And so I, you know, got to learn the cars because the university kids parked the cars on my street, so I knew nothing about U of T, but I could tell you all about their cars.

Interviewer: [1:13:00] [Laughs] I'm so glad I asked you about that. [Laughter] But you know what they eventually did on Robert Street is they made it permit parking, and if you don't have a permit, if you park on the street, you get a nice big ticket. So and of course because the people living there couldn't park, you know, since the students came. They...

Respondent: Times changed.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right. But they knew how to get rid of them. While you were here, were you aware of people renovating their [1:13:30] homes at all?

Respondent: No. I was aware of people repairing their homes if there was damage. You know, usually, you know, things like shingles on the roof, and things like that, I – whenever I visited a house, it was almost always in original condition. Never, never saw renovations.

Interviewer: And many people living in each space.

Respondent: And yeah. You would figure out how to compartmentalize and accommodate [1:14:00] your needs, but you never, never saw, you know, new drywall coming in, or things like that. And they were plaster walls anyway.

Interviewer: And what about the furnaces? Did people make changes to furnaces? What kind of heating did your family use?

Respondent: We had oil, oil heating, but we had a coal bin. We still, you know...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: ...under our front verandah, there had been some access, you know? We had [1:14:30] openable windows for the basement, and there was a coal bin, you know? So not long before I lived there. So we were there in '53. Probably in the '40s they were burning coal in that house.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. But it had already transformed from...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...the coal to – yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. And we had radiators for heat around the house.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. I have one more question, and you might have more that you want to talk about, but do you remember it being – in terms of safety, [1:15:00] what do you recall about whether it was a safe neighbourhood or problems?

Respondent: I guess what I should – how I should answer that is I spent my summers – I never went to camp. My parents didn't know anything about sending kids to camps, you know, so the city was my camp. So in the summertime, I would have breakfast in my house. I'd say goodbye to my mom, I'd get on my bicycle, five o'clock I'd come home for supper. [1:15:30] [Laughter] You know? The city was not dangerous. You know, we – today we have a little slogan for our kids. You know, I'm very paranoid – I was very paranoid when my kids were young and we said things like, "Stranger danger." You know, you never take anything from a stranger. "Don't talk to strangers." You worry about – you know? We didn't hear any of that stuff. We never heard about any problems, you know? We were very accessible in [1:16:00] terms of if you needed help someplace, like one time I wound up as a young kid, I got turned around in Queen's Park, and I zigged instead of zagged and I wound up on Yonge Street instead of back in the Annex, and all of a sudden in this busy place, and people walking all over the place, and I had no reluctance to go up to the first big person I saw and said, "I'm trying to get to Spadina. Can you tell me?" And people were helpful. [1:16:30] So I think Toronto was a very safe place back then, and what I attribute that to is that that feeling of

community. You know, that village feeling. And there was not a lot of anonymity as there is today, you know? Like when you're in a group, you don't know anybody else, and in those days you kind of felt like you were part of everybody else. And if you really weren't, you still felt like you were. It was okay, but [1:17:00] people were more friendly and helpful than they would be dangerous. But I think today we worry a lot more about the strangers and a lot of, you know, stuff has happened in the last twenty years, and I think we worry a lot more about our young kids than we did in those days. But you know, when I think about what I did, I would never have let my kids do it.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Yeah.

Respondent: But to just take off and, you know, hang out in the city and, you know, ride around and, you know, meet people, and [1:17:30] see people, and drive here – I mean I used to ride my bicycle, crappy little bicycle, you know, like a one-speed standard, you know, from, you know, Casa Loma down to Dundas, and you know, up and down Beverley, you know, through the campus. You know? They had a library that was part of the U of T campus called the Boys and Girls House. It's still at St. George and College.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: I would go there a lot. I would go [1:18:00] there and get six, seven book at a time.

Interviewer: I have a question. Did they have air conditioning there?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Oh. So that wasn't one of your places like the theatres and the subway. [Laughs]

Respondent: Not a place to cool. Not a place to cool down. And they had at that time the main Toronto library was at St. George and College, the corner. I think it's some kind of U of T plaza now. They sell computers and – I think. I don't know it well, but that used to be the main library, which is now at Yonge and Bloor.

- Interviewer:** Oh okay.
- Respondent:** [1:18:30] So back then, I guess it made sense to have the main library – there's no Robarts in those days.
- Interviewer:** And it was such a dense population in this area. Why not have it here at that time?
- Respondent:** Yes, everybody went to that library. And then a wing of that was where the door was, that was the Boys and Girls House. So as a child, I was quite a voracious reader and I would go there a lot.
- Interviewer:** Oh lovely.
- Respondent:** Yeah, yeah.
- Interviewer:** Very convenient.
- Respondent:** It's always biking there with – I had a little cheap – bless you. [1:19:00] Little cheap briefcase that somebody gave me for a birthday present.
- Interviewer:** Chief?
- Respondent:** Cheap. Cheap.
- Interviewer:** Oh. [Laughs] Okay.
- Respondent:** And I would fill it with books, you know, and had a strap and put it on my shoulder and ride home.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. So I was all over the city on my bicycle. Never felt in danger.
- Interviewer:** So I'm asking about this neighbourhood, but you're saying you felt the city was a safe place at that time.
- Respondent:** I felt that, yeah.

- Interviewer:** And the time you got turned around, you asked some person and they guided you.
- Respondent:** And they helped me get home.
- Interviewer:** [1:19:30] Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. And in fact, you know, when we talk about stranger danger, one thing I guess before we stop, you know, is in the summertime it was playtime for me. My friend and I ran into a man once who said, "Hey, do you boys want to make some money?" So we said, "Sure. We would love to make some money." So he said, "I have these pamphlets and, you know, you can hand them all out, and I'll give you fifty cents. [1:20:00] There's a hundred or two hundred pamphlets." So we said, "Fantastic." Fifty cents was a lot of popsicles in those days. [Laughter] So he said, "So we'll get in my car and I'll drive you up to that neighbourhood. You know, take about an hour, and then I'll pick you up and I'll drive you back." So we said, "Sure." So we jumped in his car, and the guy drove us up to the neighbourhood, and it was exactly what he said. We gave out the pamphlets, he paid us our fifty cents, and he took us back to our original neighbourhood. Would you let your kid do that today?
- Interviewer:** [1:20:30] [Laughs] Good question. Or my grandchildren. Yeah.
- Respondent:** So that's how I felt about the neighbourhood.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But he...
- Respondent:** And it was fine.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, and anything else that we haven't talked about that you thought about before you came and thought, "Maybe Eleanor would be interested in this"?
- Respondent:** I think I've covered everything. You know, like I guess my highlights were my front porch, went to a wonderful school, [1:21:00] had great movie theatres, loved the people in the neighbourhood. You know, I think the theme of the Annex was the life around us. You

know, being part of that life, you know, it was like we were all a wonderful garden, you know?

Interviewer: Oh, what a beautiful way to end this. Thank you, Percy Brik. Thank you very, very much.

[1:21:27]

[End of recording]