

VN810123 Elaine Levison

Interviewer: The date today is the 24th of July, 2013, and I'm sitting with Elaine Levison who was born in 1939 and lived from 1940 to 1954 at 199 Major, which was Major north of Harbord. Elaine, thank you very much for coming to speak to me and share your experiences.

Respondent: It's a pleasure. Yeah. It's a pleasure.

Interviewer: So you lived [0:00:30] here from ages one to fifteen.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: Which means I'm going to be speaking to a person who lived here during her childhood and part of your adolescence.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: That's useful for me to know because then I can zero in on those times of your life. I'm going to start by asking you if you have any idea what prompted your parents to move to this neighbourhood in 1940.

Respondent: I don't know, but I would surmise the fact that my parents [0:01:00] were both in the garment industry. My mother worked in a factory on Spadina, and my father also started off as a presser, and then he ended up owning his own factory on Spadina, and they met at the Labour Lyceum, which is now at the corner of St. Andrew's and Spadina, the place with the two big lions out the front, and the basement was the Labour Lyceum, and that's where they met.

Interviewer: And what does that mean, the Labour Lyceum?

Respondent: It was a union.

Interviewer: A union.

Respondent: I think it was like a union for the [0:01:30] garment workers. I think that's what it was. So I imagine they just wanted to be in that

neighbourhood, and that was a predominately Jewish immigrant neighbourhood, so that's how it happened.

Interviewer: So for their work and for their community.

Respondent: Exactly.

Interviewer: Everything was right there.

Respondent: Everything was right there. Yeah.

Interviewer: Right. Right. Now your mother worked in that industry too. Did your mother work after she had her children?

Respondent: She worked out of the house. She did alterations and some dressmaking and so on.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: [0:02:00] So we call that a cottage industry.

Respondent: Yeah. Right.

Interviewer: So your mother was working at home...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...doing that.

Respondent: But not for a long time. I don't remember for all the years we were there. It was probably just at the very beginning. Maybe the first two, or three, or four, or five years, yeah.

Interviewer: And then she just was a full-time...

Respondent: Exactly.

Interviewer: ...homemaker.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Taking care of her family.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: When you lived at 199 Major, I know you have two sisters. Is it two sisters?

Respondent: Two sisters, yes.

Interviewer: And where are you in the birth order?

Respondent: I'm the eldest.

Interviewer: **[0:02:30]** And your two younger sisters.

Respondent: And then we're four, we're four-and-a-half years apart. So my next one is four-and-a-half years younger. My youngest is nine years younger.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Did anybody else live at 199 Major with you and your sisters and your parents?

Respondent: Yeah. My grandmother lived on the first floor. She and my dad, my parents bought the house together for, I don't know, three thousand dollars or something like that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And my – I had two unmarried aunts, and they lived in the house with us.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: **[0:03:00]** And then eventually they both married. We had a cousin who lived with us, and my grandmother rented a room to a couple, Sam and Ella Pupkin, who were survivors. They had just come over. After that, was right after the war and they lived in our house.

And then when my grandmother passed away in 1953, there was a room upstairs that we rented to a couple. [0:03:30] He was a Brit who had served in the army and she was a German, she was a war bride for him, and they lived upstairs so that was kind of very interesting house.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now when you say upstairs, was that on the second floor?

Respondent: On the second. We didn't have a third floor. It wasn't open. We had a first floor and a second floor. So the main floor, and then we lived – when my grandmother was alive, all of us lived on the second floor and then she rented a couple of rooms down where she was. And then when she passed away, we moved [0:04:00] down, but my parents – and their bedroom was there, but my sister's bedroom and mine were still upstairs.

Interviewer: You were a lot of people under that roof.

Respondent: A lot of people in one room. And one bathroom.

Interviewer: And one bathroom.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And one or two kitchens?

Respondent: Two. Upstairs and my grandmother's was downstairs. My mother's was upstairs.

Interviewer: So you had a separation in terms of preparing food and eating.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: But the bathroom, there were like ten of you sharing a bathroom.

- Respondent:** Yeah. At a time. [0:04:30] But it didn't ever – it never felt crowded. Never.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** We always had lots of company.
- Interviewer:** Oh. So in addition to all these...
- Respondent:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. We always had – it was great. Family and friends, and...
- Interviewer:** And so you were with your grandmother all those years.
- Respondent:** Until I was thirteen. She died when I was thirteen.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Other family members, did they live in this neighbourhood if they weren't living under your roof?
- Respondent:** Yeah. The one aunt who got married lived at the corner of Robert and Sussex above a grocery – [0:05:00] used to be a grocery store owned by the Cohen family.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Their daughter was Esther Gann, who was a Hazzan in the city.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** Yeah. She still is today. Esther Gann Firestone. And so my aunt and uncle and my cousin lived up on the third floor above their store, and another aunt lived on Major closer to Bloor in the Unger's house. Yeah. [0:05:30] And she and my uncle who was in the army – then they moved to Vancouver, and then they moved to Detroit, but they lived on Major as well.
- Interviewer:** But families were doubled up and tripled up.
- Respondent:** Oh yes.

Interviewer: Because you're talking on the first floor and the second floor. They rented from somebody else or they rented from you, or they lived under your roof.

Respondent: Right, right.

Interviewer: So people were living in close quarters.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And what we would now use as living rooms and dining rooms might have had beds and chests of drawers...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...during those years.

Respondent: Our living room, [0:06:00] we never had a living room upstairs, but downstairs after my grandmother passed away there was the dining room, which really became the dining room. And then we used part of it as a living room, so it was – yeah. You made do and it didn't matter.

Interviewer: And it didn't feel crowded, I think you were saying.

Respondent: No, and as a matter of fact, it was a huge house. It was massive, this house, until I took my kids on a walking tour years and years and years after we had moved. And I had went over to the house, and I looked at it and I [0:06:30] said to my kids, "It shrunk." [Laughter] What's going on here? It shrunk.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yes, it was only this wide. It was really a very skinny house, and we were attached to the house next door. We were actually a, I guess a...

Interviewer: Attached on one side or two sides?

Respondent: Yeah, one side.

Interviewer: One side.

Respondent: Yeah. And then we had a laneway.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. You mentioned the laneway. Did you as a child and as an adolescent use the lanes in any way at all?

Respondent: Well we – I'm talking about the [0:07:00] laneway between our two houses.

Interviewer: Oh, the narrow walkway.

Respondent: That we used to play ball – yeah. But other than that, no.

Interviewer: You didn't.

Respondent: No. We didn't use the laneway in the back at all.

Interviewer: And other – go ahead.

Respondent: I don't remember if there was a fence at the back of our yard, but I don't remember going through it onto – I remember walking through the laneway, but I don't think we had access from our backyard. That I don't remember.

Interviewer: Possibly don't...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Not maybe. Yeah. But you're saying the little narrow laneway between your home [0:07:30] and the other home. Did – you were saying...

Respondent: We used to play ball there. We used to play Indian rubber balls and bounce them off the ledge from the other house and...

- Interviewer:** So you'd bounce them off the walls and they'd bounce on the pavement.
- Respondent:** Yeah. There was like a ledge, and you had to bounce it and it – yeah, it was fun. It was fun. It was so narrow, but we were little. [Laughs] Yeah, yeah.
- Interviewer:** And it was close to home and it was safe.
- Respondent:** That's right. Exactly. Exactly. We didn't worry about safety. We didn't worry.
- Interviewer:** Where did you play?
- Respondent:** Played on the **[0:08:00]** street, played on the – roller-skated on the sidewalk. Played in the backyard. I don't know. When I got to be a teenager we went to the Y. That's not playing, but you know, socially. And we just played on the street primarily. Skipped, and we played ball, and we roller-skated, and yeah.
- Interviewer:** And you said you also sometimes played in the back and – what did you have behind your house, that little **[0:08:30]** piece of property?
- Respondent:** The backyard?
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** It was a little backyard with just a little...
- Interviewer:** So like concrete?
- Respondent:** No, it was grass.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** It was grass. And there was...
- Interviewer:** Anything growing besides grass?

Respondent: I don't think that I – I don't remember if we had flowers or not. I know there was a walkway and then there was a little bench. I even had – I didn't bring it, but I had a picture of my grandmother sitting with me on her lap, sitting on the bench in the backyard. And it was just grass mainly. Yeah. I don't think they grew veggies or, I don't remember [0:09:00] flowers. Hollyhocks, I remember hollyhocks. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Hollyhocks. That I do remember along the fence. Hollyhocks. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: They're quite decorative.

Respondent: Yeah. They were. They were. And then we used to save the seeds every fall, you know, to plant the next fall. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So you have some very clear memories about that. The hollyhocks.

Respondent: Oh, I do. I do. Yeah, I do.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I do, yeah.

Interviewer: So you used the back for playing and you had that bench, and in the front, did you have a front porch or...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: [0:09:30] ...verandah?

Respondent: Yeah. There's a porch. It's in the picture.

Interviewer: And what – was it used by the family?

Respondent: It was a small porch, yeah. We would sit out – I mean it was small, so you know, we would sit out there or stand out there, or greet the neighbours as they passed by.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. I'm coming back to your parents working. Did your father continue to work on Spadina?

Respondent: Mm-hm. And then he became a traveller and he travelled [0:10:00] as far east as Montreal. He would – when he drove to Montreal, it would take him – he went on old highway number two, which took forever, and he would be away for three weeks at a time. It might have taken him a week to get there, or five, six days to get there. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And what – do you know why he changed businesses?

Respondent: No. He always stayed in that business.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Always in some form of ladies' wear. [0:10:30] Of ladies' wear.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: First he was in – he was a presser. When he was eighteen he was a union leader. He was a union leader. Yeah, he was. It's written up in one of the books. I forget which one. Stephen somebody's book. I forget. There's a picture of him and so on.

Interviewer: So he was for the working person...

Respondent: He was very – oh yeah.

Interviewer: ...and political.

Respondent: Yeah. He was very active in the union. And then he – that was when he was eighteen, and then he went to work as a presser and he [0:11:00] met my mom, I guess, when he was twenty-four. Something like that. She moved from Poland to Winnipeg to Toronto, and then he had his own business called Adorable Junior Dress with a partner, Harry Feldman.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Adorable.

Respondent: And they had a big fire there. A big fire.

Interviewer: Was that on Spadina?

Respondent: That was on – it might not have been right on Spadina, but on one of the streets off. I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Whatever.

Interviewer: In the schmatta [0:11:30] area.

Respondent: Exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And he also – when he was in that – when he owned the company, he also travelled. He was always a travelling salesman. Up until he died in 2003, ten years ago, and he was eighty-eight...

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: ...and he was on the – was a salesman up until two years before that or three businesses – at that part with my husband. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh. [0:12:00] So your husband worked with your father.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

- Interviewer:** And your husband was also selling and on the road?
- Respondent:** Yeah. Exactly. Yeah. They had a sales agency. That was right after we got married.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Yeah. But my dad was always involved in ladies' clothing business. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Did you get clothes at reduced prices as a result?
- Respondent:** Well first of all, samples – I was never sample sizes. [Laughter] Except when I was born. [Laughter] And you know how the shoemakers' kids go barefoot. If I would ever place **[0:12:30]** an order, you know, from their line, oh, I'd get it sometimes. Sometimes not. [Laughs] But it was okay. That was all right. I didn't suffer.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So your dad was away a lot then.
- Respondent:** He was away a lot.
- Interviewer:** Which means your mother had to run the household.
- Respondent:** That's right. Exactly.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Exactly. Yeah. It was a big responsibility. And then yeah, he was away a lot.
- Interviewer:** And your grandmother lived with you. Was that your mother's mom?
- Respondent:** My father's.

Interviewer: [0:13:00] Your father's mother.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was that pretty interesting at times? [Laughs]

Respondent: Well I did – for my mother more interesting than for me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I mean mother-in-law, daughter-in-law.

Interviewer: Yeah, right.

Respondent: But I'm a mother-in-law and I get along great with my daughters-in-law, so – but they go – my mother was always very respectful. My grandmother was a widow and she was – everybody was very respectful to her. And she used to speak Yiddish to me all the time.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: I went to Yiddish school. I didn't go to Hebrew [0:13:30] school. I went to Yiddish school, so that – you know, so we spoke Yiddish all the time and it was – she was sick a lot too, so.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. When you were growing up you always spoke Yiddish to your grandmother.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And what language to your parents?

Respondent: English. And they spoke Yiddish to me.

Interviewer: So you grew up bilingual.

Respondent: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Interviewer: How nice.

Respondent: Sure. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah. And what about the other Jewish children on the street? Did they all speak English, or did some of them learn it?

Respondent: No, they all spoke English, but I did have a couple of girlfriends who came over after the [0:14:00] war, and so they were from Poland. And I came – I think they came after the war. During? I don't think during. But they all spoke English. And at home they spoke, you know, Polish, but they spoke Yiddish and English. Yeah. But I conversed – our conversations were always in English with my friends.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Even the ones who had just come over, would come over. Yeah.

Interviewer: You mentioned the word [0:14:30] safety and I didn't pick up on it because I was on a different route.

Respondent: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Was it a safe neighbourhood when you were...

Respondent: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: ...growing up here?

Respondent: Oh yes. Definitely. There was – I'm trying to think if there was anything that concerned my parents or concerned us, or we were afraid to go somewhere, or no. No. Never. Never thought it. Never thought along those lines. Never.

Interviewer: What was it like for you when you were fifteen and your family [0:15:00] moved away from the neighbourhood?

Respondent: It was hard. Yeah. It was hard because I had friends forever. But at that point, a lot of the Jewish families were moving to Downsview, were moving to Lawrence and Bathurst, were moving – we moved

to Keele and Wilson, which was unchartered territory at the time. Pardon me. But it was – but I still talk about safety. We lived [0:15:30] off Keele Street a few blocks in and between us and Keele Street at that point there was a Downsview Air Force base across the street. And between our house and Keele Street it was – there weren't even homes built, most of them. Excuse me. I used to go and take the bus by myself to go down to the Y from Keele and Wilson. I had to go take the Keele bus to Rogers Road and then transfer, [0:16:00] and I even hitchhiked. I can't believe it.

Interviewer: At fifteen and sixteen years old?

Respondent: At fifteen, yeah, and sixteen I hitchhiked by myself.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Oh my god. I must have been nuts. But there were no stories at those – there were no problems.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And then I'd come home by myself on the bus at night and then walk in all those blocks in the dark. My parents – and they were very good parents. It isn't like they didn't care. We never thought anything of it, so that's how it was.

Interviewer: So you're saying the city was [0:16:30] a safe place. This – down here, but also up at Keele and Wilson.

Respondent: Yup, yeah, yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: While you were still down here, what schools did you go to?

Respondent: I went to Lansdowne. I went to Knox Church Nursery. [Laughs] The corner of Harbord and Spadina, I think it is.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: And then I went to Lansdowne and then I went to Harbord, and then we moved.

Interviewer: What was the population? You're [0:17:00] saying that you and a number of your friends spoke Yiddish and English. You spoke English to each other. When you went to Lansdowne, who else was there besides the Jewish children?

Respondent: There was – like as I mentioned to you before, I had a friend, Colin Jones, who lived on our street who was black. The only black family on the street. I had a friend, Kenny Nishimoto. There were quite a few [0:17:30] – other than those two non-whites, everybody else was white.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: But there was the Jewish, you know, the kids of Jewish immigrants, or Jewish immigrants. There were a lot of Jewish immigrants who came to Lansdowne. And there were a lot of Christian people. There were a lot of other European people who weren't Jewish. So it was a whole mishmash.

Interviewer: [0:18:00] Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: Yeah. My grade five teacher was a Miss Milligan, and it's so weird that she died about three years ago and I happened to see her picture in the paper. And I went to the memorial after her funeral, and she had all of her books out from – she kept just immaculate records. She was the most wonderful woman. She was at my wedding. She came to my wedding actually. Gave me a gift, and gave me a little card bird. But she had in her, all of her books, [0:18:30] she mentioned about all the ethnic kids that she had taught in Lansdowne. How a lot of the immigrant children weren't understood and weren't – had a very difficult time, but how much she loved working with them and being with them, and bringing them out into, you know, the world here. So that was wonderful. So there were a lot of, a lot of immigrants when I went to school. And big classes. Huge. I was counting – I have all my pictures from kindergarten up, and I think in my kindergarten class there were [0:19:00] forty-two kids. One teacher. No assistants. And each class was like that.

- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** Forty to forty-five kids per class. So yeah. Yeah. So there was quite a mix.
- Interviewer:** And after elementary school at Lansdowne, where did you go?
- Respondent:** To Harbord.
- Interviewer:** Harbord Collegiate.
- Respondent:** But I was only – yes. Harbord Collegiate. But I was only there for two-and-a-half years, I think, and then we moved to Downsview.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** **[0:19:30]** Do you remember about the heating of the homes?
- Respondent:** Coal. When I was a kid we had coal. I remember the man – we had a window leading into our basement...
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** ...and there was a chute.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** And the coalman would come with a bag of coal over his shoulder, black face, and then he'd come over and he'd open the window and he'd flick the coal, the bag of coal, and it would go right down into the basement. **[0:20:00]** The basement was not used for anything other than a furnace...
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** ...and I guess storage. And my grandmother made pickles or something.

- Interviewer:** Oh, did she make pickles? Sour pickles?
- Respondent:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. [Laughter] And then her – the first stove I remember my grandmother had was a wood-burning stove. A big iron stove, a wood-burning stove, and then after that it – we went to electricity.
- Interviewer:** And the heating, as long as you were...
- Respondent:** The heating...
- Interviewer:** Did that change also?
- Respondent:** Well there was the coal for the – oh yeah. That changed [0:20:30] after a while, and I guess, I guess it must have been oil.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** It must have been oil. I don't remember, but it must have been oil, an oil furnace after that.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** What do you remember? You lived close to Harbord...
- Respondent:** Uh-huh.
- Interviewer:** ...which means you would remember the Harbord stores better than others. If you want to talk about other streets later, that's fine. But what do you remember about any kind of corner stores around Major, and any kind of stores on Harbord?
- Respondent:** [0:21:00] At the – turning my directions around. The northwest corner was a smoke shop called Zeit's. Z-E-I-T apostrophe S. It was owned by...
- Interviewer:** And that was Harbord...

Respondent: That was Harbord and Major.

Interviewer: ...and Major.

Respondent: On the northwest corner.

Interviewer: Northwest corner. Uh-huh.

Respondent: Now it's – I think a...

Interviewer: And what was it? Zeit's?

Respondent: Zeit's. It was a smoke shop. Now you'd call it a convenience store.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Respondent: It was a smoke shop.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And it was Z-E-I-T apostrophe S. We used to go there for ice cream, my parents went there [0:21:30] for cigarettes, and all the other stuff.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: That was on that corner. Across the street from that on the northeast corner was a service station...

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: ...called, I think it was called Abram's. No, I can't remember what it was called, but Ralph, Ralph Arnold worked there. I don't know – I don't think he owned it, but I remember Ralph Arnold worked there.

Interviewer: And there's still the gas station on that corner.

Respondent: There's still the gas station. Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Yes. So that's been there at least since 1940.

Respondent: [0:22:00] Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Different owners.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. Interesting.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah.

Respondent: And then on the southeast corner was Harbord Fish Market.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: My friend's father worked there. And then next door to it was Harbord Bakery...

Interviewer: And it's still...

Respondent: Still is.

Interviewer: ...there, right.

Respondent: And still same family.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yes. And do you have any memories about – wait a minute. So – and was there anything on the southwest corner?

Respondent: Southwest corner, I can't remember. [0:22:30] But overall, Brunswick and Harbord on the southeast corner was Willy Martin's butcher shop.

Interviewer: Ah.

Respondent: And diagonally across from that at the northwest corner was Colman Greenspan's butcher shop. That was solely kosher.

- Interviewer:** So diagonally across these people...
- Respondent:** But they were strictly kosher, and Willy Martin wasn't.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. So they weren't competing.
- Respondent:** Uh-huh. No. And then right across from Willy Martin's on the northeast corner was Feld's Pharmacy.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And then [0:23:00] he moved onto Brunswick a few stores up from Colman Greenspan. That was Feld's. And then there was a grocery store. I can't remember if it was at the corner of Borden, I think, called Platt's on the southwest corner of Borden.
- Interviewer:** So Borden, Brunswick, Major. A lot of corner stores.
- Respondent:** A lot of corner stores.
- Interviewer:** And a variety of different kinds of stores.
- Respondent:** Uh-huh.
- Interviewer:** Where did your family do most of its shopping?
- Respondent:** At – oh, and down Major Street, [0:23:30] up Major Street at the corner of Sussex, at the southeast corner you could – there was a house there now, but you can tell it was a store. It looks like it.
- Interviewer:** Yes. Yes.
- Respondent:** It was Cohen's grocery store and that's where my mom did most of hers because there weren't any supermarkets at the beginning. At the beginning there weren't any supermarkets. So we shopped at Cohen's grocery store, and then right across that – that was at the southeast corner, and at the northwest corner it was Nelly's grocery store. Like this.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.

Respondent: So this...

Interviewer: Look how clear your memories are.

Respondent: I do. Do you know what?

Interviewer: So cool.

Respondent: **[0:24:00]** I heard this from what's his name. Larry King said something about Brooklyn and it rang a bell with me. He said, "I left Brooklyn, but Brooklyn never left me." [Laughter] And that's how I feel about Major Street.

Interviewer: Yes. Oh my god, you're describing it so clearly.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: The corners.

Respondent: The corners. Yeah. And not only that, but Cohen's – the Cohen's grocery store, their son, Al Cohen, introduced me to my husband.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: Three years after they moved away. **[0:24:30]** [Laughter] He hadn't seen me in three years.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: I was twelve when he left. Or how – I was twelve when he left and I was seventeen when I – five years later and I got a phone call from my husband saying, "You don't know who I am, but I'm Ben Levison. Benny Levison. Al Cohen gave me your number." I haven't seen him in five years. But that's where we shopped and my mother would send me there. Three slices of salami, and a quarter pound of butter, and a pound of sugar. I mean that's how, you know, that's how you shopped, and you shopped on **[0:25:00]** credit, and then you'd pay it off.

Interviewer: On credit.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Which means, I'm assuming, that they knew your name, you knew their names.

Respondent: Of course.

Interviewer: It was a personal rapport.

Respondent: Of course. Of course.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about Kensington Market?

Respondent: Oh, I used to go there all the time with my grandmother with her – she had her chickens, her live chicken.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So talk to me about the live chickens.

Respondent: Well she did. She would get a live chicken and she'd take it to the shoichet, and the shoichet would kill it. But...

Interviewer: Was that also in the Market or was that somewhere else?

Respondent: I don't [0:25:30] remember that part. I just remember the live chicken part. But I used to go – and I love – to this day, I love Kensington Market. My daughter lives on Brunswick and she shops there all the time, and whenever I come – I'm meeting her today later, and we're going to head over there.

- Interviewer:** So you remember your grandmother with this live chicken with her hands around the neck with the legs or something like that.
- Respondent:** Yeah, yeah.
- Interviewer:** And the chicken would be?
- Respondent:** Would be squirming, but she'd – she was this little tough lady. She held onto it. [Laughter]
- Interviewer:** **[0:26:00]** And the shoichet would kill it and...
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** ...and then who would take the feathers and who would do all the rest of the work?
- Respondent:** I guess my grandmother must have. I don't know.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** I guess. I don't – I think the shoichet only slaughtered, and the rest was up to you.
- Interviewer:** So it was your grandmother who used Kensington Market. Did your family use it at all?
- Respondent:** My family did, but my grandmother more.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Because my – yeah. Like I said, most of our shopping was done at Harbord Bakery at the fish store, at Harbord Fish **[0:26:30]** Market, at Willy Martin's butcher, and at Cohen's grocery store. Yeah, those were the main places.
- Interviewer:** Were any foods – or was anything delivered at that time?
- Respondent:** Milk.

Interviewer: Milk was delivered.

Respondent: Yeah. At first when I was a kid, the driver, Alliance Dairy, and the driver was Harry Day, and at first it was horse-drawn. And then it came in a vehicle after that, and [0:27:00] we had – so we had milk delivered and that was when the cream was on top, and if it sat out in the winter, the top – the cardboard top popped off. [Laughter] Popped off the milk, you know?

Interviewer: Sure. Because it froze.

Respondent: And – yeah. And we had fruit peddlers. A couple of Jewish European guys who came along. And they had a truck, and you would get their fruit off the back of the truck. Watermelon, all the summer [0:27:30] fruits. We never had anything in those days that wasn't seasonal. Not like now. You can get mangoes that don't even grow here, and strawberries in the depths of winter. Everything was just seasonal because they couldn't transport it in those days, so we had the fruit guys who came around peddling, fruit peddlers, and we also had the iceman. So because we had an icebox before we had a fridge, and he would deliver the ice with this burlap thing on his shoulder and these big tongs, and the kids would hang [0:28:00] around the back of the ice truck for – because he would chip off how much ice we needed and we'd hang around and we'd take ice and suck on the ice. Yeah. I sound like I'm a thousand years old, don't I?

Interviewer: But they're wonderful memories.

Respondent: So funny. Oh, I know.

Interviewer: Wonderful.

Respondent: That's what I said. Like Major Street has never left me. All of those memories. And it was really such a short time in my life, but it was great.

Interviewer: Yeah. But it was significant and it was....

Respondent: Oh definitely.

Interviewer: ...joyful.

Respondent: Definitely.

Interviewer: Yeah. Happy, happy memories.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: But all these things that were [0:28:30] delivered...

Respondent: Mm-hm. And bread – I don't think bread because we lived at the bakery.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And what did a Jewish family buy? They bought a challah, they bought a rye bread with seeds, and that was about it.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's true.

Respondent: Sometimes Kaisers.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So you know, it was right at the corner. That was convenient. Yeah, yeah. Funny.

Interviewer: How would you describe the class structure? Who was living here? What kind of [0:29:00] finances did people have at that time?

Respondent: Everybody. They were workers. There weren't any professionals. Everybody was a worker. Blue collar, I would say. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, you're not living here now, but it's so different right now.

Respondent: I know. I know it is. Very professional. Very, yeah. It's quite different.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: We lived on Major Street. The Annex, you know, when you hear the term the Annex, live in the Annex, the only Annex that we knew was [0:29:30] Eaton's Annex, which was a store. It was like Eaton's discount store. They had a discount store. It was a big store and it was called Eaton's Annex, and that was the only Annex term that we ever knew about. Not that this whole area now is referred to as this. Yeah.

Interviewer: And the people who lived north of Bloor...

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: ...would those children have gone to Lansdowne, or was there a difference north of Bloor?

Respondent: No, I don't think so. They would have gone, oh...

Interviewer: Maybe Huron [0:30:00] school.

Respondent: Maybe. Yeah.

Interviewer: Or maybe not.

Respondent: I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah. But they weren't coming, as far as you know...

Respondent: They weren't. No.

Interviewer: ...to...

Respondent: They weren't coming. They weren't at Lansdowne. It was mainly the kids from – and some of the, some of the kids who lived in the northern part of Bloor – I think they went to Huron. Didn't come to Lansdowne, but the kids from Lansdowne went as far as College and maybe further south.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

- Respondent:** You know, maybe – maybe. I don't think as far as Dundas, but even south of College.
- Interviewer:** [0:30:30] And what about the roads? Were there a lot of cars? Who had cars?
- Respondent:** My father was a salesman, so he had a car.
- Interviewer:** For sure. Yeah.
- Respondent:** And there weren't a lot of cars. There weren't a lot of cars around. A lot of our neighbours didn't have cars. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So if they were going somewhere they...
- Respondent:** Streetcar. On Harbord there was a streetcar.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** I don't remember on Bloor. There must have been a streetcar on Bloor.
- Interviewer:** [0:31:00] I don't know.
- Respondent:** And Bathurst.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** You know.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** When you come to the neighbourhood, how does it look now – because you came to my house. I didn't have to travel to you. How does it look compared to when you were here?

Respondent: It depends on the houses. My old house doesn't look at all like my old house. They've done a lot of work to it. So the 199 is still there, but it looks totally different. But I still [0:31:30] look up and say, oh, that was my mother's bedroom, that was my grandmother's, and so on, and so on. But a lot of the houses have been redone, but a lot of them haven't.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: A lot of them look the same as they did. The same front porches and the same steps, and you know, yeah.

Interviewer: But it seems to me you have very fond memories of...

Respondent: Oh I do.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Several times you mentioned, but I didn't pick up on it, the Y.

Respondent: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Now you're talking about [0:32:00] Bloor and Spadina.

Respondent: Miles Nadal. Now it's the Miles Nadal. Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you use that?

Respondent: More socially than anything. For dances, they had dances there. Not as a gym facility, not for physical fitness. [Laughter] We walked everywhere. We didn't need it, right?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Dances. Clubs. And that was how we used it. That was how the kids used it.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: How the adults use it – my parents never went there.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: They never did. **[0:32:30]** But yeah, it was mainly a social place. Social.

Interviewer: And when you say dances, would you go on dates there?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Or would everybody...

Respondent: Everybody would go just – yeah. And there were a lot of clubs, and a lot of the guys had leather jackets with their...

Interviewer: Names?

Respondent: ...the name of their club across the back of them, and I'm sure some of them still have them. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: So the club would...

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: It was a very social place then.

Respondent: Very social. Very social.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: Yeah. It was a lot of fun. A lot of fun.

Interviewer: What would the dances be like? **[0:33:00]** What happened at the dances?

Respondent: Well just – I don't, I don't remember if girls – see, today, you don't have to have a date on a Saturday night to go out with your girlfriend. You can just – girls can go out. In those days, you didn't

do that. If you didn't have a date, you stayed home Saturday night, or your girlfriends came over to your house. A bunch of girls didn't go out together on a Saturday night. So everything was very socially restricted kind of, and at the dances, you'd go to the dance and if a guy would ask you to dance, you dance, and [0:33:30] if a guy didn't, you'd stand hoping somebody would ask you to dance, and that's what it was.

Interviewer: So you wouldn't go to some guy that you thought was cute and ask him to dance.

Respondent: No. Not – that wasn't done.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Maybe the occasional person would, but not usually.

Interviewer: Would you walk up there by yourself, or would you and two or three other friends walk there...

Respondent: No, I'd walk up by myself. Sometimes I'd meet some of my girlfriends who lived on the street; otherwise, I'd just walk up.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea how often these dances [0:34:00] happened?

Respondent: I think they were, I think they were just Saturday nights. I think they were...

Interviewer: Oh, quite often on Saturday nights.

Respondent: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

- Interviewer:** And what kind of music were they playing?
- Respondent:** The music of the '50s. You know?
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Jitterbug and rumba.
- Respondent:** Jive. Yeah. Yeah. Well jive – mostly jiving.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Yeah, and jitterbug and jiving they called it then. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** I know you left when you were fifteen, but could you talk a little bit more about how people were dating, or were they dating, or [0:34:30] were you dating?
- Respondent:** I had a couple of boyfriends, but wasn't really – I guess it was kind of dating.
- Interviewer:** And what would you do? If you didn't – if you weren't going to the dance at the Y?
- Respondent:** You'd just go for a walk or go to Sunnyside. We used to go to Sunnyside all the time. Sunnyside was an amusement park back then. It was – they had rides and they had [0:35:00] food stands, and it was a real family – because it was right on the water.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** There was a boardwalk and people would go down there, and families would go there on the weekends. And so you'd go there with a fella, or you'd go and you'd have an ice cream, or you went – there was the Mars, which was there.
- Interviewer:** Oh yes. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** And there was a Daisy, which was at the corner of College and Bathurst.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: And there was another place. It was a restaurant where all the kids hung out, and there was [0:35:30] another one on Spadina. Can't remember the name of it. South of College that all the kids used to hang out there.

Interviewer: So when you had a date, you'd sometimes go to that place.

Respondent: Yeah. Or even just a bunch of kids would go there without a date. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: Mars has been there for a long time.

Respondent: I know. And there's another one up on Yonge Street north of Eglinton. Mars has been there forever.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: And I guess the sexual restrictions at that time [0:36:00] were very different from today.

Respondent: Yes. [Laughter] Oh, definitely. Sure. We used to go to the movies a lot.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And the movies actually – there were three movie houses on Bloor Street. There was the Alhambra, the Midtown, and the Bloor. The Alhambra is gone. I don't know. It was just west of Bathurst on the north – across from Honest Ed's.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

- Respondent:** And on the – now the Bloor...
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** ...which is now a Hot Docs...
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** ...was the [0:36:30] Midtown.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And across the street from it is Lee's Palace, and Lee's Palace was the Bloor. So when Lee's Palace took over as a club, the Midtown took the name Bloor, and so that really was the original Bloor. That was actually called the Midtown first. We used to go there all the time.
- Interviewer:** Oh, on date sometimes?
- Respondent:** Not so much.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** With my parents. And even by myself I'd go to the movies [0:37:00] sometimes.
- Interviewer:** So that was three movie theatres very conveniently located.
- Respondent:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Interviewer:** Anything else that you remember on Bloor? I know you weren't living as close to it...
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** ...but anything else that stands out? The nature of Bloor?
- Respondent:** Well like I said, Honest Ed's, I remember that. I used to work on – there was a Power store when I was fourteen or fifteen [0:37:30]

further – Leon Weinstein owned it, and it was just on the south side of Bloor just west of Bathurst, and that was a supermarket. That was the first supermarket in the area. So I worked there as a cashier...

Interviewer: The beginning of Loblaws? Was that the beginning of Loblaws?

Respondent: Well I don't know. Did he – how was he at – Weinstein. So it might have been. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: That was the first supermarket we had in the area. So I remember that. And [0:38:00] I worked at a grocery store on the north side of Bloor between Lippincott and Bathurst. It was owned by – in those days, this was something. She was Asian and he was white. A married couple, and they owned this grocery store. So that was unusual to see a mixed couple like that at that time.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: So there was that store. And I don't know. I'm sure there are a lot of things. I don't remember them all.

Interviewer: [0:38:30] So we've talked about – I'm going to move on to synagogues, churches. What was here during those years from '40 to '50?

Respondent: Well Knox Presbyterian Church, I think that's what it's called, at the corner of Spadina and Harbord was there. That's where I went to nursery school. The church at the corner of Major and Bloor...

Interviewer: [0:39:00] Mm-hm.

Respondent: My friend and I used to set up every summer for The Star Fresh Air Fund, schlep a table up there with little things to sell and sent the money into The Star Fresh Air Fund in front of that church. Now it's a – I'm sure you've seen it. It covers almost the whole block.

Interviewer: Oh, it's a big church.

- Respondent:** But it's a...
- Interviewer:** It's like another community centre.
- Respondent:** ...it's like a community centre now.
- Interviewer:** It's fabulous.
- Respondent:** Right? That was there. My grandmother went to the synagogue at the corner of Brunswick [0:39:30] and Sussex, the northeast corner. It's not a synagogue anymore, but that's where she used to go. I don't remember what it was called. And my parents weren't religious. Weren't shul-going. They were traditional. But my grandmother was Orthodox, so I used to go and meet her at shul there. And there was – there's another shul which is still there on Brunswick, the Narayever.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Which was there at the time too.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. That's a very – that's a thriving shul right there.
- Respondent:** I know it is.
- Interviewer:** Really alive with...
- Respondent:** It's wonderful. Yes.
- Interviewer:** [0:40:00] Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. So that's – I can't remember any other churches or synagogues around. Oh, and of course the one on – oh, what am I talking about? The one on St. Andrew's.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** There's a shul there. And there was the Henry Street shul.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: There was a shul on Henry Street, and Cecil Street shul.

Interviewer: So those are south of College...

Respondent: Those are south of College. A lot of them. Yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: But there were a lot of synagogues down south of College.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Plus the two that were [0:40:30] close to your home...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...when your grandmother went, and the Narayever which is still there.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah. You were young, but did you have any sense of the effect of this neighbourhood being so close to the university?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: No. Because that wasn't my interest at that time.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's – I'm not surprised by that.

Respondent: We used to go down to – I have pictures of me and some of my girlfriends taking pictures on the lawns, lawn outside of Hart [0:41:00] House. So we would – and Queens Park was a big thing by – when we were little, my mother and her friend used to – we used to – they used to take us over to Queens Park, and in the middle of Queens Park, right now there's a big horse statue or something, there was a fountain and we could splash around. It was like a wading pond.

- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** And we had a lot of picnics there.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Were there some parks in the neighbourhood?
- Respondent:** Queens Park. That was, that was it.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** There were no [0:41:30] parks on the street.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Right.
- Respondent:** There was the park off Wales, which is – I don't think – is that Trinity-Bellwoods? Trinity-Bellwoods is on Queen Street, I think. Faces onto Queen?
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** But there's a small park there, which is on – I think goes between Augusta and Kensington? That was there too. And that is still there.
- Interviewer:** There's a little park on Brunswick across from the Narayever, but that used to be some [0:42:00] kind of a garage, a mechanical – a mechanic's garage and they took some – that eventually came down and there's a little park there, but that park...
- Respondent:** There is a park there now?
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** Oh. Oh, right across from the Narayever was where Feld's Pharmacy – he moved his store there, so.

- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. So whatever was there is now kind of a long, narrow park. It's a nice little piece of green space.
- Respondent:** Oh, I have to pay attention when I go by. And also on Bellevue, I think there's a park on [0:42:30] Bellevue...
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** ...south of College.
- Interviewer:** But right in this neighbourhood there's also one on Ulster and Brunswick now, and I'm not sure if that was a park at that time, or if there was some buildings there.
- Respondent:** Oh.
- Interviewer:** So we have two parks very close to...
- Respondent:** Oh, I know where that park is. Yes, yes.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** On the southwest corner.
- Interviewer:** So the children were playing on the roads, the sidewalks when you were here. Back gardens, back lawns, but not in the parks because those two parks, [0:43:00] I think, did not exist at that time.
- Respondent:** Yeah. We did go to Christie Pits.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** We went and used to go to Christie Pits.
- Interviewer:** But all those – all these places that you're naming are wonderful, but not really in what we now call Harbord Village.
- Respondent:** Right. Right.
- Interviewer:** But of course, you used the streets more than the children...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ...do now.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Or we went somewhere. We went to Centre Island, or to – that was a big trip to go to Centre Island. I used to do that a lot. That was wonderful.

Interviewer: When you think back, are there some strong [0:43:30] sentiments that arise when you think back to that period of your life in this neighbourhood?

Respondent: Well, because it's – I mean it's been so many years since I was fifteen. [Laughter] And I still – when I come down, because my daughter lives on Brunswick, when I come down to this part of the city, it's like my heart thumps. It's like I'm coming – these were my roots. And it was only until I was fifteen, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah. Those are [0:44:00] important years.

Respondent: But it was – yes. It was. It was. Because when we moved up north, I got married when I was nineteen, so I was only in that home for four years, but I was in this – other than my marriage home, that was the longest I'd been. And of course, my formative years, and I had so many friends, and when I come down to this area, I remember all the things I told – oh yes, this store was here, and that was there, and this one lived here, and my friend lived there. And it's just nostalgic. It's nostalgic. And it was a good time because we were with [0:44:30] my family, and we were with a lot of relatives, and a lot of friends.

Interviewer: And when you talk about the stores, you could go buy something on credit, they knew your name, you knew their name. You watched them grow older, they watched you grow up...

- Respondent:** That's right. Exactly.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Exactly.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. And your daughter has moved down now.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** And I think she's the one who approached me...
- Respondent:** That's right. Yes.
- Interviewer:** ...in the laneway to say her mother grew up here.
- Respondent:** Uh-huh. She heard – she was out on her balcony and **[0:45:00]** she heard someone on a megaphone and she went to check it out. She lives in Lou Jacobi's – Lou Jacobi's old house.
- Interviewer:** Oh really?
- Respondent:** Yeah. That's what – she bought that house.
- Interviewer:** Oh, that's a nice – yeah.
- Respondent:** Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah. So it's nice. She loves it down here. She just loves it.
- Interviewer:** And you did too.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** And when you think about it, you said it makes your heart pitter-patter.
- Respondent:** Yes. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** I think I've pretty well covered whatever I was hoping to cover.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: It's been very interesting and very helpful. Very informative. And
[0:45:30] Elaine, I want to thank you very, very much for coming
and speaking to me.

Respondent: It's my pleasure.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Thank you. Thank you.

[0:45:36]

[End of recording]