

024 Mutt Greenberg

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

[0:00:00]

**Interviewer:** Okay. So I guess you prefer to be called Mutt and not Mort.

**Respondent:** Oh, Mutt is my Yiddish name, and when I played ball that was my name. And only people who are very old acquaintances call me Mutt, but when there are people like Brian Williams and some others, they call me Mutt because they prefer to be more acquainted, intimate with.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Is that short for Muttel?

**Respondent:** Muttel. Muttel.

**Interviewer:** Yes. Okay.

**Respondent:** Yeah. [0:00:30]

**Interviewer:** I just want to – for the sake of this, to remind you that I'm here as a member of the Harbord...

**Respondent:** Village...

**Interviewer:** ...Village Residents' Association board.

**Respondent:** Yeah. And Gus is across the road.

**Interviewer:** That's right.

**Respondent:** Rory. Excuse me. Rory. Remember you opened the trunk to deliver something to my kitchen and left the trunk open? Drained the battery? So for eight days I didn't have my jar?

**Interviewer:** [Laughs] Okay.

- Respondent:** He just came back from the west coast.
- Interviewer:** I haven't seen him yet. Yes, I know **[0:01:00]** Rory well. So we're doing...
- Respondent:** Not as long as I do. [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** No, for sure. So we're doing this to learn about the changes that have occurred in our neighbourhood. I would just like to start by saying thank you. And your name is?
- Respondent:** Morton. My niece, great niece said – when she first heard it she said, "Your name is Morton?" Because she always called me Uncle Mutt.
- Interviewer:** And your last name?
- Respondent:** Greenberg.
- Interviewer:** Greenberg.
- Respondent:** **[0:01:30]** But it isn't the last name. It's just a name made up when my parents arrived.
- Interviewer:** So do you know what the name was?
- Respondent:** No.
- Interviewer:** You don't know.
- Respondent:** It's thought to be Gorenberg because my Uncle Itsic in St. Louis was Gorenberg. His family is Gorenberg. And my great – whatever the relation is – and said to me she's done some research and she's pretty confident that the name is **[0:02:00]** Gorenberg, but I don't know what Goren in German, or Yiddish, or whatever language – berg I know, but I don't know. See...
- Interviewer:** But you're going by Greenberg here in Canada.

- Respondent:** I'm not going by it. It was given me. It was tattooed on my – but I can't show you that. That's too private.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] Would you tell us please when you moved into this house.
- Respondent:** My brother **[0:02:30]** Joe says eighty-five years ago because I have only lived here eighty-two plus, and when I wanted to find out precisely and tell Gus how long we've been resident here – because there was the naming of the lane up the – at 104.
- Interviewer:** That's the Louie Laki?
- Respondent:** Say again?
- Interviewer:** Is that the Louie Laki Lane?
- Respondent:** No. It's the Greenberg Lane.
- Interviewer:** Oh, the Greenberg Lane.
- Respondent:** **[0:03:00]** Well if you – you see, you're asking the wrong person. You should start at the source, brother Joe and Gus, who has sworn to go over because Joe was responsible for that article in the paper called "Boys of Major Street."
- Interviewer:** Yes. And I will certainly phone your brother.
- Respondent:** And that lane is going to be named up on Harbord Street. It should have been named leading from behind the east side of Major **[0:03:30]** Street because that's where they all lived, but that's been named St. John's Lane for the nuns who occupied prior to the Doctor's Hospital. St. John's Order is now up in Cummer. I'm taking you away from your...
- Interviewer:** Right. Okay. So if you could – so your family moved in here eighty-five years ago.
- Respondent:** They lived elsewhere, and I don't know where.

**Interviewer:** Okay. But we're just interested [0:04:00] in this, and eighty-five is enough. And you were born eighty-two plus years ago in this home.

**Respondent:** 1929.

**Interviewer:** And who else was living here when you were born here?

**Respondent:** Eleven people who were living here, but not all family.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so...

**Respondent:** Of the family, one sister had died before I was born of the three on this – that would be Sarah. She died before I was born. And sister Rose and sister Dorothy, plus father and mother [0:04:30], Joe, Dave, me.

**Interviewer:** So you're the youngest of the children.

**Respondent:** Well it's up to you to determine that. I'm not going to tell you their ages. It's not right for me to speak about other people's ages.

**Interviewer:** Right. Okay. But you said there were – so your family lived here, your parents, your siblings, and a few other people. Who were they?

**Respondent:** Schranen.

**Interviewer:** Neighbours.

**Respondent:** Tenants.

**Interviewer:** Okay. [0:05:00]

**Respondent:** Three tenants. Man, wife, child.

**Interviewer:** So that meant eleven people were living in this home.

**Respondent:** Well I didn't mention Johnny in the cellar who was a Polish gentleman who I never knew much about, who helped with the lighting of the Shabbos candles, and cooking, and whatnot.

- Interviewer:** So – and there was one bathroom I assume.
- Respondent:** [Laughs] One bathroom.
- Interviewer:** One bathroom.
- Respondent:** Six by eight. Still there.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So [0:05:30] eleven of you plus the person downstairs?
- Respondent:** I believe so.
- Interviewer:** Twelve of you.
- Respondent:** Well I don't know if that's twelve. You figure it out.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So eleven or twelve and you all shared one bathroom.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And I guess you all shared one kitchen.
- Respondent:** Of course.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** The kitchen's about four times the size of the washroom at least. At least. And this had one of these pull-down chains, but all that was changed before my mom passed away. The kitchen [0:06:00] was all redesigned, bathroom was all different, and the two-piece toilet for my mom in the kitchen...
- Interviewer:** So you added a two-piece bathroom on the main floor.
- Respondent:** It used to be a closet.
- Interviewer:** Right.

- Respondent:** So a guy named Louis redesigned – I kind of indicated what we needed, bought the appliances, and everything was changed on her behalf so she wouldn't have to climb up the stairs.
- Interviewer:** Do you have some idea of when that would have been? Nineteen what?
- Respondent:** Nineteen – [0:06:30] well she passed away 1970, so it had been 1968, '69.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So many of you lived here with one bathroom for many, many years.
- Respondent:** Well wait a sec. People were already married and left.
- Interviewer:** But when your family first...
- Respondent:** I was the only one left in the house when the change in the house occurred. [0:07:00] I had returned from UCLA, got a job, left for Europe, came back, and I decided for no particular reason it was silly to have a basin where my father would kill the chickens in the kitchen, and people would bring in the chickens on the floor, and my father would deal with them in a pious way. [0:07:30] And then I don't know why, but it was just something I chose to do. Kitchen was remodeled, the paper hasn't been changed, the toilet has not been changed except it's not a pull-chain flush. There's been a shower installed, and I took the leggings off the [0:08:00]...
- Interviewer:** The bathtub.
- Respondent:** Yeah. I have dry mouth. Leggings off the bathtub so she wouldn't have to hoist herself in...
- Interviewer:** Right. Right.
- Respondent:** But she always did, and I was very stern with my mother because I wouldn't let her feel pity, or would ask me for things to do and I wouldn't do them for her. I just insisted she do them for herself. But she expired because of a faulty drowned gravity furnace, [0:08:30] and I almost did too. Not lying you.

**Interviewer:** Oh my god.

**Respondent:** Yeah. See my room at that time did not have a heat register, so I never was influenced by the effluence from – but my mother went to bed New Year's Eve.

**Interviewer:** So some bad toxin fumes came through?

**Respondent:** Well I could go on with this story, but it's not necessary, and I barely got up from sleep one morning and struggled out [0:09:00] to the porch before I regained my respiratory whatever, and called the oil person in, and he said, "Nothing wrong." Check what you need...

**Interviewer:** Would you like me to give you some water?

**Respondent:** No, no. That doesn't help.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Respondent:** Check the chimney. Chimney guy said nothing. Brought back the guy from the oil, and he said, "Oh. If there's anything wrong I'll put this [0:9:30] bomb on top and if there's a leak, it'll show. Well he put the bomb on top and it was like Vesuvius.

**Interviewer:** Oh my goodness.

**Respondent:** And he wrote, "Not responsible for anyone after I leave this call." So I had that removed, and put in a gas furnace, and that was changed to another gas furnace, and that's how I've lived since. My mother passed away very quietly, died in her sleep, and there was a phone over [0:10:00] there, and a chair, and my lady friend phoned to find out where I was, and I had been in New York with my third from the right nephew, showing him Broadway and enjoying a number of plays, and brother Dave came in the next morning. My sister Dorothy was preparing breakfast. "How is Mom?" "I haven't been up yet." He went up and found her dead. And they found me in New York, I don't know how, and left a note on the – didn't say, [0:10:30] but left a note on the door. I said to my nephew, "Barry, I think my mother's died." "How do you know?"

And I said, "Well, for them to find us in this outlandish area, no phone." So I phoned home, and we came for Friday because it wouldn't have been a burial on Saturday on Shabbos, and that was January the first.

**Interviewer:** Of what year? Nineteen...

**Respondent:** [0:11:00] 1970. A friend of mine was making his debut at the Met. He's on the wall in the hall singing in "Madame Butterfly," and Ricky and I have been friends for a long time, but I never got to see his debut at the Met. But I loved Ricky and saw him many times, and unfortunately he died six days after Birgit Nilsson, whom you may know or may not know. She was the [0:11:30] greatest soprano of her day.

**Interviewer:** Let me get back into our interview, and I'm wondering if you can just think of the neighbourhood, and you've been here all your life. I mean you went away for certain periods of time, but what, to you, are the outstanding changes that you've seen in this neighbourhood?

**Respondent:** None because it's always been an immigrant neighbourhood. I've always been a go-between between the kids and the parents because they gained confidence [0:12:00] and affection. When they needed anything in the house, they came right on by.

**Interviewer:** But in the neighbourhood you're saying it's always been an immigrant neighbourhood.

**Respondent:** Always been an immigrant – except for the young yuppies who have come in and torn the innards out and redid it. A guy bought two homes, 100 and 102, tore off the porches to make them look for modern presumably so he could sell them, [0:12:30] and that's what he did. Now I resented that because he damaged the roof, but I just – I don't really care so much because I have too many other practical, reasonable, resolvable things. How everybody else does things is beyond me.

**Interviewer:** But in terms of changes, you said that – is it still an immigrant neighbourhood?

**Respondent:** [0:13:00] Well my best friends are all Portuguese.

**Interviewer:** Uh-huh. So...

**Respondent:** The one next door is an elderly woman. She's Portuguese, but she's rented out a couple of rooms. One's a guy who plays a guitar, Tommy. Next to them is a family of Portuguese. The next one on the corner was a Jewish household. Sold to a friend of mine from Hungary. He fixed it up, he paid five hundred, he sold it for seven hundred and eighty, [0:13:30] and that family of seven sold it for nine hundred and twenty.

**Interviewer:** Oh my god.

**Respondent:** And it's occupied by a single woman, whom I tried to acquaint, but she would have none of it, and she's renting it out to a couple of people.

**Interviewer:** So the way you see it is immigrants who are still here, and then yuppies who have bought it for escalated prices.

**Respondent:** And students who rent out these homes, aside from Gus and the ones south of him, there are [0:14:00] homes owned by a gentleman who rents them out every year as long as a student is here. They, every summer, go away, and another group comes in. So I've never gotten acquainted with them. Never.

**Interviewer:** Right. Now when you lived here, your family, there was a tenant downstairs who wasn't Jewish.

**Respondent:** No, he wasn't a tenant, he was just a guy who helped out. And all he wanted was a piece of bread and a piece of chicken. He didn't speak much English.

**Interviewer:** [0:14:30] Right. But he could do whatever.

**Respondent:** I have no idea. I was a kid. I was a child.

- Interviewer:** Right. Okay. But the household has now changed because you're living here by yourself. So could you give me some idea of when this house changed? It's one person here and there were eleven or twelve people here.
- Respondent:** Well look, the boys got married, and the girls got married, and that was it.
- Interviewer:** Right. Right.
- Respondent:** Sister Rose got married in 1941. She had a child in 1942. I was twelve and [0:15:00] I turned thirteen. Joe got married in 1958. I was on my way to Europe, but since he was going to get married I had to wait on the wedding. 1958, '42, '50. He's been married 54 years this year.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So as the years went on, more and more people moved out.
- Respondent:** Well my sister Dorothy went to Palestine to be a pioneer with [0:15:30] her husband, 1940 and '41. I was only ten and eleven.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. But then nobody else moved in.
- Respondent:** No, no, no.
- Interviewer:** Everybody in the family became – the home became just for your family.
- Respondent:** Well what was left of us.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** My father, my mother, and me.
- Interviewer:** Right. Right. And now it's yours. You're here by yourself.
- Respondent:** It's not mine. I own it, but it's not mine. [0:16:00] My parents took ten years to pay off two thousand. I took it ten minutes to pay off whatever to buy it from my siblings. I don't think they should have sold it to me because they're going to inherit it anyway, but they

wanted money for it, and I gave them the money. Just a few scrawls on a cheque, but I never considered it my home. It's my parents' home.

**Interviewer:** It's nice the way you describe it took your parents ten years to pay two thousand and it took you ten minutes to...

**Respondent:** Nickels and dimes.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. That was a lot of money at that time.

**Respondent:** [0:16:30] Well you can make that decision for yourself. Ten years, two hundred dollars a year. That's four dollars a week.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So in terms of the changes, waves of immigration, what have you seen?

**Respondent:** I really – you see, I'm so disinterested because I accept everything. I don't query or question. When they come by [0:17:00] and say, "Mort, I need help," that's the only time I find out something's happening, but they bring in food, they consult with me, they visit with me, I take them to my hockey games. When I played, I'd take them to Maple Leaf gardens because I was very – how should I put it? I had a reputation working for CBC as the only person that brought in items, filmed items, [0:17:30] and well that went for the university, to high schools, public schools, every sport there is, all the track and field, all the swimming events, all the football, and all the baseball going on.

**Interviewer:** Now would you explain what you mean when you say you brought in these things?

**Respondent:** Well I was self-assigning. The guys who were on television said, "What have you got for me today?" I've got an interesting young man who plays basketball for St. Michael's. He happened to be the coach of [0:18:00] the professional team and then the national team. I have an item on Bruce Simpson, our national pole vaulter, and I was encouraged to film him to show him how to improve his techniques. A lot of people said, "Would you help me determine

how to film something in slow motion so we can break down the aspects of his"...

**Interviewer:** So did you study filmmaking at UCLA? [0:18:30] Is that what you studied there?

**Respondent:** No, I studied theatre arts and sociology. I worked at a gas station, worked my – well, you may as well come into the kitchen because there may be stuff that you could – talking is fine, but there's a picture or two worth thousands of words that might assist you. Let's get through the talk aspect and then...

**Interviewer:** Sure, I'd be happy to do that. Okay.

**Respondent:** Don't be happy. Just do it.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So you're saying you didn't have much interest, but I [0:19:00] wonder whether you could describe the different ethnic groups who are here. You talked about the Portuguese, you talked about that.

**Respondent:** Well there are all kinds. There's a group that works at Harbord Bakery, they've worked there for years. The son, John, has been a good friend of mine. I came out of hockey one night and I had five, six kids, prepubescent? I don't know. [0:19:30] The battery was dead, so they pushed me all the way from Eglinton to here. Each of those kids, I loved them. I'd bring them in, we'd have hot dogs and beans. When I was away I bought a ping-pong table and they used the cellar and they cut up a lot of carpets to decorate the cellar. I never thought about who they were or where they were from. [0:20:00] I just went into their homes, hugged and kissed their mothers, shook hands with their fathers. That's the way it's always been. It's always been.

**Interviewer:** Did your family belong to a shul?

**Respondent:** Of course.

**Interviewer:** Where was that one?

- Respondent:** Well it was on Centre Avenue. That is no longer there, so they set up a shtiebel, Markham and Ulster. Why are you asking me this? Joe's the president. It's silly for me to respond to things.
- Interviewer:** I will interview Joe. **[0:20:30]** I look forward to that.
- Respondent:** Well it's not worthy of me to take up his portion. You know, a portion is a portion when you go into your bar mitzvah. You've got to read that whole portion. Anyway, the shul was on Centre Avenue just a bit east and south of Dundas and University. A wonderful, magnificent building, and it was supervised, it was **[0:21:00]** mainly run by relatives by ours called the Zimmermans. He was an elegant gentleman with a white beard, and his family were his choir, and they lived at number 50. I didn't know them very much.
- Interviewer:** 50 Major Street?
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** I didn't know them very much. He was quite elegant. There were others. There was a rabbi at 108 in the apartments there that is now owned and occupied by Portuguese friends. **[0:21:30]** Dear, dear friends. When the mother died – oh. Look it, you may want much of what I can't tell you and I'm not able because I do not have the investment in – as my brother Joe has. He's always known the people. Always known of them because he shared the Air Force induction, and let's see. **[0:22:00]** About the neighbourhood. I just knew it was a place where I grew up, and everyone was the same. Nobody had any bicycles. Oh, one person had a bicycle. That was not a very pleasant person in the end. We made up our own games, we made up our own contraptions. Orange crates on a two-by-four with a skate...
- Interviewer:** Some wheels?
- Respondent:** **[0:22:30]** Wheels into the rain. Toboggan. Whatever we called them. I didn't like haircuts, so my mother asked Mr. Roberts to trap

me on the street and put a pot on my head and cut around. Yeah. Those are...

**Interviewer:** But those are wonderful stories. They're valuable to us.

**Respondent:** Well that's what it was.

**Interviewer:** Because you're saying that right now, I think you're insinuating that people buy a lot of toys. **[0:23:00]** And when you were young, you made toys and you played outside.

**Respondent:** We played our own games.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Respondent:** Relievel, Chase the White Horse. I can't tell you how many, but there were – there was an immigrant family from England in 133. There was a black **[0:23:30]** and French-Canadian family around the corner. As far as I know, those are the non-Jewish. We grew up in a community that despite the absence of parents because they were at work, those who remained were monitors of our behaviour.

**Interviewer:** So whichever parents were around watched all the kids.

**Respondent:** Absolutely. Everybody knew everybody else, and **[0:24:00]** they mustn't behave, or else. I don't know what the or else was because we never misbehaved.

**Interviewer:** And did the mothers work? Were a lot of the mothers working?

**Respondent:** What do you mean? Keeping house, cooking, sewing.

**Interviewer:** Right. But were some of them working outside the home.

**Respondent:** No.

**Interviewer:** Uh-huh.

**Respondent:** Only my mother.

- Interviewer:** Your mother worked outside the home.
- Respondent:** Because she had to pluck the chickens. Flick the chick. My father would slaughter the chickens, and my mother and he would pluck them for the neighbours [0:24:30] for six cents.
- Interviewer:** And that was then right in your home.
- Respondent:** Not at first.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** It was done, but then the Jewish Mayor of Toronto got – apparently. You see you're asking – I was only a kid and you're asking me to give you a mature, you know, version of something that Joe can tell you precisely.
- Interviewer:** Okay, but...
- Respondent:** You should have started with him.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. But...
- Respondent:** And take up the rest.
- Interviewer:** But your mother did work with your father, [0:25:00] so you do remember that.
- Respondent:** Well we had also from – there used to be a burlap business on College Street. Harry Eisen. He was from the same area my parents were before they were killed by the Cossacks, and so we took out the twine or the thread, and so we got paid for doing that. [0:25:30] I remember being part of that, and I started work at twelve, and did jobs until I'd left for school at UCLA, and always whatever portion of that was – I don't know. Whatever I made, I gave or shared because there was no money in the family. Joe at [0:26:00] eighteen, 1941, had left for service. Brother Dave was the only working member. My Pa would go to the feld and recite poems over the dead on certain occasions. They'd give him a handful of nickels and dimes, he'd bring it home and pour it out on the table.

**Interviewer:** So your father was a shoichet?

**Respondent:** Well that's exactly what I've been saying, you know?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** I understand why that would be – [0:26:30] my father had a number of jobs. But you see, it's silly. I was not relating anything about my father because I knew nothing about my father. Let's stick with something you think I know something about.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Tell me what school did you go to?

**Respondent:** First I went to a school called Lansdowne. It's now called Lord Lansdowne. I would go, walk down, go into a lane, and walk down the very lane I think they should have named Boys of Major Street, [0:27:00] but they changed it. They did it without inquiring. And I arrived on Robert Street, and I spent from 1934 to 1942. And finishing that, I went to Harbord Collegiate and I spent from 1942 to 1947. Then because I didn't think the parents could afford university, I took a course [0:27:30] in accountancy by correspondence from Queens University. I didn't like it. Nothing made anything of me or I of it, and so I applied to be as far away from home in case things were not quite easy enough, and I went to UCLA by bus back and forth.

**Interviewer:** Wow.

**Respondent:** And I didn't really enjoy UCLA because I wasn't part of [0:28:00] anything, and they missed out because I was a really talented person. How do I know? Because on return they asked me to write a musical for the Dentistry Faculty, and it was done. No problems, sat down, wrote several songs, wrote the outline, the storyline, but I had the great job of working at the gas station shoveling gas. And I met wonderful people, Jack Dempsey for one, the great heavyweight champion, [0:28:30] and through a number of encounters, the time was spent very, very well. I wasn't a great student. I was B-average throughout presumably, and I did okay. And when I was asked to join the main office of Chevron, the large

oil company, because I was trusted and admired by the people who saw me at work for three years, I said I [0:29:00] miss the seasons, and I have elderly parents. But had I done that, it would have been a totally different experience. I came home. Then I worked at CBC, get fed up with the bureaucracy and decided I was going to take six weeks off because I hadn't my vacation the previous year, and a friend said, "What can you see in six weeks?" So I quit, and I spent thirty-two months with all these [0:29:30] wonderful human beings. Great opera singers, musicians, and theatre people, ballet people. Well it was a part of my life, and that has nothing to do with this neighbourhood, except when they came back I became something more interesting, presumably, because none of these people at the time – so far I don't know if any of them have any ambitions towards what I enjoy.

**Interviewer:** And what is [0:30:00] it that you enjoy?

**Respondent:** Well just what I told you. Theatre, the arts, the...

**Interviewer:** But you began to work in that area as a photographer.

**Respondent:** No, I never worked in it.

**Interviewer:** As a photographer for sports?

**Respondent:** I was a sports cameraman.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So how did you come to that?

**Respondent:** Well I was always a sports person. I always played basketball, baseball, hockey.

**Interviewer:** But then you got behind the camera.

**Respondent:** No. I was not what you consider – I have a – there's a [0:30:30] camera on the floor over there that cost me forty-six thousand. I bought it because they were switching from film to video, but they fired me because of somebody's desire to be an empire builder. His name was Dobigeon, and he fired everybody in his way, as he presumed. Now when I went out with my camera, I found people of

interest, so that when I came back the people on **[0:31:00]** camera said, "What have you got for us?" And I told them, "I have a football story, a hockey story, track and field story, a swimming story, whatever. Horse story." And that was accepted because I was the senior member. I was the eldest, I had more sports experience, and all the wonderful people I worked with gained a trust, except one. Steve Douglas was on the air, and I had gone to Maple Leaf gardens to see the Metropolitan **[0:31:30]** Opera, and I had not known that behind him was a rear-screen projection. And by walking behind not knowing, I cast my image, silhouette across, and Steve said, "Good evening, sport fans and opera lovers." You see, these are so person that conveying them means absolutely nothing. I'm taking it all out of your hands and going on in this undisciplined way. **[0:32:00]** You really want to know about the neighbourhood. I cannot give you the kind of information in really, really, really...

**Interviewer:** Okay. Can I ask you some very specific question then?

**Respondent:** You can do anything. I'm wide open.

**Interviewer:** You talked about using the lanes. You walked through the lane to go to school.

**Respondent:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Did you use the lanes in any other ways?

**Respondent:** Well I don't know which other way you're thinking of.

**Interviewer:** With your friends, playing with your friends.

**Respondent:** Oh no, no, no, no. The street.

**Interviewer:** **[0:32:30]** The street.

**Respondent:** That was our lane. We skated on the street, we played puck and stick. You take a length of broom, you take another length of broom, and you sharpen one end. You hit the sharpened end, it flies up, you strike it, it flies. If they catch it, you're out. If it lands,

they throw it towards the length of your stick held upright, and you measure the number of lengths away from that [0:33:00] stick. That's called puck and stick.

**Interviewer:** Now do you see children playing those kinds of games now?

**Respondent:** No. No.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Respondent:** They have no idea what they're missing. No idea.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So that's a change because you used the street actively.

**Respondent:** Well then we made our own orange crate scooters.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Respondent:** They don't skate on the street. Oh, they have now these brand new multi-roller things, but we had roller-skates, [0:33:30] which we used to adjust by pulling out and in, and tightening the bow up. And we'd go and – perhaps we would go to a place that had roller-skating, but they don't have places that we frequented. Nobody plays baseball. You see, in our childhood, every school had a playground and a tutor, a trainer, and that's what kept us off the [0:34:00] street in contact with another. Training, and we – there's a picture here of the last national basketball championship team with my brother Dave. National championship. That group called the Lizzies.

**Interviewer:** But you're saying then that you...

**Respondent:** Kids are not like we were, and I have no idea why they're [0:34:30] not further away from what – but you see, the same restraints of the early immigrants is still not on them as they were on us. They don't fly off the handle, they don't go – I don't think there's one kid that does drugs.

**Interviewer:** In this neighbourhood.

**Respondent:** Right. The neighbourhood is still a community that holds in its own way the control, discipline. **[0:35:00]** And those who get married have families just like everyone else used to.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And that's why we're studying the community because we – our feeling is...

**Respondent:** But I can't speak for other communities.

**Interviewer:** Okay. But this a strong community.

**Respondent:** This street. I don't even – I can't tell you what happened above Harbord. I can't tell you what happened below Ulster.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So you know your street. But you also – you talked about the heating of your house changed. What – do you remember as a child how the house was heated? **[0:35:30]**

**Respondent:** I told you, by gravity furnace. You poured in the coal, you took out the ashes from the bottom, but then it was oil and that was converted to oil, and that's what caused my parent to die, and almost took my life.

**Interviewer:** Right. I'm going to ask you one question. You might think it's silly.

**Respondent:** Nothing is silly. You don't know me **[0:36:00]** at all, so what's the point of arguing the point. Go ahead.

**Interviewer:** What about dating? How people of your generation dated.

**Respondent:** Well that was a whole problem for me. I never got into it. I was in an all-boys form for four years, didn't know a girl at school, but I loved to dance so we held dances. But I always chose the least good-looking ones because I knew they weren't being attended to. As a matter of fact, I wrote a radio play on the basis of an **[0:36:30]** experience I had in London. But in fifth year, I was in a mixed form. My marks weren't going good enough.

**Interviewer:** Okay, now one minute. You're talking about form. Is that what we call grades?

- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So...
- Respondent:** First form, second form, third form, fourth form, fifth form.
- Interviewer:** ...grade five you were in a mixed class. Or is that high school?
- Respondent:** Well that would be grade thirteen.
- Interviewer:** Oh, so form you're talking about high school. Oh okay. So...
- Respondent:** [0:37:00] Grade one to eight.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. And then the forms began.
- Respondent:** No, I'm sorry. Grades one to eight were public school. Eight to thirteen...
- Interviewer:** Were form one, form two...
- Respondent:** Right.
- Interviewer:** First form, second form. Okay.
- Respondent:** Right.
- Interviewer:** So when you were in fifth form, which we cal grade thirteen, then you were saying something happened.
- Respondent:** I met a girl, we became an item. She was the most beautiful, the prettiest and most popular, and I just happened. [0:37:30] I don't know how. Things happen. I don't know. I don't do them earnestly, intentionally because I allow things to happen and accept them so that I can have more than what I...
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So you go with the flow.

- Respondent:** I don't have any ambition. I didn't have – I just loved everything I did when I did it. I live in rather than for the...
- Interviewer:** Present.
- Respondent:** **[0:38:00]** ...moment.
- Interviewer:** For the moment. Okay.
- Respondent:** If you came, I would live in that moment. If you didn't come, it wouldn't bother me because it didn't happen, and I'm not going to blame anybody for that. It just didn't happen.
- Interviewer:** But you said earlier on you danced with the girls who were less attractive to give them a break.
- Respondent:** No, not a break, because I knew they were being overlooked. Later on, I loved dancing and I went to large **[0:38:30]** ballrooms in London and there was this pretty girl and she was standing there. And of course, the guys are looking and they walked, and after a while she started to back up so that she wouldn't be completely visible all around. And then finally she wound up in a corner so that nobody could see her except from the front. And I wrote this play called "Friday Afternoon," and **[0:39:00]** so I went over and I said, "May I have this dance?" And she said, "No." Of course not, because she wanted to get back after all the insults.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Respondent:** I understood. I understood.
- Interviewer:** But nevertheless, in fifth form, this most beautiful girl.
- Respondent:** Ellen Robbins. Her young sister was Toby Robbins, who became quite an actress. Toby loved me dearly and always wanted me to be part of the theatre, and always wanted me **[0:39:30]**. Ellen was simply, well, I loved a tenor, always will, named Jussi Bjoerling from Sweden, and I gave her **[indiscernible 0:39:40]** from "La Boheme," and she didn't like it. I spent ninety cents, ninety cents

1947, 1946, and I should have known then there was no future for us.

**Interviewer:** [Laughs] Charming.

**Respondent:** So I took [0:40:00] her, we were at the Harbord homecoming, and I took the day off to see Al Jolson, the movie, at a cinema that no longer exists, and I bought an orchid, and I gave it to her, and I wrote the following. "You tear open my box, you stick me [0:40:30] with a pin. He holds me close 'til I'm all crushed in. You tear off my petals, my androecium shows through. Who cares if you love me? I'm still quite stuck on you." She went off and married a very well-to-do gentleman from Cole's Bookstore. Tabby was a football player at Harbord and has died within the last three years. And I phoned her not many months ago and I said, "When you're ready to be kissed again, let me know." [0:41:00] We keep in touch somewhat.

**Interviewer:** [Laughs] That's...

**Respondent:** She sends a hundred bucks to the fund.

**Interviewer:** Oh lovely. Yes.

**Respondent:** A hundred and fifty people send in money. Some as much as twenty-five hundred, two thousand. My own is over thirteen hundred. I'm not sure what's happened with the totals, but Frank Selke is the son of the man, and you should know, who was very important in the early days of the [0:41:30] Montreal Canadiens, Frank Selke Senior. As a matter of fact, they name a trophy after – the Selke trophy. Frank's his son, and he's just a few months older than me, but we adore one another.

**Interviewer:** Would you talk about the stores on Harbord, how they were then and now?

**Respondent:** No, no.

**Interviewer:** No.

**Respondent:** There were no – the stores on Major.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Respondent:** At the corner we had a fish market, Harbord Fish Market. Next to it [0:42:00] was the Harbord Bakery. Across the road was Orloff's grocery. Over here we had a Chinese laundry, but after the war a holocaust survivor became a grocery. Across the road was a grocery.

**Interviewer:** So there were lots of stores.

**Respondent:** Wait. I'm not finished yet.

**Interviewer:** Go ahead.

**Respondent:** There were two on Ulster and Brunswick, one on the [0:42:30] northeast, one on the northwest. The one on the northwest is still there. Not by Jews anymore. So we had to shop. Couldn't do it on the Sabbath, so we had to sneak in on Sundays.

**Interviewer:** Oh my god. Because they were closed on Sundays.

**Respondent:** If we got caught on Sunday it would be bad, so we'd go in, and we'd buy, and they'd write our name and amount. Five cents, twelve cents.

**Interviewer:** So it was a credit system. So [0:43:00] somebody would pay eventually.

**Respondent:** Eventually. Everyone would pay.

**Interviewer:** But that is very different.

**Respondent:** So we had one. We had the fish. See, this was the self-contained neighbourhood. What wasn't available at the corners were brought in by horse and wagon, and pushcarts. This wonderful – when the animal cart came by with a tank of fish, and [0:43:30] they'd come out and they had a little scale, and they would reach in and he would pick out and drop off the head, put it on the scale, and so on. And then the wagons would come, horse and wagons.

"Watermelon, watermelon," singing it out and we'd buy watermelon and anything else. And of course, we were – there's a story about E. Ann Pierce whose brother went onto an ice truck, got some ice, shards of ice to suck on, fell off and got killed. And I said, [0:44:00] "You know what? Joe, you've got to read this book." It's like Major Street, lower east-side in New York. Absolutely just like Major Street. All the [indiscernible 0:44:05]. Just like here. It was a wonderful book by E. Ann Pierce who died unfortunately a miserable life, a miserable death. So we get on the ice trucks, we'd go to the tar when there were tar in the road, and grab pieces of tar because we liked to chew on it.

**Interviewer:** Oh my god.

**Respondent:** The [0:44:30] tar was good for the teeth. It really was good. When I ate sand, I didn't know why I ate sand, but there's minerals. There used to be a little sand plot on the corner here, and I used to eat. My parents were never around because they were always at this little place, little garage, next to the Western Hospital on Bathurst Street. But when someone...

**Interviewer:** Was that when they were doing the chickens?

**Respondent:** Yeah. But when there was some business with the fleas and whatnot, [0:45:00] the lice, they were obliged to leave, so that's when the house became the abattoir.

**Interviewer:** Oh, so there were fleas down there near the Toronto Western.

**Respondent:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** So they began to use your house.

**Respondent:** Why do you ask me? Because I was never there. You see, you're asking me...

**Interviewer:** But you're telling me this. Yeah. But anyway, after that...

**Respondent:** It's all hearsay.

- Interviewer:** But after that, your home became where they killed the chickens.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Father testing the knife, that was absolutely flawless. Sharpening it up. I still have [0:45:30] those things in the house somewhere.
- Interviewer:** And you watched your father doing this? You saw him doing it?
- Respondent:** Of course. How we still love chicken, I don't know.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs]
- Respondent:** I love chicken. We go eat it every Wednesday, and Tuesdays at the Colonel. What's his name? Colonel? KFC.
- Interviewer:** Colonel – Kentucky Fried Chicken.
- Respondent:** Kentucky Fried Chicken.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So you know...
- Respondent:** You know where he died?
- Interviewer:** No.
- Respondent:** Mississauga.
- Interviewer:** Really?
- Respondent:** The Colonel lived and died in Mississauga.
- Interviewer:** See, I'm talking about [0:46:00] Harbord Village, and you are talking about Major.
- Respondent:** That's all I know.
- Interviewer:** But what I'm saying is how wonderful that is because Major itself was such a community, and had such a...
- Respondent:** Are you crazy? It was a magnificent community.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. That's what I'm...

**Respondent:** We had plumbers, we had painters, we had everybody who was able to contribute to the well-being of the community, except doctors. They came later. **[0:46:30]** Doctor Shaw used to come in, take care of our family with a few eggs my parents gave him. I never saw any money.

**Interviewer:** So they paid him. It was a trade. A barter.

**Respondent:** Ask Dr. Joe. His son is still working down on College Street, and whenever I walk in there I'm in tears and thank him from being a Shaw. Lola Shaw is a person I went to high school with. Her husband died, and so **[0:47:00]** the vacant heart needs love to fill. Your beloved husband still feels your heart and always will. I'm given to writing rhymes. I've booked loads of rhymes, given to all the family, not one of which has indicated they have read it. Not one. Are you ready? Are you really ready? Okay. You forced me to this. You've heard thunder rumbling. Did you know it's only raindrops grumbling to go out and play? **[0:47:30]** After all even raindrops can't stay in all day. And so it was because the raindrops and the cloud were not allowed out, they all began to pout and complain. "We aren't allowed to rain anymore and staying inside's a tiresome bore." Well up popped Mrs. Sop, the mistress of the cloud who was endowed with a kind and loving name. "You've been truly untruly unruly, why can't you be good?" And she made the sternest face she possibly could. "Why can't you be fair? It's too cold out there. You'll freeze," she said. "Oh please, please," **[0:48:00]** the raindrops pled, with a hint of a glint in each watery eye you might think it a tear, but raindrops can't cry. So high aloft, Mrs. Sop was soft. She gave me permission on the condition they all get warmly dressed. They all cried like all good children, all for fun, one by one they kissed their Mrs. Sop. Kerplop, kerplop, kerplop. "But minus season," she amended, "for no reason are you to stay after winter ascended." "We'll be back in time," the rest replied, smiles on their faces, rainbow-wide. **[0:48:30]** But Mrs. Sop knew a few would be late to return, yet she couldn't be stern, even with those. She used to be late herself when it snows. Well before you knew it, each raindrop went to grab itself a piece of cloud, and wrapping itself in a

shroud of furry white fluff. "Enough! Enough!" cried the cloud. "For crying out loud, if you grab every piece you see, there won't be anything left of me." Then in a hurry, furry, flurry, in a great big cheer, they leapt off into the cold atmosphere. [0:49:00] So now you know and did you always know the snowflake's a raindrop, just in a fur coat.

**Interviewer:** [Laughs] Fabulous. You have a wonderful memory.

**Respondent:** That is fine. I'm always given to writing, so that's kept me alert.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Okay. I just have a few more questions.

**Respondent:** Don't worry about few, schmoo.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel that the university being so close has an effect on our [0:49:30] living here, on you, on the neighbourhood?

**Respondent:** It wasn't so close. It's much, much, much, much, much – and I've worked with every sport, everything, and I'm a big contributor to the university. Twenty-five, twenty-six hundred to the sports, five hundred dollars to the opera program. I'm very much part of the University of Toronto. I've never been there, and I even sent two thousand dollars to UCLA never to write [0:50:00] me anything again. I have a friend, Nancy Freeman, no less than homecoming queen in 1953, no less Lowe's Parade Queen, January the first, 1954. I have asked the alumnae, "Would you kindly tell me how I can reach Nancy Freeman?" They don't even know who she is. [0:50:30] I've sent pictures of her in the Los Angeles Times paper to show them who she is. Nope, they can't find her. Here's to Queen Nanc, whose gay eyes enhance the brightest stars in the sky. Here's to a queen, low poets may glean in vain and only may sigh. Here's to a queen so pure, so supreme, long may she reign on her throne, and may she descend to remember this friend when the days of our years have flown. [0:51:00] I never knew she got it, and they can't tell me where she is, and I never knew. Fifty-four, fifty-seven years ago.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. That's too bad. Really too bad.

- Respondent:** No, it's stupid. So I sent them money. "Thank you for the convenience of being there. I don't want to hear from you ever again."
- Interviewer:** I want to ask one more question.
- Respondent:** Why only one more? [Laughter] Am I not interesting enough?
- Interviewer:** What about Kensington Market? Do you feel that it has had an influence on us in this neighbourhood?
- Respondent:** **[0:51:30]** Oh not anymore. It was all Jewish. We'd go down there. Dill pickle.
- Interviewer:** So you would just help yourself to the pickles?
- Respondent:** A huge barrel of it, and I love dill pickles.
- Interviewer:** Did you pay for it, or you just stuck your hand in?
- Respondent:** No, paid for it. As a matter of fact, we had five delicatessens on College Street. We had Becker's, we had Wertz, and **[0:52:00]** the one I can always remember – oh, we had four. On the corner where there's a thing called Caplansky now, ugh. Oh, what a – and the other one was – started with a letter R. Now there were four there. We had three cinemas on College. Oh, I spent all my life in cinemas. We had three on Bloor Street. We had one on **[0:52:30]** Spadina called the Pickford, after Mary Pickford. One on Dundas and Bathurst called the La Salle. We had Alhambra, the Midtown, and the Bloor. On College we had the Bellevue, the Playhouse, and the Garden. Why would you have to go – I mean I didn't even know where – I had to get my **[0:53:00]** birth certificate. I had to get my birth certificate to play baseball, and I didn't know when my birthday was. "Mama, when was I born?" Well **[indiscernible 0:53:04]**. [Laughter] You know what that means?
- Interviewer:** A few days before Pesach.
- Respondent:** Yeah. It could have been March, it could have been April. Anyway, I had to provide proof that I was of age to play. Where do I go?

Wellesley, Bay. Where's that? Well you go along – [0:53:30] and I finally got my birth certificate. April nineteenth. I was thirteen years old and I didn't know when my birthday – none of us ever had a birthday party. None of us. We never cared about birthday – there was no money anyway. And when I got bar mitzvahed, I got two religious books from my sister Dora's family-in-law.

**Interviewer:** But you did have a bar mitzvah.

**Respondent:** Oh, everyone has a bar mitzvah.

**Interviewer:** [0:54:00] And which shul was that at?

**Respondent:** The one that we attend on Harbord. Excuse me, on Markham and Ulster.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. What they call the Joe Greenberg shul.

**Respondent:** He saved it.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I know that.

**Respondent:** Okay. So my nephew, Dr. David – I'm sorry, this is your fault. He turned fifty '09. He was born in '59. Okay. [0:54:30] Fifty's pretty nifty, but it's only half a hundred. Mid-life crisis? For the sum, the prices dismay and dreams asunder. You've had practice; your next act is to expand your horizons, your comp so far. Blow your own horn to the man who was born like a tequila on the shore fire. So here's to you from an uncle who dubs you monarch of all you survey. [0:55:00] No diadem; it's just pro tem, because you only king for a day. Now he came in on his fortieth birthday carrying a son. J.J. I don't know what those initials stand for, because I had been botched – I had an operation that was botched, betrayed, lied to, covered up. I've written over a thousand letters, not a single response. Five blood clots, [0:55:30] three operations for a nothing operation. So I said to myself, hm, J.J. You know, he's going to be thirteen very soon. So I wrote this lovely poem and sent him thirteen times high.

**Interviewer:** Whoa. That's big.

- Respondent:** Three of them last Friday.
- Interviewer:** Wow.
- Respondent:** Two-hundred and thirty-four dollars each. That's seven hundred and two dollars for the [0:56:00] three of them.
- Interviewer:** Very nice. Very nice.
- Respondent:** But that's my role.
- Interviewer:** I want to come back to the – you said that there were so many theatres around.
- Respondent:** Cinemas.
- Interviewer:** Cinemas. And you enjoyed those a lot.
- Respondent:** And you know...
- Interviewer:** And there's only one left in this neighbourhood now.
- Respondent:** Well you should know about the original Yiddish theatre.
- Interviewer:** In this neighbourhood?
- Respondent:** Dundas and Spadina.
- Interviewer:** Okay. But that's not...
- Respondent:** Well that's the whole point. [0:56:30] The feeling of Judaism is what we're talking about.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Yes.
- Respondent:** I don't really have any other thought. I am grateful to have been born into this Jewish situation. I'm not very religious. I go in memory of the people who've died. The tradition of being in a synagogue at the time. One of my dearest friends was Simon Wiesenthal, whom I

met in Linz, and then later in Vienna, [0:57:00] 'til I got this bone situation that stopped me from going in '98. And when I spoke about maybe my friend who made his debut at the Met, James King, Simon Wiesenthal, Birgit Nilsson, and Ricky DiGiuseppe all died in the same year. Whammo, whammo, bammo. [0:57:30] Simon – did I say Simon? No, no. He died in '05. No, I'm sorry. I was correct the first time. I write a lot of – mostly I write the same grieving. I just felt it was heartfelt when I wrote it, but it hasn't lost any of its pulmonary [0:58:00] activity, so I just write the same thing. What did I jump from to something for no reason? What did you ask me? The last thing. Oh yeah. The Strand theatre, I never attended. And it probably went out of theatrical business because it became a cinema, a kind of a bawdy house. Now it's, of course, like the whole neighbourhood down there. It's owned by [0:59:00] Chinese.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So that's a big change. Yeah.

**Respondent:** But it would have been wonderful if they had kept it as a Yiddish theatre because now the Yiddish theatre as such is at the Jewish Community Centre, the Greens. Now there's something about – you ask Joe. The Greens lived up the street. Al Latner lived up the street, and they formed Greenwin construction. I mean this street created some of the great construction companies. The Lashes. You see, I really don't know what I'm saying. It's just coming out, but there's no real knowledge behind it.

**Interviewer:** But you have a lot of wonderful – a richness of information.

**Respondent:** No. You've got me going and I'm on a skid, and I just [laughter] – okay. Can you redirect any of this that you need rather than me?

**Interviewer:** I'm choosing another topic right now.

**Respondent:** Anything.

**Interviewer:** Do you [0:59:30] remember in this neighbourhood the end of World War II? Do you have memories of that?

**Respondent:** I remember more the death of Roosevelt. I remember going out and grieving. 1945, I think it was. April just about then. The war ended not too long after that, and I went down, tried to [1:00:00] mingle. I'm not really a mingler. I really don't enjoy a lot of people doing a lot of things they might later reflect on as being unworthy of them. A celebration. You see, we – a whole bunch of hundreds – maybe not hundreds – went to Montreal to show the Quebecers [1:00:30] how much they love them because they're confronting the Quebecois leaving Canada. Do you remember that? Not so many years ago there was the vote, the Oui and the Non. Okay? So the Non went out, oops, by that much. And how much did they love them? They went out and celebrated, while the people they really love were grieving over their loss. And that goes in sports. I hate it. [1:01:00] Celebrating over a loss of people you should respect and give the affection of thank you for making us a better team than we've ever been before. And I don't find that funny at all. I dislike it. I don't watch hockey. I don't watch any sports because I grew up in a different ambiance or something. So as for the end of that, [1:01:30] Joe wasn't there because he was stationed elsewhere, and brother Dave hadn't been married yet. Dave was about eighteen. I didn't see him at home because he was – I can't even tell you. See, I can only tell you certain things precisely because they impacted at that time, [1:02:00] but I do remember going to Bay Street maybe. Maybe Yonge Street was the centre of it all at College, but I didn't get that close, and I didn't want to penetrate into what I imagined.

**Interviewer:** Are you taking about now about the declaration of the end of the Second World War?

**Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah. And people were on the street.

**Interviewer:** So you have memories about that. That people were on the street. No.

**Respondent:** Not here.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. But they went downtown.

**Respondent:** I guess.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** Let's face it, they would [1:02:30] still be at work earning a living. That was the main thing, earning a living. [Laughs] There was one funny story. Novitsky, N-O-V-I-T-S-K-Y, a little man from – it was his second wife. A little wife who was making dill pickles at Switzer's delicatessen. Aside from the four I mentioned here, there were two on Spadina near Dundas.

**Interviewer:** Wow. Yeah. Yeah.

**Respondent:** There was Switzer's and...

**Interviewer:** Shopsy's?

**Respondent:** [1:03:00] Shopsowitz.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** Do you know who Harold Ballard was? Harold Ballard and I got along famously. The old Ballard, his son, gives two thousand dollars to the fund every year. He was in partnership with Michael Cole. Michael Cole saved that Broadway production of the Spiderman, forty million dollars. Michael took it over. Michael used to share that two thousand, but now Michael's in Florida. So the [1:03:30] Novitsky's lived at 129, and there were...

**Interviewer:** You're talking about Major Street.

**Respondent:** Major Street.

**Interviewer:** Of course.

**Respondent:** And there was Louis, Manny, Jackie, Bella, and Joey. So Louis is a little older than me. He's still alive I believe. I've not seen him for a very long time. [1:04:00] Then Jackie unfortunately came to grief, walked in and he said, "Pa, I'm changing my name to Norman." And his father said, "Yeah, that's okay, my son." And then Manny who got killed on a ski trail, he's the guy that asked me to write the

musical for the dentistry because he was a dentist. I loved Manny. [1:04:30] Manny comes in and he said, "Dad, I'm changing my name to Norman." "But what is this? You have two people with the same name, Norman." He didn't know it was the last name.

**Interviewer:** Oh. [Laughter] Novitsky to Norman. Got it. Got it. Yeah. Yeah.

**Respondent:** So these are little nonsense...

**Interviewer:** No, but lovely story.

**Respondent:** In 135 were a black family, the Marshalls. I loved the Marshalls. And Hoddie [1:05:00] and Jimmy – Jimmy was my contemporary – were having a BB fight. If you go into the hall into that French door, you will see a hole in the bottom in one of the panes of glass. The BB missed and it flew right through. Jimmy came over and he said, "Mutt, I'm sorry." But Jimmy used to come in and change the lights, and the Marshalls – [1:05:30] Jerry learned how to sing Yiddish songs.

**Interviewer:** Talk about Yiddish. What language did you speak at home when you were growing up?

**Respondent:** I didn't know much Yiddish, but I understood a lot. But my parents, when they didn't wish us to know anything, spoke Russian.

**Interviewer:** Oh, Russian.

**Respondent:** And my mother could speak – I don't know what the difference is – she could speak Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and she would hire help [1:06:00] of those people who were one of that tongue.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Respondent:** My father of course could go to synagogue and sit there, and go through the whole Megillah all by himself.

**Interviewer:** Wow.

**Respondent:** And there's a chair of a porch I'm reluctant to throw away because that's what he sat on, just sat there and...

**Interviewer:** Shuckled.

**Respondent:** ...shuckled. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. Did some of your friends' parents speak Yiddish at home?

**Respondent:** [1:06:30] Of course.

**Interviewer:** Uh-huh. And did some of your friends speak Yiddish to their parents?

**Respondent:** I would think they'd have to.

**Interviewer:** Oh, because the parents didn't know English.

**Respondent:** They were too busy working to do anything else. To do anything else. But you know, the woman of every family is much smarter. All the Portuguese women are much smarter than the men, and I lost one very dear Portuguese woman [1:07:00] not too many months – yeah, months now I guess, a couple of months. And at curling club, although I don't curl, at the end of the year I'm given a turkey and I give it to number ninety-four, and inevitably two, three days later I get turkey legs, sausages, roast potatoes, soup.

**Interviewer:** So you give them the turkey, but they give you all kinds of cooked...

**Respondent:** [1:07:30] It's not meant to be that way, but they are wonderful. When I'm ill they come in with a thermometer and test my – for the seventieth time, I fasted. The seventieth time. But it cost me a hundred and two point something degrees. And I didn't phone my brother, I didn't phone – I just said, "Lucy, do you have a thermometer?" [1:08:00] And she came and she took care of me like I was her own.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So you have a nice relationship.

- Respondent:** With all the neighbours.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Respondent:** With all the neighbours.
- Interviewer:** So Major Street is like a large family in some ways.
- Respondent:** All the neighbours are my dearest friends.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. Lovely. Lovely.
- Respondent:** I cannot tell you. If I need anything in the house done, they put in a shower, they change the footings of the house, they built a patio out back.
- Interviewer:** [1:08:30] So this is a wonderful place.
- Respondent:** When the kids wanted to buy a jacket because they won the football championship in the school, I had to go and be a – because fifty bucks, that's a lot. So I said, "Ah," so I paid it.
- Interviewer:** Wow. So it's give and take, is what you're saying.
- Respondent:** They adore me.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Respondent:** And whenever I shop I get virgin olive oil because I know any of them use it all the time. [1:09:00] Why would I not? Well you go in the kitchen, you see the containers left over from what I emptied, and [laughs] every day I'm phoning them, they send their kids in to pick up the empties so they could...
- Interviewer:** Fill them up again.
- Respondent:** Mrs. Fernandez brought in, oh boy, spareribs, rice, so I emptied it [1:09:30] into my own containers and her son, who's a fireman, Paolo, came by. Sometimes he cuts my hair, otherwise I cut it

myself. I said, "Paolo, would you mind taking the container back to your mom?" Within an hour, she's packing the same container. [Laughs] Filled it up again. And I keep throwing – "Would you come by, please? Take some of this food. I'm dying here." I cannot tell you. This neighbourhood [1:10:00] sustains, supports. I can't tell you. Not the family. Of all the family, most of them, ninety percent plus have never been in this house. This is where their great-grandparents, their grandparents, and parents lived, and they're not interested? I don't know. It doesn't matter to me. I just think what a waste not to be interested. You have to be [1:10:30] interested to become something of something, or know what you don't – you have to do things to know whether you like them or not. Even doing a job. If it's not a good one, at least you know that. That's something useful. And I found the UCLA – I was working at Uncle Myles' hamburger stand. "Sorry, Mort, I'm selling it out. Here's a book for you. Opera." [1:11:00] And one night, a guy comes by named James Dean, happens to be an actor, and he says, "Would like some money for gas." "Seventeen cents." "What about the till?" "No, I don't go into the till." So James Dean kills himself in a car crash owing me seventeen cents. Then another night, a gentleman comes by with a child, orders a couple of hamburgers and I make the hamburgers [1:11:30] and he says, "How much?" And I said, "Ain't nothing you can do here, Mr. Mercer." Johnny Mercer, the great lyricist, one person I've loved all my life, and then he said to me, "You know me?" I said, "Yeah. I love you. I've been sending you lyrics from Toronto, and I get the usual form letter." "Here's my home address. Send them to me."

**Interviewer:** Whoa.

**Respondent:** And what he did was send back the originals and write in the margin, "Good lyrics. What's the tune?" or something like that. [1:12:00] Johnny Mercer. Then I got a wonderful job at the gas station, which now pays me because my social insurance – seventy-six dollars a month.

**Interviewer:** Whoa.

**Respondent:** They just went up this January by two dollars.

**Interviewer:** That's substantial.

**Respondent:** Of course. Of course it is. But you see, I'm worth enough quarters except – my best friend had four children, the youngest of whom was in [1:12:30] Desert Storm. "What are you going to do with your bill of – your GI bill?" "Oh Mort, I'm sorry. It's too late." I said, "What? How can you be too late for the GI bill?" So I started to phone his Senator representative, phoned in Washington, California, but his family didn't want to take part. So at the final moment, I wrote to University [1:13:00] Avenue, the consulate, and I said, "How is this possible? Oh, by the way, I just turned sixty-five. Am I eligible for social insurance in the States?" "Mr. Greenberg, sorry. You don't have enough quarters. You only have twelve. You need thirty, I think. Something like that." "Thank you very much." "Oh no. Wait, wait, wait. We have a reciprocal arrangement. If you can prove you've been paying taxes for the [1:13:30] required number of months," yeah, because it's quarters. I said, "Of course." I returned, I started paying fully since 1962 and now it was, well, thirty-three, twenty-two years later. Voila, fifty bucks. And it's gone from fifty steadily up, and isn't it marvelous? And people keep talking about the United States. And of course, all the great opera that I've heard, [1:14:00] the best symphony, the best ballet, some of the best theatre on Broadway, of course. And I love the US because some of my best friend, a lot of my best friends, my PhD in Rochester. "John, don't send me any New York Times crosswords after Tuesday. Monday and Tuesday I can do, but it gets harder, and Sunday it's impossible."

**Interviewer:** [1:14:30] Let me bring you back here. Okay.

**Respondent:** Thanks.

**Interviewer:** [Laughs] Your stories are wonderful.

**Respondent:** No. The point is I don't speak with anybody. You came in here, and I have a chance to talk with somebody. Frank phones me about a difference in money, but it's not conversation. Go ahead.

**Interviewer:** Right. I'd like to wind up our interview for today.

**Respondent:** Please. Please, because I'm getting tired.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Respondent:** Of me.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything that we haven't talked about.

**Respondent:** Oh no, that's up to you.

**Interviewer:** [1:15:00] About the street, the neighbourhood?

**Respondent:** The mail used to come eleven times a week.

**Interviewer:** Oh.

**Respondent:** Twice a day for five days, and Mr. Dunn used to come in because knowing that my parents couldn't read English, he'd bring in my sister's mail from Palestine, and he'd read it to my parents. I loved Mr. Dunn, but then everybody who was – I mean [1:15:30] how could you not think of things in a very positive and loving way? Except my sister Rose phoned me, got me out of [indiscernible 01:15:32] during my bar mitzvah time and said to me, "Did you steal money from me? Who do these comic books belong to?" I said, "They're Wilfred's up the street." "No, they're not. You took money from me to buy comic books." Of course I did. How else was I [1:16:00] going to buy comic books for a dime? [Laughter] So over a year or two I may have taken four or five dollars, excuse me. So she took the original Superman, Batman, put them in the fireplace [laughs].

**Interviewer:** Oh.

**Respondent:** Who was to know? Who was to know? Who was to know? That was the stove we had. It was a wood-burning on one side and [1:16:30] gas on the other side, and the markings of the leggings are still in the floor. And that's 1942.

**Interviewer:** But that in itself is another change. You had a wood-burning stove.

- Respondent:** Well that's why I changed the whole kitchen for my mother. That was '42, and I'm talking about '69. Twenty-seven years later. And in the interim, my dad was hucking away and...
- Interviewer:** [1:17:00] One last question. Is there some kind of little garden at the back, or a piece of land behind the house?
- Respondent:** Of course. There's a yard.
- Interviewer:** Okay. How was it used when you were growing up? And then what are the changes that have happened to people using their backyards?
- Respondent:** I had a marvelous neighbour, Portuguese, Manuel. He used to plant my garden with all menus of vegetables, but then he died [1:17:30] and it's just grown weeds, weeds, weeds.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. But for many years it was a flourishing vegetable garden.
- Respondent:** Only with him.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** But I've offered anybody in the neighbourhood, come and use it. It's gone – it doesn't have any use at all.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. So right now it's just weeds and it's not being used at all.
- Respondent:** Weeds. Weeds. But it's amazing. There's a picture on my refrigerator of me with a ball in my hand, because I always was going to be a ball player, and it looked like a very [1:18:00] large yard, but of course it's very small compared to now.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. What was it growing up? How was the yard used? Or was it used?
- Respondent:** Not at all.
- Interviewer:** Not at all.

- Respondent:** My sister was married in this very room. Sister Rose in 1941. She did appear with her people at the window. Oh, Joe's the person. I mean you've wasted your time.
- Interviewer:** No, I haven't wasted my time.
- Respondent:** No, no. Not for me you haven't.
- Interviewer:** Or for me. Really.
- Respondent:** No, I don't care about you. **[1:18:30]** [Laughter] You know what I say, and please, it's not meant in any derogatory or whatever, as a way I'm trying to suggest it's not. Eleanor, I define love for myself, as anybody who makes me feel good about myself. So at the moment, I love you dearly because that's what you've done for me. **[1:19:00]** I don't know what it does for you, but I love any – see, when you go to court and it's irreconcilable differences, they never say, "Oh, he doesn't make me feel good about myself anymore." But that's what it is.
- Interviewer:** Well I want to tell you I have enjoyed our time together, and you have added very richly to what we're looking at, what the neighbourhood was like. We see what it's like now, and your anecdotes **[1:19:30]** and your stories have been a treasure for us.
- Respondent:** No, you have not begun. You have not begun. I have lived without even knowing it was there ready for me to mine. I don't know. My parents didn't say, "Where are you going? And why?" "Mom, I'm off to school in California." **[1:20:00]** My father would write me in Yiddish, **[indiscernible 1:20:03]**. That's all he could write. There was never any shared experience between us. And I would write back in Yiddish, the best way I could. And then I got fed up with the bureaucracy at CBC and I decided to go to Europe.
- Interviewer:** Okay. I'm just going turn this off for now.
- Respondent:** Please do.
- [01:20:21]**

[End of recording]