028 Frances Gotkin

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: You said that the women stayed home. Were there any mothers who were going out and working?

Respondent 1: Yes. My girlfriend, Faigy Dratsch – 20 Major – her mother was a widow very young. She had Faigy and her husband died when Milton wasn't quite a year old, and she had to go to work. So she worked **[0:00:30]** full-time, and Faigy was cared by her grandfather and grandmother. And so she always worked full-time. She never remarried until she must have been in her late sixties or seventies.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: And she worked at a dress shop all those years.

Respondent 2: How about across the street?

Respondent 1: Across the road, Sandra Ellis's mother worked, but she was brought **[0:01:00]** up by her grandparents.

Interviewer: So the women…

Respondent 1: Most of the other women stayed home.

Respondent 2: There were bootleggers.

Respondent 1: Yeah. There were bootleggers.

Interviewer: Okay. You know what, since you mentioned that, one of the things I want to talk about is any kind of home industry. So talk about the bootlegging…

Respondent 1: Well there was the bootleggers – they passed away now. These guys, they were the bootleggers across the road. Home industry – **[0:01:30]** my mother would make – it wasn't really an industry. Come Christmastime, and we had a big coal stove in the kitchen, and my cousin would ask her to make turkeys for his Christmas

parties because my mother would cook and help out with catering and that, so she would make the turkeys. **[0:02:00]** I don't know of too many women who, if they weren't working – or families in an industry – there were just too many people living in a house to really have an industry going in the house. There may have been further up the street, but I didn't know any in my little area because everybody went out – you know, the men were out working and maybe the women were minding somebody else's kids, but it wasn't always…

Respondent 2: **[0:02:30]** Her father.

Respondent 1: My father worked three jobs. He made shoes in those years, like worked for three different companies. So you worked, and they came – when they came from Europe they were all orthodox. You didn't work Saturday, but in order to make a living, a lot of them changed and they worked Saturday because they had to feed their families. So things started changing…

Interviewer: Out of necessity you're saying.

Respondent 1: …out of necessity. Was a lot of – yeah. **[0:03:00]** But as far as small, except for the storekeepers – and the women would work in the stores with the men. And sometimes the women were working in the stores; the men were at another job, so it wasn't always…

Interviewer: So the women officially were not working, but often they were…

Respondent 1: They were.

Interviewer: …because they just needed to bring…

Respondent 1: My mother worked in the house. Because we rented out later on all these rooms, she provided all the **[0:03:30]** linens, and they had cooking plates. So my mother would clean all the rooms, wash and iron all the linens, and clean the three-storey house. I came home from school one day. She's pregnant with my brother, I was twelve years old, and I find her on a ladder and the ceilings on our house on Major Street – my mother was not five feet. She's eight or nine months pregnant, she's standing on top of a ladder cleaning a

ceiling. **[0:04:00]** I came home from school at lunchtime and I felt nervous. I go, “What are you doing on the ladder?” I mean I was only twelve, but I know she shouldn’t have been on a ladder. I had to go get the man next door, Mr. Calan, to come in and we should bring her off the ladder. What if she would have fallen? I mean the women in those days were really crazy. [Laughs]

Interviewer: And they worked hard.

Respondent 1: And they worked.

Respondent 2: And they were strong.

Respondent 1: They were strong, they worked like horses. They didn’t go out to work. They cooked, they cleaned, **[0:04:30]** they never had time to go out. My mother gave birth to my brother in January. He just turned sixty-five. My girlfriend, Annette, who became my stepsister because my father married her mother – they lived at 10 Ulster Street, so her mother Mamie had her fourth child, a son, on March 17th. Well do you think that **[0:05:00]** those mothers ever walked those children outside? They didn’t have time. Annette and I, we used to walk the kids outside in the carriages…

Interviewer: Because the mothers were working.

Respondent 1: They were too busy in the house working, cooking, baking. They never had time. They didn’t – they really – if you asked them, “Did you know your neighbours?” “Yeah, I went outside and I said hi.” The only neighbours they would know is our friends’ parents, but there wasn’t where they would go in and visit with the **[0:05:30]** neighbour. They didn’t have the time to do any of that, they really didn’t. She knew Faigy – like Frieda Dratsch because a lot of times my mother would take the kids in to help look after them, and if she was going out on a date they would sleep over or something like that, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah. And families helped each other.

Respondent 1: Very much so.

Interviewer: Everyone was busy with their own families…

Respondent 1: But they all helped as much as you could. Like down the street was the Wymans, the Greenspans, **[0:06:00]** like there were certain people that were friends before and they stayed friends or family, and you made friendships with different people.

Interviewer: I have the impression that if you live near Harbord, or you live near Bloor, or you being near College, that your life very much was on the street you lived on, but the east-west street was the one you lived closest to. You didn't use the whole neighbourhood as much.

Respondent 1: **[0:06:30]** Well it depends on where the friends were. So my friends went all the way up to basically Harbord, and a few that were closer to Bloor.

Interviewer: Yeah. But all the way up to Harbord.

Respondent 1: Yeah. And my cousin, Dorothy, lived on Borden. Like 197.

Respondent 2: Further north.

Respondent 1: So she went to school at Lansdowne instead of King Edward. And her late brother Gary also went to school there, so you made friends with – **[0:07:00]** even though they weren't on your street I had friends who lived on Brunswick, on Robert, on Borden, Lippincott. Friends who live south of College that I'd go with, but your life and the people you knew was maybe in that whole block. You knew them really well, if you went to school with them. If you didn't, they were passing. Like Jerry's cousin, Edith Drutz, married Dr. Frank Birnbaum. **[0:07:30]** His parents lived on Major Street, and we would always see Frank's Father, Mr. Birnbaum, walking up and down Major. He was friendly with my father and mother. He would come in and say hello. This man lived to be a hundred. Then the Smalls lived on Ulster, I believe. Their daughter, Ethel Small, married my cousin Harry Wasserman. **[0:08:00]** And their son was Dr. Small, a dermatologist. My cousin Harry's son became a dermatologist. Gary Wasserman. So there were people who would go up and down the street that you knew, but they were older than us, and I knew them because of my parents.

Interviewer: But you know, as you're saying Dr. this and Dr. that, I'm seeing that as the generations went on there were more and more well educated young people.

Respondent 1: Right. Because **[0:08:30]** in my family, my brother Sheldon is the first lawyer. And in those days, like I went as far as third form high school. I went to Commerce.

Interviewer: So wait a minute, third form means what grade?

Respondent 1: Eleven.

Interviewer: How old were you? Okay.

Respondent 1: Sixteen.

Interviewer: Okay. Because they're not using that word anymore. Yeah.

Respondent 1: No. So I finished third year Commerce, and my husband and I were engaged, but we **[0:09:00]** were engaged by seventeen. And my mother said, "I want you to finish school," but I had a job, and she said, "Well, maybe you should go to work because we need the money for Sheldon to go to university."

Interviewer: Oh that's interesting.

Respondent 1: And I'm six years older than my brother, the next one. So I said, "Ma, I'm getting married. I have a good job. Yeah, what's the difference? I'll go to work," so I never got my diploma, so I never finished fourth year at Commerce and I **[0:09:30]** went to work. Sheldon went on to go to Harbord and go on to be a lawyer, and that was the dream of every parent – was that if they had a son – daughters no, but sons – they had a doctor, a lawyer, and an accountant. [Laughter] Or a dentist. And that was every mother's dream and the father's.

Interviewer: Especially the immigrants.

Respondent 1: Exactly.

Interviewer: That was a measure of success.

Respondent 1: A measure of success was if your son became a professional. If your daughter married **[0:10:00]** a professional it was even better. [Laughter] But they never looked to your daughter becoming a professional. There were a number of my friends that did go to Harbord that went on to have professional lives. They became therapists…

Interviewer: Like physiotherapist you mean?

Respondent 1: Physiotherapists, social workers…

Interviewer: Teachers?

Respondent 1: …teachers. None of my personal friends **[0:10:30]** became lawyers or doctors, but later generation – like by the time Sheldon, six years later, it already moved a little more. And by even a year difference there was more, and by the time my brother came around – twelve years later, my youngest brother – so you've got another generation. You've got more doctors, rabbis. It all turned over. Like my brother Sheldon became a lawyer **[0:11:00]** and his three best friends – two became doctors, and another one became a lawyer. So and they're still friends until today. So like six years, seven years in age made a lot of difference in the families. And again it depended on what your family did as a living because if you worked in the factory and you were barely getting by, and you managed to own a house, you did pretty good. **[0:11:30]** And you didn't say – well you put everything into your children. So you wanted to your children to have what they didn't have, and that they should have a profession because that would guarantee them a good living.

Interviewer: Yeah. So there were expectations, especially for the sons.

Respondent 1: Oh very, very much so.

Respondent 2: Oh. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Well those expectations as you say for you, just six years older than the next brother, was to marry well. Be able to hold a good job and marry somebody to take care of the family.

Respondent 1: **[0:12:00]** Right. There was never any doubt in your parents' mind that being a girl that you would get married. There was no such thing you're not going to get married. [Laughs] You know? Today you don't want to think that way. In those days – and the boys had to have a profession because they had to make a living, so that was the progression. The girls – we went out to Commerce. Most of us went to commercial school. We were secretaries, bookkeepers, and the **[0:12:30]** odd one went on to accounting. They finished Commerce but they went on, got higher degrees. Even just kept going to school.

Interviewer: But you were all expected to get married and have children, but hopefully have some skills so you could earn some money too.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Well I don't think – yeah. The expectation is that you would earn the money before you went to get married. The thought that **[0:13:00]** you would have to work after you got married, that you would want to work after you got married wasn't really there. You would be a housekeeper because by then you're in the fifties, and television had come on and you're looking at all of these shows with the wonderful mothers who stayed home and looked after the children, and that was the expectation. It wasn't the expectation of, "Oh, I was going to have another career and go on and do something else." That was something that had to come from you.

Interviewer: So your career **[0:13:30]** was being a good wife and a good mother and raising healthy children, and they could be professionals, whatever.

Respondent 1: That was that generation.

Interviewer: And it was honoured.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Definitely.

Interviewer: It wasn't a second class citizen I don't think.

Respondent 1: No, no. And then many of my friends, we got married and those days there was no help. Once you got pregnant you had to leave your job pretty well, and there was no unemployment insurance. It was nothing. You stayed home with your kids until such time as you – **[0:14:00]** if you had to go back to work, there was no daycare. Maybe there was one or two around the city, but not really. But if you had a grandmother to look after your children, or a friend so that if you had to go back to work, you went to work. Or some of us took in – like I worked after we were married, I didn't have a child for three years. So I worked until the end **[0:14:30]** of December and he was born March. So I never went back to the office to work, and you never got unemployment insurance. Nothing really. Your husband was your sole provider, and whatever savings you had. But by then my father was out of the factory working on the shoes and he had gone into business buying and selling houses, so he was starting to make a living at that, **[0:15:00]** so I was doing the bookkeeping for that at home. So a lot of us would do work in the house, bookkeeping or whatever.

Interviewer: You know we talk about a home industry.

Respondent 1: That would be our generation already. That was our generation. Then when the kids – when I had my second son, a lot of our friends, by the time we had the one or two kids and they were in school all day, a lot of my friends **[0:15:30]** went back to work as secretaries, bookkeepers, or whatever, and some went back to school. Some went on to get degrees later on in life. So that was already you're in the '60s, so things had changed.

Interviewer: Yeah. And those certainly were changes. I'd like to talk a little bit about the sidewalks, the back lanes. How were those used – **[0:16:00]** the sidewalks, the back lanes, the roads?

Respondent 1: Well the sidewalks were wonderful. Everybody had a front porch, so you sat on your front porch and you saw everything going on in the street, and communicated, and you played on the street. Played hopscotch, skipping, whatever. The boys played hockey on the roads. There weren't the amount of cars there are today, so the car came back. Everybody had respect for everybody. And then roller-

skating **[0:16:30]** on the street, and bicycle riding – whoever could ride a bike and have a bike – on the streets. And we participated in the street. And back lane, we didn't use our back lane. And there was a lane behind us.

Interviewer: Was it paved?

Respondent 1: No.

Interviewer: Oh, it wasn't paved.

Respondent 1: No. No. It was a dirt lane. And we had a garage in the back of our house, but it wasn't a useable garage because the lane **[0:17:00]** ended there. We had a little bit of a backyard, and everybody who had a backyard tried to make a victory garden sort of if they could.

Interviewer: So that means growing vegetables.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Because it was during the war and after the war, but it wasn't much of a backyard because you're – how much of a backyard do you have here? Maybe it was bigger. I don't know. So you had – if your frontage was fifteen or sixteen, and maybe you had another fifteen feet **[0:17:30]** to the back lane or something, so the backyards weren't used. They were used to hang your clothes out and maybe have a little bit of vegetables out there and that's all. You used your front porch.

Interviewer: Okay. But that's very different from now because…

Respondent 1: Very different.

Interviewer: …you talked about the victory gardens where people planted vegetables, or fruit, or whatever they planted, and hanging clothes, and it's quite different now.

Respondent 1: Very different.

Respondent 2: The amount of vegetables that **[0:18:00]** were planted were limited. We all ate whatever we had.

Respondent 1: Just whatever you grew or got in the store. There wasn't this flying in of all the foods, so you're very limited in what vegetables over the winter.

Respondent 2: Yeah. Carrots.

Respondent 1: There's carrots, onions, celery.

Interviewer: So you say you grew those and you stored those.

Respondent 1: Well some of it you grew and some of it you bought and stored. So I remember my mother buying twenty-pound bags of sugar, twenty-pound bags of flour, **[0:18:30]** twenty-pound bags of potatoes, carrots, onions, and they were all stored in the basement. My mother would – and in the summer they would buy bushels of fruit because they would can. All the women canned. When all the fruits came off and they bought the fruits, they didn't buy a basket. They would buy bushels because they would sit and can. My mother would can hundreds of jars and we'd have **[0:19:00]** fruits all winter long.

Interviewer: So when you talk about these women working hard, that's another example.

Respondent 2: There's no question.

Respondent 1: Oh my god. We had coal furnaces. Who shovelled coal? You think the men shovelled the coal? The women shovelled the coal. They were at home.

Interviewer: So they put them into these big bins and then they put it into the…

Respondent 1: That's right. They shovelled the coal into the furnace. The women shovelled the coal. If the man was home he shovelled the coal, but night…

Respondent 2: A jacket heater.

Respondent 1: And then we had a jacket heater for heat.

Interviewer: What's a jacket heater?

Respondent 1: It **[0:19:30]** was a little stove for hot water, and when you needed hot water to take a bath, you took a bath once a week. You'd turn on the jacket heater. Some places you had to put a quarter in…

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: …to light it. You had washtubs. You washed on a washing board. You would give big sheets and stuff and there was nowhere to hang it. Yeah. Small backyard.

Respondent 2: How about on Thursday the fish?

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. And then you'd go shopping on Thursdays, **[0:20:00]** and most kosher homes all the women would go shopping Thursday. They would buy fresh carp.

Interviewer: And where would they buy that carp? Where?

Respondent 1: At the fish store?

Interviewer: And where was that?

Respondent 1: In Kensington.

Respondent 2: Kensington.

Respondent 1: Or on Spadina. Wherever area you lived in. You'd go…

Interviewer: So there were fish stores all over the place.

Respondent 1: …there. You bring home fresh fish, and you would put it in the bathtub and you would leave it there until Friday morning, and Friday morning you would kill it, and scale it, and cook it for Friday night dinner.

Interviewer: **[0:20:30]** Oh my god.

Respondent 1: The chickens…

Respondent 2: It's true.

Respondent 1: ….you went and you bought the fresh chicken and you took it to the flicker because that was my job for my aunt and uncle, and they would take a fresh fish like that that you've got to kill.

Interviewer: Okay. Just say what the Shechita is.

Respondent 1: The Shechita is the ritual slaughter, so you had to get it killed in a certain way.

Interviewer: Okay. So you bought it and…

Respondent 1: You bought it fresh, you took it to the Shechita, to the ritual Shechita…

Interviewer: Fresh meaning alive.

Respondent 1: Alive. [Laughter] You took it to the ritual slaughterer, **[0:21:00]** and then you took it to the flicker who took the flickers off. [Laughs] Sometimes they'd be in the same place. Sometimes you would go and the chicken place would have it done for you. You could go and get it already done, but a lot of women would prefer to do it.

Interviewer: They would want to choose their own chicken?

Respondent 1: Choose their own chicken. They had to feel it. [Laughter] And they choose their own fish. They had to kill it.

Interviewer: Whoa.

Respondent 1: **[0:21:30]** And that's what they did. So when I said that these women worked hard, let me tell you, they worked overdrive.

Interviewer: So the fish would be swimming in your bathtub?

Respondent 1: In my bathtub.

Interviewer: And then your mother would be the one to kill it? Or your father?

Respondent 1: My mother. My father didn't know nothing. The men in those days went to work. If they knew how to boil water, you were very lucky because that's – they didn't do anything.

Respondent 2: What do you mean anything?

Respondent 1: They didn't do any housework. **[0:22:00]**

Respondent 2: That's right.

Respondent 1: They didn't cook, they didn't clean. Nothing.

Interviewer: So it was a very clear division of labour.

Respondent 1: Very, very clear division of labour.

Interviewer: You know, kind of Jane and Tarzan, and Jane does this, and Tarzan does that.

Respondent 1: Well the woman was definitely – men worked hard. I would say the women worked harder.

Interviewer: Well it's a lot. I mean what you're describing plus taking care of the kids and the laundry…

Respondent 1: Yep. And the baking, and the cooking. And then my mother made her own cream, her own butter during the war **[0:22:30]** because you couldn't get a lot of this stuff. So you only ate what you could buy. You couldn't get the fresh fruits and vegetables and all the foods you see today. There was just no way.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right. Right. They weren't importing it from Mexico or the United States.

Respondent 1: No. [Laughs]

Respondent 2: None of it.

Respondent 1: None of it. None of it. You got oranges – oh my god. And the oranges – there wasn't toilet paper like there is today. Oranges came **[0:23:00]** in a crinkly orange paper. That was used in the toilet. [Laughter] And so was the newspapers. The Jewish newspapers. And if you read an English newspaper they were torn up. That's what you used in the toilet.

Respondent 2: It's true.

Interviewer: It didn't block the toilets?

Respondent 1: They'd be blocked.

Interviewer: [Laughs] With twelve people sharing two toilets?

Respondent 1: Well maybe we had some toilet paper later on, but basically that's what you used. Everything was recycled. **[0:23:30]** The oranges came in these orange crates, okay? So the orange crates became your dressing table or your dresser because you could use the shelves. So people would put them together and put a top over it.

Respondent 2: Or seats in the back of the truck.

Respondent 1: Seats in the back of the truck.

Interviewer: Or else these toys that people would put wheels on.

Respondent 1: The kids would play in them, would play in the boxes. Who had the toys they have today?

Interviewer: So recycling happened long before the word came around.

Respondent 1: Long before. Oh my god.

Interviewer: This was happening – you're talking about **[0:24:00]** seventy years ago you were really recycling.

Respondent 1: Recycling. Women didn't go to the store and buy Motus and Kotex. They recycled rags.

Interviewer: Whoa. And then washed them.

Respondent 1: That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: My generation already went and bought, but my mother's generation, no.

Interviewer: So recycling was…

Respondent 1: It's an old story.

Interviewer: …it's as old as prostitution. **[0:24:30]** [Laughs]

Respondent 1: We grew up. My mother or my cousins, they made these wonderful shopping bags. You went to the store with your own shopping bag. The baker – we had home delivery for bakery. There was bakers that would deliver the bread, so that was in a paper bag. The milkman would come with the milk that was in the glass jars.

Interviewer: How does the milkman come?

Respondent 1: What? If they had a horse and wagon, **[0:25:00]** later it became a truck.

Interviewer: But it started off when you were a child. It was horse and wagon.

Respondent 1: Horse and wagon.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Respondent 1: The tea man until my mother moved away…

Interviewer: What man?

Respondent 1: …in the '50s. Flowerdale Tea. He would deliver tea to the house with a horse and wagon until the '50s.

Interviewer: So that's another huge – when I talked about the sidewalks and the roads you talked about kids playing, people gathering and sitting on the front porches…

Respondent 1: And all of the deliveries.

Interviewer: But all these deliveries with horses.

Respondent 1: **[0:25:30]** Horse and wagons, and then his father had a horse and wagon, and then they graduated to a truck. But they started out with horse and wagons. The milk was – I think the only horse and wagon delivery we had on Major already that I remember first was the bakery. He got a truck. I think Mr. Kay already had a truck. And the milkman…

Respondent 2: I don't think so. I don't think so.

Respondent 1: …maybe, but the Flowerdale Tea was **[0:26:00]** the funniest because he was delivering from a little green truck with a horse.

Interviewer: Yeah. And what about the ice?

Respondent 1: The iceman would come too.

Respondent 2: Oh yeah. [Laughs]

Respondent 1: The horse and wagon with the truck. But we graduated to a fridge, we got a Frigidaire – I think we must have been in the house a few years. Two, three years until we got a fridge, and then my mother took the coal stove down to the basement and we got a gas stove.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Okay. So **[0:26:30]** you moved from coal to gas. Right.

Respondent 1: And then we moved from coal furnace to oil heat. Peace Heating it was called.

Interviewer: Peace?

Respondent 1: P-E-A-C-E. So we had an oil furnace.

Interviewer: So they schlepped all that other dirty stuff out and replaced it.

Respondent 1: Right. With oil.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 2: And you got rid of the space that was used – that the coal used to take.

Respondent 1: Yeah. But basically your cellar was a cellar. **[0:27:00]** My girlfriend who later became my step-sister, my step-mother – they had a brand new house at 10 Ulster. This was two little houses, 8 and 10, and they bought that house when it was being built. And they moved in there, and that house had a finished basement. A recreation room.

Interviewer: Whoa.

Respondent 1: Now that – my mother and my step-mother both couldn't say recreation room. It was a decoration room. **[0:27:30]** [Laughter] Yeah. And like that house was more modern already. It had a very nice kitchen like you have here that they had with tiles and that, and they had a living room, and a dining area, a kitchen-dining area, and a bedroom. Then they had rooms upstairs and they rented a flat upstairs too. And we used to have parties in the decoration room. [Laughs] The recreation room.

Interviewer: Very cute.

Respondent 1: **[0:28:00]** But most of the basements were basements. That was the only house we knew that you could go downstairs…

Interviewer: So it was kind of a rough place where you could put all the vegetables downstairs.

Respondent 1: Right. And the furnace. And some of them weren't – the basements were really low and you sort of had to crouch. For my parents it was always high enough because they were five feet tall. [Laughs] But other people had to crouch in a lot of basements, **[0:28:30]** but they weren't liveable spaces.

Interviewer: Yeah. So they were used for stuff, but certainly not for family living.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Respondent 2: Most of them got dug out.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Respondent 2: Dug out afterwards.

Interviewer: Eventually. Yeah.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Some had trap doors, some had trap doors and a ladder to go in the basement. We had stairs. We had stairs going up to the second floor off the kitchen also because it was a big house, but that wasn't necessarily every house.

Interviewer: **[0:29:00]** Can you talk about the renovations? Like you just mentioned having the ladder, or those who had stairs, or this person who had, as you say – like your mother said, the decoration room. What renovations were you aware of that began to happen towards the end of your living in this area?

Respondent 1: Well when we moved in most of these houses in the area **[0:29:30]** had two kitchens and one bathroom because you moved into the main floor and you rented out the second floor. If you have a third floor, you rented that out too. So you would have a family like four, six living in two, three rooms and in order to pay for your house you'd rent out the flats. Later on you started upgrading. So **[0:30:00]** the original kitchens in a lot of the houses were a sink and that's it. You brought your own furniture into the kitchen, so you'd have – I don't even know how you – a cabinet. So you'd see these old cabinets that you'd put dishes in, and then they had a drawer that would pull out like an extra table that you'd prepare food or bake on. So you had **[0:30:30]** a sink, a stove, an icebox. Then you graduated to a fridge. Then maybe you graduated to some cupboards in the kitchen other than that thing. Then later on they started modernizing, so you had the kitchen cupboards.

Interviewer: They provided the sink. That was it then. The rest…

Respondent 1: At first that's all you had. Yeah, there was a sink and you had to bring everything else. So you'd do your dishes, so you'd pull over **[0:31:00]** a chair, and maybe you'd wash the dish there and rinse it here, or wash it on the chair, or rinse it in the sink. You'd brush your teeth in the sink because you only had one toilet for everybody. You'd wash your hands and face; you couldn't line up for the bath. You'd never get to work or to school.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the bathroom was used for the toilet.

Respondent 1: Toilet.

Interviewer: Or the once-a-week bath.

Respondent 1: Or the bath. And if you were lucky enough to get in there before anybody else, there was a sink in there. You'd wash.

Respondent 2: I think your father used the kitchen…

Respondent 1: To take a shave.

Respondent 2: …to take a shave.

Respondent 1: **[0:31:30]** Because you couldn't. Everybody's rushing to go to work. You get up at five. My father had to be at work at seven. He'd get up at five o'clock because he took the streetcar wherever he went. The man upstairs worked at Tip Top Tailor's down at the Lakeshore. He would be up at five o'clock in the morning because he had to be at work. So everything – the kitchen was the central point for cleaning.

Interviewer: Yeah. And the sink was used for…

Respondent 1: For everything, not just for washing **[0:32:00]** dishes and preparing food. So your kitchen was minimal, then everything started to upgrade. And we all had hardwood floors, paint, and wallpaper. Like my cousin, Dorothy's father was a painter, so every few years you'd upgrade and paint something. And then as families got more

money they would upgrade the kitchen, they would upgrade a bathroom. **[0:32:30]** See, when my father and mother already were moving out of Major Street and going into renovation, they were buying and selling old houses and fixing them up. So fixing them up was they would buy a house, an older house like on Major, Bloor, wherever, and if there wasn't two kitchens, nice kitchens, the carpenter would make uppers and lowers in the kitchen, **[0:33:00]** a new floor, put in a sink, toilets. They would upgrade the toilets, put in the bathtub, sink, toilet. Make sure that all the floors are done, that everything is painted. The roof is done, the furnace is in. We started putting in gas furnaces wherever you could. Not oil. So everything in the '50s and '60s, already people started to upgrade their homes and renovating. And **[0:33:30]** you had a new wave of immigrants coming in, so you had all the Italians coming in after the war and they were buying the homes, or whatever ethnicity was coming in after the war, they would start buying houses and you were able to sell them. And they, again, would be the immigrant. They would live on the main floor. They would rent the second floor so they would be able to pay their mortgages.

Interviewer: **[0:34:00]** So they did what you did.

Respondent 1: They did exactly what we did.

Interviewer: Yeah. And that's what immigrants do.

Respondent 1: That's right.

Respondent 2: But we gave them…

Respondent 1: We gave them a better quality of home than we had. They already had maybe two bathrooms, two kitchens that were really kitchens, and they had cupboards and things. Because when the original homes – if you ever saw them, they weren't great. So the renovations started '50s, '60s. Everybody **[0:34:30]** started upgrading and everything started moving north, east, west, and you had the newer homes. And the people with money always had the bigger homes and the nicer places, and your working stints upgraded as they went along. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Now you're talking about everybody working so hard. In terms of your own adolescence, you've been **[0:35:00]** dating since what age the two of you?

Respondent 1: Sixteen.

Interviewer: Sixteen. And how old were you when you got engaged?

Respondent 1: Seventeen, eighteen. Eighteen. We got married at nineteen.

Respondent 2: I never got engaged. [Laughter] I asked her to go steady and she said, "No, not unless you can marry me." [Laughter]

Interviewer: You drive a hard bargain. [Laughs]

Respondent 1: I think we were seventeen.

Interviewer: Oh my god. And then you got married at nineteen. You were both nineteen?

Respondent 1: Yeah. Just short of twenty.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: We got married March 28th. **[0:35:30]** He turned twenty May 1st, and I turned twenty in August.

Interviewer: Okay. So talk to me, please, about dating at that time.

Respondent 1: Dating was interesting. [Laughs] We were – it was a lot of group dating. You would meet at the Y or the B'nai Brith.

Interviewer: And were those at that time?

Respondent 1: We had class. The Y was at 44 St. George or 12 Major. 12 **[0:36:00]** Major…

Interviewer: Near College.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Yeah. Major had clubs and we had club meeting rooms there, and we held dances. And B'nai Brith had the B'nai Brith house on Spadina and the Crescent.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Respondent 1: Just where Scott Mission is. Right there. So you had the funeral home and B'nai Brith, Scott Mission, and the Silver Rail or whatever it's called. [Laughs] Silver dollar.

Interviewer: **[0:36:30]** So you did a lot of stuff as a group of young people.

Respondent 1: So we all belonged to clubs. I belonged to Hanna Szenes at B'nai Brith. Jerry belonged to 103. He came off Gedolah AZA. That was head of AZA of the area, and I was treasurer and president of Hannah Szenes. And we were at Hannah Szenes – we were at B'nai Brith from the time we were thirteen until we **[0:37:00]** got married. Both of us were in B'nai Brith. We belonged to the Y. He belonged because he played basketball and all that, and I went there because I knew a lot of the other kids, but I didn't belong to the clubs there. And then we had dances at schools. The public schools – high schools already would have dances.

Respondent 2: And the public schools too.

Respondent 1: Too. Yeah. And then we started dating **[0:37:30]** individually out of the groups.

Interviewer: Around what age?

Respondent 1: Thirteen, fourteen.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. And what kinds of things would you do when you were dating?

Respondent 1: We'd go to a movie. Not me, I didn't go to movies too well. [Laughs]

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Respondent 1: I wasn't a good moviegoer. I'd get to the cashier and then I'd say to the guy, "I'm not going in." [Laughs]

Interviewer: You didn't want to go in. You had some anxiety about it.

Respondent 1: I had some anxiety. Yeah.

Interviewer: The big dark room?

Respondent 1: I don't know what it was. **[0:38:00]** Some of the movies just didn't sit with me. I went to the movies later on, but for years I didn't go to the movies. I'd go see "Donald Duck," [laughter] but I couldn't take the other stuff. But we'd have parties, so we'd go to the parties. Kids would go to the movies. We went on to picnics, moonlight cruises on Lake **[0:38:30]** Ontario.

Interviewer: Oh that's nice.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Respondent 2: Especially when she went with one guy and I went with a shiksa. [Laughter]

Respondent 1: But we went, and we gather at people's homes.

Interviewer: So a lot of it was…

Respondent 1: Even though we were a couple it still took place at people's homes. We would put the radio on and dance to the radio.

Interviewer: And what were the dances? Do you remember the dances?

Respondent 1: Yeah. Jitterbug.

Respondent 2: **[0:39:00]** Tango.

Respondent 1: Tango. That. We'd do a lot of parties.

Interviewer: Holding hands? Kissing?

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. Big time. [Laughter] Oh yeah. [Laughter] My father was funny. We'd been dating for a while. He came to teach me algebra actually.

Interviewer: Jerry came to teach you algebra?

Respondent 1: He was my girlfriend's boyfriend and they broke up, and he started **[0:39:30]** teaching me algebra. And they got to be my hosts at my surprise sweet sixteenth…

Interviewer: Oh my god.

Respondent 1: …that they made me. So anyways we were dating for a while and he's saying goodnight one night, and my father's looking at me and he says, "And you're not going to kiss him goodnight?" [Laughter]

Interviewer: So I guess that was permission.

Respondent 1: [Laughs] Not that he hadn't done it, he just wasn't going to do it in front of my father. [Laughter]

Interviewer: That's a delightful story.

Respondent 1: **[0:40:00]** But there was a lot of individual dating and we – you know, you were introduced by other people in other groups, and we were very groupy at that time. You didn't go – today you go to bars and I don't know what the kids – they go to these concerts and that. We went to B'nai Brith, and we went to the Y, and to school, and that's how we…

Interviewer: So the organizations that were in place…

Respondent 1: That's how we met.

Interviewer: …that's where you would congregate.

Respondent 1: **[0:40:30]** That's how we met our friends. Most of us met our prospective husbands that way, or we were introduced by somebody from another group or whatever.

Interviewer: And well when you showed me the pictures, you said, “This person’s married to this person.”

Respondent 1: And most of us went to school together or lived in the area.

Interviewer: So it was a very powerful, tight community.

Respondent 1: Very. Yeah.

Respondent 2: She can go up and down Major Street and tell you pretty well.

Interviewer: Well she – I think of this list that you gave me.

Respondent 1: **[0:41:00]** Yeah. There’s a lot not in there. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah. No, I don’t need more than that.

Respondent 1: Because a lot of them aren’t alive.

Interviewer: Just in the neighbourhood corner stores, do you recall some? I’m not talking about College Street.

Respondent 1: No. So on Major the one at Ulster and Major on the southwest corner was the store, but we never – I know it was there, but we never went up there for anything. And then there was **[0:41:30]** if you went further up at Sussex, Barbara Pell’s parents had a store at Sussex and Major. Those are the only two I knew on Major. On Robert was the one right across from Lansdowne School at the end of the lane. Maybe there was other ones on Robert, I don’t know. On Brunswick, was there a corner store on the street?

Respondent 2: They were big houses.

Respondent 1: They were big houses. There was no store. There was the **[0:42:00]** Shul by Rabbi Reiger. The stores – well there was. At the corner of Harbord and Brunswick on the northwest corner was Greenspan’s Butcher. There was one brother. The other Greenspan’s was at Brunswick around the corner, 7 Brunswick, and College. That was another one. The kosher butcher. The Greenspans. Next, **[0:42:30]** just up the street from Greenspan was

Goldie Tennenbaum's parents. They had a chicken place there. Now there may have been grocery stores there. I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah. But there were so many little specialty shops.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Always.

Interviewer: So you got your chickens here…

Respondent 1: Yeah. And your butcher there…

Interviewer: And cheese.

Respondent 1: …and the bakery. Harbord Bakery was there forever. Kushner's Fish Store was next door.

Interviewer: Oh. Yeah, I heard of that fish store.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Now it's the restaurant. Basil **[0:43:00]** Zeit's is now the Japanese restaurant at the corner of Major and Harbord on the northwest side. That was Zeit's convenience store. There were more on Harbord, but I didn't know them all.

Interviewer: But lots of little stores.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Lots of little stores. Dressmakers. There were dressmakers too.

Interviewer: **[0:43:30]** Do you remember when the Second World War ended?

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me. What do you remember?

Respondent 1: We were in a place called Bronte Kash's Farm. We were renting a cottage there that summer. August – my birthday was August 6th, and the Japanese did the bombing that day, '45. And we were at **[0:44:00]** Kash's farm and we heard on the radio, so we made these big signs. And my cousin Dorothy Wasserman was there, and the two kids, her cousins, were there. And a whole load of us.

And we all went out on the highway with these signs because there were cars coming and maybe they didn't know because they didn't really have radios in their cars in those days. And they would stop.

Interviewer: What did you have on the sign?

Respondent 1: "The war is over."

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: **[0:44:30]** But I don't think there's any pictures of it because who had a camera?

Interviewer: But you made signs.

Respondent 1: We made signs and we held them up there.

Respondent 2: I wasn't there.

Respondent 1: You were in camp, but we…

Interviewer: But you remember it.

Respondent 2: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: You did.

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. And in May 7th, that was the European war.

Respondent 2: European.

Respondent 1: That war was over. I don't remember where I was that day. I don't know why. I just **[0:45:00]** don't remember that one. I think there was a lot of – I don't know if I was in the house at school or what when we heard that that part of the war was over, but the one – that summer I really remember because I was eleven.

Respondent 2: And we weren't in school.

Respondent 1: No. And we weren't in school. But during the war, right after the war it was very **[0:45:30]** interesting. And during the war there was a lot of blackouts.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: And we had air raid sirens. And we made things in school, we were making stuff for the soldiers. Like we would get together money and we'd make bags and we would put toothpaste and personal items, and all these things would be given to the soldiers. I don't know if every soldier did it.

Respondent 2: We saved in the penny bank.

Respondent 1: And then we had penny banks. **[0:46:00]** So there was a lot of war effort put in where families and children could do things for the war effort. And knitting. I would have known how to knit. We all made our own socks, our own sweaters, and things.

Interviewer: And did you make it for the war also?

Respondent 1: We made the socks for the guys.

Interviewer: For the guys.

Respondent 1: Yeah. Yeah. And then after the war, when you found out if you had family – so my father had one brother who lived in France and you would – **[0:46:30]** we found out he was alive, so I remember we would buy groceries and then we would put money in the flour. And she would put a box together of goodies to send him. And then you would take a sugar sack, and she would put the sugar sack over the box, and then she would put more paper over the box.

Interviewer: But she was sending money.

Respondent 1: We would send money.

Interviewer: In the sugar? In the flour?

Respondent 1: In the flour to my uncle.

Interviewer: So it was **[0:47:00]** cash that your mother was sending.

Respondent 1: It was cash. It wouldn't be a lot. Ten dollars, twenty dollars, whatever.

Interviewer: That's plenty.

Respondent 1: And you would send it to my uncle. And then after the war when the immigrants started coming in there were places in Toronto where they would come and my mother and my aunts would go down to the houses on Cecil wherever the people were bringing them into Canada, and maybe some of them didn't have family. And you went there looking for family **[0:47:30]** because not everybody had an address, but they knew somebody lived here. And we found distant relatives that way.

Interviewer: Amazing.

Respondent 2: And your father got over too.

Respondent 1: There was a whole bunch of people that they helped.

Interviewer: So they would go – that's when they brought the Jewish immigrants.

Respondent 1: Different houses.

Interviewer: And you sometimes found family members.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Remarkable. At that time, was there any effect of having **[0:48:00]** the university so close to your neighbourhood? Or were you aware of any effect?

Respondent 1: We knew the university was there and we were very happy when somebody could go there. [Laughs] But it was – my brother, when he decided to become a lawyer there was no – he wasn't going to go anywhere else. He was going to the University of Toronto. I

mean there was Osgoode and there was Toronto, University of Toronto, but **[0:48:30]** he chose to go to University of Toronto. And in those days it wasn't as difficult to get into the universities because there weren't that many people applying, so your chances of going to the university of your choice was much better.

Interviewer: Yeah. So you're saying it was easier then.

Respondent 1: It was much easier.

Respondent 2: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: It wasn't like one out of every ten get in.

Respondent 1: No. No. For medicine it was still a problem because they would go to the University of Toronto if they lived here, but a lot of them graduated from Johns Hopkins or they'd go **[0:49:00]** to the States.

Interviewer: So they sometimes went to the States, eh?

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Respondent 2: Yeah. They couldn't get in right away.

Respondent 1: But it was hard. Like after the war, for a lot of professions it was harder. What happened when the soldiers came back from the war and they were given a preference to go to the university or college to get a profession if they didn't have one, so my cousins…

Respondent 2: Even if they didn't go to high school.

Respondent 1: Yeah. They were given choices. So three of my cousins **[0:49:30]** decided they wanted to go to become optometrists. Two got in and the third one didn't. There was no room because there was a limit on how many Jews were allowed.

Interviewer: That was just what I was going to ask you.

Respondent 1: That was the limit.

Interviewer: The quota.

Respondent 1: So the quota, Harry Wasserman and Henry Schanfield, they were first cousins. They got in. Moises, Harry's brother – my cousin Moises, he's still alive – **[0:50:00]** he couldn't get in. He was in the Air Force, but he couldn't get in to optometry. He was getting married so he didn't go to finish to go in.

Interviewer: So the quota was cut off at some point.

Respondent 1: I think it was eight Jews in those days were allowed into optometry school. And maybe in medical school, ten.

Interviewer: Yeah. I remember that. I remember that from Montreal. I just want to move on to one more thing **[0:50:30]** and that is – and I don't know if you have a sense of what it's like now, but the safety, the liveability of being down in the core of the city. How safe was it?

Respondent 1: We felt very safe. There was anti-Semitism, and I encountered it, but I didn't feel distress like I would feel now. I mean I was going to Shul one day and there was, **[0:51:00]** on Brunswick – and sometimes my mother would give me a nickel to go buy a cinnamon bun or something before I go into Shul. So I remember eating this cinnamon bun and standing there before I went up to my class, and this boy started yelling at me, "You dirty Jew." And I'm yelling back at him, but he didn't hit me or anything. So that was one time that I didn't feel really safe. **[0:51:30]** But generally I felt safe, but there was a lot of anti-Semitism that wasn't always directed at me, but I heard it. And I knew…

Interviewer: So you heard about it, but you didn't experience it very much.

Respondent 1: That was the first time I ever experienced that. The next time I experienced something I was already older. I was working at Loralee Ladies' Wear on Yonge next to the little theatre.

Respondent 2: Laura Leif?

Respondent 1: Loralee **[0:52:00]**.

Respondent 2: Loralee?

Respondent 1: Robin's store. My cousin's sister's place. And I have a tendency of getting very dark and I had curly hair. And I went across the road to the restaurant for lunch were – you know where the Eaton Centre is at Yonge and Queen? So there was the Eaton's store there. But at the corner was Woolworth's and the Eaton's store. Reitman's. **[0:52:30]** There was a laneway and there was a restaurant, and a shoe store, and I worked across the road next to the store. So I go across sometimes for lunch. If I didn't bring lunch on a Saturday – I worked three jobs then. So I worked there Saturday. Was I with you yet?

Respondent 2: I think so.

Respondent 1: So I went across for lunch one day and I'm at the counter and they're not serving me. **[0:53:00]** So I go, "Excuse me, I've got to get back for lunch. Why aren't you serving me?" And the guy says, "We don't serve blacks here." I look at him. I say, "Are you crazy? First of all, I'm not black. And who are you not to serve anybody?" I said, "I'm on my lunch hour. Are you going to serve me or not?" And I was hungry, so he served me. I never went in there again.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Respondent 2: I think **[0:53:30]** it was '54, '55.

Respondent 1: No. We got married in '54.

Respondent 2: '54.

Respondent 1: It had to be before we were married.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Respondent 1: Yeah. It was before we were married. Maybe it was '52.

Interviewer: So it wasn't your being Jewish. It was racist…

Respondent 1: It was being black.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent 1: And in those days they didn't like you to mix black and white. There wasn't a black – we had black friends, but if you went in – I worked for **[0:54:00]** Krinner Foods at the time, and my boss owned a restaurant called Sammy's on Spadina, and that's how I got the job. They had the restaurant, and they didn't want the blacks coming in with the whites. So he was putting a fifty-cent minimum on the table figuring that would discourage them because there was still the discrimination. My mother rented rooms. **[0:54:30]** One day she rented – a couple came from Vancouver. The guy was Chinese, the girl was white. The neighbours didn't like that very much either.

Interviewer: So your mother rented it to them, but the neighbours disapproved.

Respondent 1: They saw them coming in and out of the house. They told my mother on no uncertain terms.

Interviewer: Oh my god. So did your mother have to…

Respondent 1: She didn't do anything. She goes, "None of your business."

Interviewer: Oh, so your mother was tough when she had to be.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Respondent 2: A little tough. [Laughter]

Interviewer: **[0:55:00]** Wow.

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. She says, "None of their business. I'll do what I want. It's my house." But there was this discrimination there.

Interviewer: So if you're talking about they didn't want Asian, they didn't want Jewish, they didn't want blacks…

Respondent 1: But that was Toronto.

Respondent 2: That was the Jewish area.

Respondent 1: Yeah, but I'm saying Yonge Street. That was the commercial area. I mean that was…

Interviewer: And generally speaking in this neighbourhood…

Respondent 1: In our neighbourhood I never really felt unsafe. I never had that feeling.

Interviewer: **[0:55:30]** Now we're going to conclude. I'm just wondering if when you agreed to speak to me and you were thinking about we were going to have this conversation, and you were going to be sharing your observations, your experiences, is there anything that I did not ask you about that you had thought about that you thought, "Oh, I have to tell Eleanor this"? Is there anything either of you can think of?

Respondent 1: Well just that, well, the schools that we went to, we predominately went to from that **[0:56:00]** neighbourhood you're doing, so my friends mostly went to Lansdowne or to King Edward. King Edward was on Bathurst just north of College. Lansdowne was on Spadina just north of College.

Interviewer: Right. It's on Robert Street. Right.

Respondent 1: It was really two major – Robert, and Spadina – and those were the two major schools.

Interviewer: Elementary schools. Yeah.

Respondent 1: And then the high school in the area was Central Tech **[0:56:30]** at Harbord and Bathurst, Harbord and Borden. So that was your technical school. And to go to Harbord was on Palmerston, Euclid, and Harbord. And to go to Commerce you had to go all the way over to Shaw south of Harbord.

Interviewer: And that's where you went.

Respondent 1: Right. So that was the area of schools, and you were confined. Those were the schools you had to go to. There was no moving around.

Respondent 2: **[0:57:00]** And there was an area where depending where you lived.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you went to the school in your neighbourhood.

Respondent 1: Yeah. So that's – and it wasn't just the kids from College, Spadina, and Bathurst. It went south also. The kids in Kensington and Spadina, and going east would be Lansdowne. Some families went over to Huron Street maybe, and **[0:57:30]** like he went to Charles G. Fraser. He was in another area. It all depends what area you lived in. They had it sectioned off by wards and by…

Interviewer: Right. So you went to your neighbourhood schools.

Respondent 1: Neighbourhood schools. Always. You couldn't move around.

Respondent 2: And talking about your neighbourhood, in her class it was a tremendous amount of success.

Respondent 1: Yeah. The kids that came out of my school year for that era we had Allan Lindbaum became **[0:58:00]** a big judge. His brother Sydney a few years later became a judge. You had doctors, you had dentists. Jerry Gray – he wasn't in my school, but you had – like the kids who were now in their seventies really accomplished a lot. We had very bright students. Some became professors in the States.

Interviewer: So the immigrant parents came **[0:58:30]** over. You lived in crowded quarters. The parents worked hard. They had high expectations, and you did not disappoint your parents.

Respondent 1: No.

Respondent 2: Oh yes, she did. [Laughter]

Respondent 1: We didn't attain those expectations. [Laughter] She was supposed to be a lawyer. [Laughs] Never did. But what I'm saying is that the expectations – and you know, I thought we had a great childhood. I mean we never knew anyone who had anything better than us. **[0:59:00]** We were all in the same situation. Maybe somebody had a little bit better, but we all felt that was life. When we were getting married we thought, "Boy, he's going to have a job, and I'm going to have a job, and we've got a house. We've saved up money and had a house. How good was that?" And then we were able to buy a car a year-and-a-half later. I mean we worked hard.

Respondent 2: When we bought our house – no. I with my father and father-in-law **[0:59:30]** went to see the house three days before we were married and we bought it.

Interviewer: Whoa.

Respondent 2: And she saw it and she says, "I'm not going to marry you." [Laughter]

Respondent 1: I hated it.

Interviewer: Oh my god. So what happened?

Respondent 2: We lived there three years.

Respondent 1: We got married. [Laughter]

Interviewer: So you did marry him, but three years later you moved out of it.

Respondent 1: Yeah. We had to. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah. Because you didn't like it.

Respondent 1: Well I didn't like the house was number one. It was infested with mice, but we had two children. There was nowhere to put them with **[1:00:00]** three small rooms on the main floor.

Interviewer: Okay. I'm going to turn this off for now.

Respondent 1: Sure.

Interviewer: I just want to say this has been entertaining, delightful, and very informative. Thank you both. Thank you both very much. And you've given us an excellent wealth of information.

Respondent 1: If I remember anything else, or if you want anymore, tell me. I don't remember everything now. All right. So I'm Frances Gotkin. I lived at number **[1:00:30]** 24 Major Street from 1941 until I got married in 1954. And at that time when we – in 1941 there was twelve people living in our house. And subsequent years it went up and down from twelve to maybe more. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Oh my god. Okay.

Respondent 1: But we were quite a number of people in the three-storey **[1:01:00]** house with one bathroom. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

[01:01:04]

[End of recording]