

049 Sue Potts

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: I'm recording. So I'm sitting with Sue Potts at her neighbour's – sue lives at 162 Major, but we're sitting next door at her neighbour's because she's cat sitting. [Laughs] I want to say thank you very much on behalf of the history committee of the Harbord Village Residents' Association for agreeing to speak with us because...

Respondent: My pleasure.

Interviewer: ...we are looking at the neighbourhood, people who have lived here a long time, what their experiences have been, and what the changes have been. So thank you.

Respondent: You're welcome.

Interviewer: We'll start with just [0:00:30] when you did move here and who lived here with you at that time?

Respondent: My husband, John, and we also – it was a duplex so that we could afford it, so we did rent the upstairs...

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: ...until it was paid for.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Respondent: Our first tenant was Dr. Ellen Buchman, who became my physician. She was a resident at Mount Sinai.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. That was who lived upstairs first. No, it was a woman from Brown University, [0:01:00] Elizabeth Kirk, Medieval literature scholar. Had two nice women living upstairs.

Interviewer: For sure. Yeah.

- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** What made you choose to live in this neighbourhood in...
- Respondent:** I was teaching at Central Tech at that time. Come to teach at Central Tech in 1969 or '70.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** To do the musicals.
- Interviewer:** To do musicals?
- Respondent:** Mm-hm.
- Interviewer:** So you were teaching theatre?
- Respondent:** No, I taught English and Latin, but I came to Central Tech to **[0:01:30]** teach English, and because they needed somebody to direct the musicals. And they were wonderfully successful.
- Interviewer:** Oh my god. Could you – if you don't mind, tell me how old you were in '72 when you moved here.
- Respondent:** Just a minute. I think it was before then, but it might not have been. Okay. So...
- Interviewer:** What year were you born?
- Respondent:** That's what I'm doing now. [Laughter] Thirty-one or thirty-two.
- Interviewer:** **[0:02:00]** Okay. Thank you. Okay. So you came here as an adult, because one of the things...
- Respondent:** Oh yes.
- Interviewer:** ...one of the things I sometimes ask people is about dating, but I think if you came here with your husband and you were thirty-one or thirty-two, dating is not...

Respondent: That's why Norman Cook and his sister are so interesting because – whom I met just last year – who lived here as a child in this house.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. That's the one whose sister sent the wonderful picture of the man with the water wagon.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Yes. I didn't even know he had a sister. As I say, I met [0:02:30] him once, but I was out in the front yard next door, and he was coming out of Loire and introduced himself.

Interviewer: Fabulous.

Respondent: So he'll be back in May or June, and he's going to come, and I'm going to take him out for lunch.

Interviewer: And you will also introduce me to him.

Respondent: I will. [Laughter] Ask him if he wishes to talk to you, and I've mentioned that before.

Interviewer: Good.

Respondent: He's going to try to put a lot of it in writing for me, he says. So.

Interviewer: But if I could interview, I'd be very grateful.

Respondent: Oh yeah. No, that would be fine.

Interviewer: Thank you. Thank you. So you came here for very practical reasons [0:03:00] because your job was close by.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. What was the neighbourhood like at the time in terms of who made up the neighbourhood?

Respondent: I would say almost entirely – just thinking – Italian. This is – you see, in Jack Bingham's house, wasn't the Poretta's. I can't remember who – were wonderful – [0:03:30] Italian or Portuguese family. And next door to me was Jenny Langer, who came to Canada with her husband after World War II, and she spoke mostly Yiddish, [laughter] and...

Interviewer: Did you learn some Yiddish?

Respondent: Well I learned a lot from Jenny. She was very happy to get a good neighbour. Upstairs she [0:04:00] rented to Mrs. Pasternak, and Janice's house, 156, was owned by Mrs. Crystal, and it was divided up into a rooming house, and there was a lovely, old Jewish gentleman who lived there, among many others. Janice knows their names more than I because she wasn't working at the time. And the three of them would sit when the weather allowed on the front porch here on three different kitchen chairs, and when I came home they would tell me if anybody came [0:04:30] to the door, and whether or not they were Jewish. [Laughter] I said, "It doesn't matter to me, Jenny. It's fine." Mrs. Langer. I always called her Mrs. Langer. Yeah. She was a good neighbour. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. So you're saying a lot of Italian people, but a lot of Jewish people too?

Respondent: Oh very much. Yes, yes, yeah. Very much so. As I say, there was the – I think – yeah, it was where the potter – Janice is better on this. Where the pottery store is...

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: ...was, I think, [0:05:00] kosher meat or kosher chicken. There was one on the other side. Harbord. The bakery, there was the Harbord Fish Company across, right across the street, and I would say, yes, but then remind me to give you some pictures. My mother's, my mother-in-law's family lived on Lippincott Street and I have a few pictures of that, [0:05:30] which I'll give you.

Interviewer: Well I'll make my own copies. I'll take pictures of the pictures.

Respondent: Well what I want to do is walk down and see if I can find the actual house because she wasn't – she died at ninety-seven. She wasn't too good on the house numbers, but I'll show them to you before you go.

Interviewer: Good.

Respondent: So virtually because of Central Tech and Central Commerce, my in-laws were – I'm from Hamilton, but both Mr. and Mrs. Potts [0:06:00] were Toronto people, and his father was a fireman on Gladstone Avenue, and her family lived – so there were a lot of old Toronto lived here. Now Mr. Cook, Professor Cook told me that this was known as midtown. Like where do you live? We live midtown.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Respondent: He said that's what we called it. And like you talk to anybody and they say, "Oh yeah, my mother and father lived here."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: So it was like...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: [0:06:30] I don't know. It was...

Interviewer: I get a lot of that. I lived on Robert Street for many years now. I've been on Borden Street for twelve years, and I get, "What number?" with the same thing. Who used to live in these houses.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Right. But I love your description of these three women sitting on kitchen chairs.

Respondent: No, two women and a man. Janice does know the man's name and I've forgotten it.

Interviewer: But they were on kitchen chairs.

Respondent: Oh yes. [Laughter] They came out of this house every day and they sat on them, and watched the world go by. Jenny [0:07:00] was very limited because she never learned English. She couldn't go on the subway, she couldn't read the signs. Her husband was a tailor, and it's all his machinery. I can't remember whether it was still in the basement then. Might have been.

Interviewer: So you're saying he was a tailor. Did he work somewhere else, or did he work...

Respondent: He worked out of the basement.

Interviewer: He did?

Respondent: As far as I know, as far as I know. Now the bakery people – remember Mrs. Langer. Very sharp tongue.

Interviewer: Oh boy.

Respondent: If you talked [0:07:30] to the Kosowers, Susan and Roz know – I don't know how much more they would know about Mrs. Langer because they would have been much younger.

Interviewer: Yeah, they are. Yeah.

Respondent: They would have known that. But the big machines were down the basement. Now what I remember, and what my husband told me, and what Janice told me too was that that's – and that's how the Immerglucks on Spadina, they came too because they were tailors because Canada needed tailors, and that's how so many of the Jewish people came after the First World War. [0:08:00] And Jenny, the most interesting thing she told me, is what she did. She and her friends, they went to the dead bodies and they took out the bullets that could be used again. One of the few things she ever told me about her past.

- Interviewer:** So she did this during which war?
- Respondent:** Second World War.
- Interviewer:** Second World War. And what country was she in?
- Respondent:** Maybe Poland, but I'm not sure.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. But she took the bullets out of the bodies so...
- Respondent:** When she was young, yeah. That's what she did.
- Interviewer:** Oh my god.
- Respondent:** **[0:08:30]** So they sent the kids out to get the – that's what she's – that's all I know.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. Did she say that with any emotion?
- Respondent:** No, not really. As an interesting fact.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. It is a fascinating fact.
- Respondent:** Fascinating fact, isn't it?
- Interviewer:** Heartbreaking.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** But how they were budget-conscious, so they...
- Respondent:** There are two children, but it's very – I don't think I could get a hold of them anymore because there was no will when she – I owned this house too. When she died, **[0:09:00]** there was no will, so it went into the realm of the public trustee. And there was a son in California, and there was a daughter somewhere, who might know more, but I looked through the files I've got on this house when I bought it, and there's no record in any of the lawyer's stuff of the son's name or address, but they had to find them, and they had to

agree to it, and that kind of thing, so they would **[0:09:30]** be a source, but as I say, I looked in preparation for this to see if there was anything in the way of names, but there wasn't. Janice maybe.

Interviewer: Well I will phone her.

Respondent: Yeah?

Interviewer: I'll definitely – I'll try very hard to meet with her.

Respondent: Do you want to hear about Mrs. Crystal who also came after the war? She was a Christian scientist.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And I...

Interviewer: She lived in this neighbourhood too.

Respondent: No, but she lived in 156.

Interviewer: Okay. Got it.

Respondent: See these two? I bought Mrs. Langer's – and because when **[0:10:00]** John retired, we were going to live side-by-side in separate houses because then we wouldn't, as he used to say – I better not say it.

Interviewer: [Laughs] After I turn off the machine? [Laughs]

Respondent: Yes, I will. And so – and then Janice and her husband came, and they bought Mrs. Crystal's, and Mrs. Crystal went into, oh golly – Janice is better on this, but Janice would go and visit her, and so she learned all about – they were persecuted as well.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Like the gypsies or something?

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Respondent: [0:10:30] I don't know.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Respondent: And that's why they came to Canada. And I think her husband died by falling down the basement stairs, but you'd better ask Janice.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: But she was a very interesting woman. When we were working on this house, and we were building a fence, and she came over and she said to me, "You work just like man. That is good." [Laughter] And she was right. I said she's right, you do work like a man. [Laughs] Yeah, no. She was all right, Mrs. [0:11:00] Langer. Or Mrs. Crystal. Gave you pamphlets all the time if she was...

Interviewer: Okay. There's several things I want to come back to that you...

Respondent: Sure. No, no, no. I do talk too easily.

Interviewer: No, no, no.

Respondent: Stick with the questions.

Interviewer: Well they're things you're talking about that I want to come to anyway. You talked about having the tailors working at home. Can you talk a little more about that? So as far as you know, he had his machine...

Respondent: But he was dead before we came.

Interviewer: Okay. So...

Respondent: All I know was that the machines were there...

Interviewer: ...the machines were still here...

Respondent: ...and she talked about them.

- Interviewer:** Okay. **[0:11:30]** When you came, were there any other people that you knew who did work from their homes? What used to be called, or can be called, cottage industry? Anybody at that time? So you're talking about around 1972, '74, '70.
- Respondent:** No, I'm just going down the street.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] Yeah.
- Respondent:** No.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** No.
- Interviewer:** So okay, there wasn't. And the other thing that you mentioned...
- Respondent:** You know to interview Rose Rodriguez? Louie Laki's...
- Interviewer:** Yes, yes, yes. We had a wonderful...
- Respondent:** **[0:12:00]** She's the one that said that I should be interviewed and I said, "Well, I think maybe Janice," but as long as you get both of us you'll get most of what's the last forty years, yeah.
- Interviewer:** Excellent. Excellent. Yeah. Now you also mentioned these three people sitting on the front porch with the kitchen chairs.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Can you talk a little more about that? People sitting on the front porches. Are people doing it now? Did people do it more in '72 and '75? Sitting on the front porches. What's...
- Respondent:** Well if you walked down Major Street now, you'll see couches.
- Interviewer:** **[0:12:30]** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** On the front porch. There wasn't quite so much – mostly there was a lot of people just living in the houses, not student housing, so you

would see the older people sitting out at night. But you still do, Eleanor. If you walk down those same, there are people sitting out at night talking to their neighbours on the verandahs. There just aren't verandahs anymore much. A lot of people take them off.

Interviewer: They certainly take the overhead, the overhanging thing off.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: [0:13:00] Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: No, I like a verandah.

Interviewer: Oh, I think it's wonderful. And when I lived on Robert Street, I did a lot of that too. Much less since I've moved to Borden Street, but sitting outside until ten, eleven, twelve, one in the morning. Just schmoozing with the neighbours. It was wonderful.

Respondent: Yeah, it was.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you think it's happening as much? Or has it changed?

Respondent: I think now the schmoozing goes on in the backyards more at this end of the street, but if you go down the street there aren't really that [0:13:30] many verandahs anymore. They used to be able to get the marvelous wooden pillars. People would, you know, take the verandah off, the wooden pillars would go out to the garbage, John and I would go down and get it. [Laughter]

Interviewer: And what did you do with them?

Respondent: Oh gee, we turned them into the short ones. I think there's still one in Janice's house. You could make a wonderful plant stand, and there's another couple out in the other house that John marbleized, and – but they were – you could easily get [0:14:00] wonderful

wooden columns because people were knocking the verandahs off the front. That's one thing that's gone.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: There used to be – with every garbage, you could go down and you'd look and see that they were rotten or not, and...

Interviewer: Yeah. That's...

Respondent: It was good.

Interviewer: Yeah. My own personal, I love verandah living.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Or what Jane Jacobs called sidewalk living, using the front. Yeah.

Respondent: Well it was – I knew everything [0:14:30] that went on. [Laughter] Mrs. Langer told me. [Laughs] And we were both working, and we were busy doing something in the funny little vestibule. I'll show you the house. We'll go back through the house. And she came over with this terrible wine, and awful little cakes, and we had to have a visit. [Laughter] We had to have a visit.

Interviewer: Have they made the wines themselves?

Respondent: I didn't – it was hard sometimes to understand what she was saying.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. But anyways it was bad.

Respondent: We always understood each other quite nicely, so [0:15:00] we put some lawn chairs out in the front, and we sat and talked to her, and we drank the stuff, and ate the...

Interviewer: Drank the bad wine and ate the terrible cakes?

Respondent: No, it wasn't bad. It was just – it was very nice of her.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you have very fond memories of that time.

Respondent: Oh yes.

Interviewer: As I'm listening to you and watching you.

Respondent: Yeah, it was wonderful. Yeah. It was wonderful. It's a wonderful place to live, actually.

Interviewer: It was or is?

Respondent: Is still, I think, yeah. There's more break-ins, [0:15:30] and – but no, it's always been all these years. Been a wonderful place to live.

Interviewer: Well you know, we're sitting at your neighbour's house because you're cat sitting, but I'm seeing that she has these bars on the window.

Respondent: Mm-hm. I had – before I got the new windows I had bars on mine.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yup. No, this house was broken into – we've owned this house since 1985. It was broken into twice. [0:16:00] And then we put the bars on.

Interviewer: Do you still own this house?

Respondent: We do.

Interviewer: Oh, so you live next door at 162 but you own this one still.

Respondent: I do.

Interviewer: And you put the bars on.

Respondent: But it is Maya's house. She's a wonderful – been here a long time.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What about the food? Was there sharing of food? You're talking about Italian people, Jewish people. Any comments?

Respondent: There was only the awful Dominion Store [0:16:30] really. Nothing like – there was Poretta's Pizza. No. No, I wouldn't say there was food sharing. Every single one of these restaurants is new since 1972, except Poretta's pizza, which is now Messis.

Interviewer: And you mentioned a few places that were here a long time ago.

Respondent: There was a kosher – Janice owned a – I'm sure it was the pottery building. [0:17:00] Kosher chicken. Sally Bird Park was a Volkswagen repair garage. I remember that because we used to take our cars there.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: I can't remember the man's name. If I got a really old phone book I could probably find it. Like you know, your personal phone books. But you took it up and – well you repaired everything, but yeah...

Interviewer: So they took that whole structure down to build the park then.

Respondent: To build the park. Yeah. Well it was...

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: ...I suppose, an illicit use of a car repair place. Would be all toxic [0:17:30] and I suppose. It was a wonderful place to take your car though. Really was.

Interviewer: And so other stores that you can remember since we're talking about stores, on Harbord, or College, or Bloor...

Respondent: Next to Poretta's...

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: ...which is Messis, there was one of the two Chinese laundries. Janice remembers the man's name. I don't. Which is – I think it's now that – it's Middle Eastern Fusion, the restaurant right next door to Messis.

Interviewer: 93 Harbord [0:18:00] maybe?

Respondent: Yeah. That was a Chinese laundry, and there was one next to the Immergluck's tailor shop on Spadina as well, and that's where you took your laundry. Where Tati is was the only Laundromat. Was really small. Really small. And there was a – not a homeless man. [0:18:30] I don't know what he was exactly, but a little short man in the black suit and a fedora [laughter] that spent a lot of time in that Laundromat, and walked around the neighbourhood, and would come up and talk to you, and...

Interviewer: Was he a street person?

Respondent: I believe. He was so neat that he must have had a home. Apparently he did. The most famous street person we had was – if you look down the driveway there's quite a splashy new concrete garage with a red door where a guy keeps his motorcycles and things like [0:19:00] that, and that was a wooden garage, and I don't know whether you've ever seen Florence, a very fat lady. A street person.

Interviewer: Oh yes. Yes.

Respondent: Florence had a little business in that garage.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: You asked about [laughs] home – she didn't have a home, but she did have a little business [laughter] in the garage.

Interviewer: Oh my god.

- Respondent:** She was quite a problem **[0:19:30]** in the neighbourhood. She could become quite abusive, but we would see the gentleman coming out of the garage. I'll show you the garage on the way out.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** Which one. But it isn't – it now has a fancy metal door and everything like that, but it was – there was just – there was a big shed out here that – a big double-garage, and the Harbord Fish Company kept all the – that's what this house was. They used it as a storage place for dried fish.
- Interviewer:** This house that we're in?
- Respondent:** No, next door. No, the one next door. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** **[0:20:00]** Oh my god.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So Florence had what we called the cottage industry. [Laughs]
- Respondent:** A cottage industry. Yes, she did. In good weather in the garage.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. [Laughs] So she must have rented that space.
- Respondent:** No.
- Interviewer:** She just...
- Respondent:** Come on in, Tom. Suit yourself. I'm still – well come in, I'm still here, and Eleanor's here too. We can shut the door. Next time just let me know. Yes. I wish I – for use it – cottage industry. [Laughs] I just remembered now.
- Interviewer:** **[0:20:30]** So that was squatter's right, so to speak.
- Respondent:** Well. [Laughter] It just wasn't used, I guess, much, or not used during the day, or I don't know what. Are you warm enough? Are you okay?

- Interviewer:** No, I'm too warm. I'm taking my jacket off.
- Respondent:** Oh there you go.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. [Laughs] Maybe it's the story you just told me. [Laughter]
- Respondent:** I just – oh gosh.
- Interviewer:** Well she's still certainly around a lot.
- Respondent:** Oh she is. She is. Oh yes. No, she's on such a medication now that she isn't abusive anymore, but...
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** ...she used to shout at people, and...
- Interviewer:** [0:21:00] Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** And well not in her cottage industry self, but just by walking along the street you'd think, oh she's crossed to the other side.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. To protect yourself.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Well she was a real fixture. She was.
- Interviewer:** Well and she is too. She spends a lot of time sitting outside near the Bloor Cinema...
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** ...that little Middle Eastern place, and she buys some food there I guess.
- Respondent:** Somebody on Bloor Street...
- Interviewer:** We all hang out at the JCC.
- Respondent:** ...supports her apparently financially.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Respondent: Remember there's a big thing in the Annex Gleaner [0:21:30] about – they wanted to – she will not stay in any facility, and somebody – I think the woman that lived upstairs above the By The Way Café wrote a very harsh letter about how she gave her money and stuff like that, and you should. No, she was trying to get the Jewish Community Centre to support her, that was it. Isn't that funny? I wish I'd kept...

Interviewer: She used to hang around in the Jewish Community a lot.

Respondent: Yes. And I think that's how this lady got to know her and felt that – I didn't realize – I don't [0:22:00] think Florence was Jewish, but she could have been.

Interviewer: She looks more gypsy.

Respondent: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. That's the look.

Respondent: But she said that the Jewish Community Centre, the Jewish – wrote a nice letter back. Old Annex Gleaners would be good. I don't know how – when they started. I remember that. Okay. On with the questions.

Interviewer: So that's the cottage industry.

Respondent: That's the only one I can think of at this time, yes. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Your street, let's just talk [0:22:30] about your street, which is the one that you know the best. And you talked about the front porches changing. Any other changes that you can think of? You can talk about the other streets in this neighbourhood too, but you're so familiar with Major.

Respondent: No. I don't – there was a big – is Ulster the one down there? Sussex is up there.

Interviewer: Sussex is closer to Bloor and Ulster is – yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. Ulster there was a big scandal [0:23:00] if you're in the park at Ulster and you look across the street, it sort of was a desecration of about eight Victorian houses. Have a look at it. That was one big scandal that occurred in my staying here, that somebody got in and changed all of them. It's awful.

Interviewer: Oh, I know where you mean.

Respondent: Oh, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah. That's just south of where I live, because I live on Borden.

Respondent: Yes. And that I can remember about a change in the street. But actually Major Street is pretty much...

Interviewer: [0:23:30] Pretty much the same.

Respondent: ...visually the same.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. But are there fewer students now? Because you said that it seems to me...

Respondent: There's certainly – for example, one of the negative things, I think – well I guess it's good for the students, but the lovely little row of houses between the Harbord Bakery and So Young, and Brian's Variety Store, three of them are now [0:24:00] sort of student housing, and the garbage problem is terrible. The visuals are terrible. There weren't places like that. You rented – well, we rented our upstairs to people that were in the academic world in some way, or at the hospital.

Interviewer: But they respected their property and the neighbours.

Respondent: Yes. I think everybody took better care of everything when there weren't – I don't think there were that many absentee landlords. But I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Rose would know too. Rose is younger [0:24:30] than I am. Her mom would know.

- Interviewer:** Well you mentioned Rose because we had a lovely interview and she's given me other names, and then there's another Rose. There's Rosie Schwartz, and I haven't met her.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** And she's on my list.
- Respondent:** Oh. Oh, I forgot about her.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. So I'm going to phone her.
- Respondent:** Oh she used to be a real – she used to really annoy people. [Laughter] No, a real powerhouse, and she was always going to run – I think she ran for public office. I've forgotten all about her. [Laughter] **[0:25:00]** Very attractive in a sort of big way, but boy was she – she used to live up above Harbord. Oh yes, oh very – oh.
- Interviewer:** I will phone.
- Respondent:** That'll be interesting.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** That will be interesting.
- Interviewer:** And she's been here a long time, I gather.
- Respondent:** Oh yes. Mm-hm. Oh I forgot all about her.
- Interviewer:** When you said Rose, I thought of Rosie.
- Respondent:** See, when John got cancer and that kind of – that kind of – that two, three-year period before he died **[0:25:30]** I kind of – I don't even remember much, and I wasn't here that much. I was out there where he was, and so there's a gap in there, but oh yes.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. So what was that?

Respondent: I remember her. And Jack Layton was our alderman, and Dale Martin, and this restaurant across the street here, Harbord House...

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: ...used to be a lovely little cottage.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: And the city let horrid Peter Fenton turn it into Rowers.

Interviewer: I remember [0:26:00] that. Yeah.

Respondent: Awful.

Interviewer: Oh, so it was a little...

Respondent: A beautiful little cottage. A centre hall plan. You went up stairs to its verandah, and the city let them turn it into that. And I was just – when I was looking through the stuff I got all this stuff on Peter Fenton. He was – Rowers was the worst thing that ever happened to this neighbourhood. He had – like they urinated in our yard, they threw bottles. You [0:26:30] don't want to know about Rowers. It was awful. This man is a very good restaurant owner, and there's no problem, but the Rowers years are famous in this neighbourhood because he was just an arrogant bastard. I hope this is on the radio sometime. He was just...

Interviewer: He didn't care about the neighbourhood.

Respondent: He didn't care.

Interviewer: Neighbours or neighbourhood.

Respondent: If you went in to complain that there were – all his customers were in your parking places, he'd threaten the police to come and get you, and report [0:27:00] you. And report out. I forgot about that. That was terrible. Rowers was just awful, and Olive and Lemon was awful too, but nothing like Rowers. So. Oh, I've got all the letters we

wrote to the City and everything about Rowers with examples of the patrons and the abuse, and the [0:27:30] destruction of property and everything. It was just – oh.

Interviewer: And it was mainly young people.

Respondent: It was young middle-class people that didn't live around here that thought that this was like the slums, and so they could do whatever they want. Oh, it was – it failed too eventually, and apparently he opened another restaurant somewhere, but oh.

Interviewer: So he – and what about Olive and Lemon? You said that that too, they were not good neighbours?

Respondent: No, they were not. And we used to go to his – when his first [0:28:00] restaurant was down below College, John and I used to go there all the time. But when he came up here, it was, it was bad.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: It was bad.

Interviewer: Well it's too bad because this is a neighbourhood and it's a community.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And these people come in and they don't respect and appreciate it.

Respondent: He couldn't have cared less. He had motorcycle gangs at night, and they would – you know, he wouldn't adhere to any of the time limits. He wouldn't. And the motorcycles would gun, and gun, [0:28:30] and gun, and stuff like that. He was just – they were just awful. So that's why all there's all this – we're so glad about Loire. I mean it was just...

Interviewer: It sounds a little bit similar to what they had with Brunswick House at Bloor and Brunswick. A very unpleasant...

Respondent: Yes, yes. It was very unpleasant.

- Interviewer:** The experience with the patrons.
- Respondent:** Yup.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yup, very unpleasant.
- Interviewer:** And everybody suffers and everybody's irritable.
- Respondent:** Yeah. True.
- Interviewer:** And impotent at the same time.
- Respondent:** That would be – that would be a change in the neighbourhood is the **[0:29:00]** restaurants, which are not well run. That would be the thing that has happened. There were no restaurants when I came on Harbord Street. There was only Poretta's.
- Interviewer:** And your silence about some of them means that they're okay. Some of them are okay now.
- Respondent:** Oh, Dessert Trends is the best neighbour anybody could ever have in the world. Messis is wonderful. I don't know about the other ones down there. Loire is wonderful. Tati, **[0:29:30]** the upper level of Tati, he tries harder than anybody else to not make that a neighbourhood nuisance, the man that owns it now.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** But somebody allowed them to put a deck up on top, and under other owners, it was – there's the biggest change that with a bad restaurant owner, that's the only negative thing that's ever happened in the neighbourhood, **[0:30:00]** I think.
- Interviewer:** Well you know, I'm aware of the Brunswick House, but you're the first person that I'm speaking to who has talked about some of the neighbours, some of the restaurants being bad neighbours.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Yeah, and the restaurant owners. They've been bad neighbours.

Interviewer: And they bring lots of people in, so they take up parking spaces, and they...

Respondent: But now with – well it used to be Sussex-Ulster Residents' Association, Bob Barnett and Sally – I can't remember. Lives on – house [0:30:30] burnt down. Lives on Robert.

Interviewer: Robert. Okay.

Respondent: They ran it, and with these neighbourhood associations now, basically if you want – like Loire had to – well they volunteered to meet with us, and we laid down – because it shouldn't have been a restaurant. It was Harbord fish, and then it was Dr. Cheese and the Cake Lady. Oh that was wonderful. That was Jerry Balan, who is now dead. A loss of a really good woman and her husband. She had – it was like a bakery [0:31:00] and it was absolutely wonderful. And then these two really nice guys came along and wanted to turn it into a restaurant, and so they – we let them turn it into a restaurant. They were fine. Then they decamped to the Maritimes, the two of them, and we were left with – oh, I can't even remember the second one. It didn't last long enough. Then we got Olive and Lemon. So it's our own fault. The neighbourhood said that this business building could [0:31:30] become a restaurant facing residential streets, and we had – yeah. There would be – that's the only negative thing. Only negative change is bad restaurant owners, but I mean the way it is now, I don't think there's – I think there's a problem maybe with Latitude in that it's a place where – but you'd have to ask the people at that end. I just heard that everybody that works in the restaurants in Toronto goes there at night, and there's noise until two and three in the morning. But I have never heard it.

Interviewer: [0:32:00] Yeah. Yeah.

- Respondent:** It's all I know.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Because the restaurants around here now are just fine with us. Except for Charlie's Place, which went into where Atoshi was, which is sort of just a...
- Interviewer:** What is that?
- Respondent:** When they asked for it, it was going to be lunch, it was going to be sandwiches. They gave a dinner menu, never happened.
- Interviewer:** So it's a bar?
- Respondent:** It never happened. It's a late-night bar.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. I know that when I pass it, it's **[0:32:30]** empty, so it's not empty because I pass it too early.
- Respondent:** It's a real problem. Yeah. Apparently – so I don't know. I think Cyrus is sick now too. The husband. Atoshi's long gone.
- Interviewer:** Atoshi's husband, you mean?
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Somebody told me he's in the hospital, but he's very upset about it.
- Interviewer:** So they rented it out. Because I know for a while it was an art gallery. One of their children...
- Respondent:** Yes, the girl. Yeah. And now it's this whatever it is.
- Interviewer:** **[0:33:00]** Yeah, yeah.

- Respondent:** I remember Tim Grant saying, "Well I went up because I wanted to have the," I think it was the seafood dinner that they said, but he said there was no...
- Interviewer:** No seafood dinner.
- Respondent:** Nothing. Nothing.
- Interviewer:** Just beer.
- Respondent:** All the promises. You know, they had the neighbourhood meeting, the guy came, produced all this, that this is what it was going to be, and none if it ever happened, and nobody seems to care. For one point when the girl was living there, they had late-night parties where they paid admission and went up to sit on the **[0:33:30]** roof and that kind of thing.
- Interviewer:** Oh terrible.
- Respondent:** That finally stopped.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Anyway, but go ahead.
- Interviewer:** But that noise really travels.
- Respondent:** Oh, does it ever.
- Interviewer:** If people are out at night and it's one in the morning...
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** ...and the city is quiet, that noise is traveling...
- Respondent:** It does.
- Interviewer:** ...and it disturbs the neighbours again. Yeah, yeah, yeah. What about the traffic? Changes in the way the streets are used since you've been here?

- Respondent:** Well they made the traffic maze, which a lot of people disobey still, but that [0:34:00] made a difference.
- Interviewer:** But isn't that annoying when people are going the wrong way?
- Respondent:** Yes. But usually we just shout something offensive at them, but it doesn't do any good. [Laughter] The traffic maze is good, it's good.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, I agree.
- Respondent:** Yeah. There's a lot more bicycles, a lot more people riding bicycles to work than there were when I came, which is good.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. So those are changes. Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah, they are. But basically it stays a [0:34:30] really nice neighbourhood.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. I feel that way too.
- Respondent:** Yeah, it is.
- Interviewer:** What about renovations?
- Respondent:** Have I done any?
- Interviewer:** What do you see in the neighbourhood? Anything worth mentioning?
- Respondent:** Well someone has just done a wonderful job on a house on Brunswick. Janice will know that, the address, because she's seen it. Saved it. It was written up in the Gleaner too. They saved this – it was at the meeting, [0:35:00] I think, at one of the thing – you know, when the Harbord – your news thing. It said, "Here's these lovely houses."
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.

- Respondent:** I know the little row on Robert Street, the little row that they're all the same on the west side about halfway down.
- Interviewer:** Towards College?
- Respondent:** Towards College, about halfway down towards College, there's the little **[0:35:30]** two-storey ones that are identical, and the people – the original people are still in the one that's painted with green and white paint, an Italian family, and the rest – a friend of mine lived in one of them. There were two really – there was one really bad person, but I see that that's all been renovated. No, the renovations have been pretty good really, except for the famous Ulster ones, but that was early in the day...
- Interviewer:** Yeah. That really sticks out.
- Respondent:** It does stick out.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** **[0:36:00]** It does.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. In the years since you've been here, do you have any comments about how the back lanes have been used?
- Respondent:** The city expropriated property from all of us to make the lane paved in 1995 and lit. We are very pleased with that.
- Interviewer:** Oh yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah. And this is a dead-end lane, so we don't get the speeders going through. **[0:36:30]** It is a place from which people break-in, but it was in the '70s too, so...
- Interviewer:** But being lit...
- Respondent:** Being lit is a big deal.
- Interviewer:** Right.

- Respondent:** And that's '95. That's when that came.
- Interviewer:** And welcome, as you say.
- Respondent:** And welcome. It was welcome, yeah.
- Interviewer:** What about heating systems, air conditioning systems? What have you been through with all of that?
- Respondent:** I just – the houses are air-conditioned. That's about all really. I know some of the [0:37:00] people – you should talk to Jessie Khan next to the Harbord Bakery. It used to be the Children's Bookshop.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** She, I think, has a green roof.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** You should look – if you go down, she's very interesting. How long was the Children's Bookshop? She's very interesting. She's an American, but she's been here a fair amount.
- Interviewer:** Really?
- Respondent:** Jessamyn Kahn is her name. Do you want a phone number?
- Interviewer:** [0:37:30] Yes. You'll give me that after?
- Respondent:** I'm not sure she gives out her phone number, but...
- Interviewer:** How would you spell Kahn?
- Respondent:** Jessamyn is J-E-S-S-A-M-Y-N, I think.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** K-A-H-N. And it would be right next to the Harbord Bakery. That's the best I can do. Queenber's are 107.

- Interviewer:** I remember when it was the bookstore.
- Respondent:** Well she's still there, and she has the beautiful new fence out the front.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Right.
- Respondent:** Go around the back and see her backyard. I'll take you on your way home.
- Interviewer:** [0:38:00] Good, good, good.
- Respondent:** I'll show you Jessamyn. She's a very interesting woman to talk to. Very interesting woman. And I believe she has the green...
- Interviewer:** Green roof.
- Respondent:** I believe. I believe so, yes, because she was trying to talk me into it. So – but very interesting woman to talk to. Odd, but interesting women often are, aren't they? [Laughter] Not unpleasantly odd, just a different view of things.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** An American urbanite, [0:38:30] but she – I like her.
- Interviewer:** Okay. I'll see if I can meet with her. I'll try. What about garbage collection? Changes since you've been here? Anything worth noting?
- Respondent:** [Laughs] Well I fought to not have to drag that blue bin. I played the age card and I said, "I am not dragging that thing through my house," and so Maya and I fought, and we can put our recycling out in a [0:39:00] plastic bag because I said, "I'm not putting that in my front yard," and they said okay. I think that the bins do not belong down here. I think the worst thing that has happened is the amalgamation of the City of Toronto where we have the bins, which were really meant for the suburbs, the giant bins, and people have had to build receptacles in their front yard there. That's a big

negative change is the giant bins, which are fine and we have them out in [0:39:30] Caledon. We have – I mean they're wonderful in the suburbs, but here where people don't have garages – so anyway, we fought, and so Maya and I put our garbage out, get the tags.

Interviewer: So you have special tags so that they'll take it away.

Respondent: They'll take the garbage, recycling. We don't have the big bins here.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Green bins we do. We fully approve of the small green bins because you can carry them through your house, but I can remember saying to them, "I'm sixty-something years old and I'm not wheeling it through my house." [0:40:00] [Laughs] So anyway, they said, "Okay," and so we now use plastic bags. So that – everybody does it now, but it should never have been used in old Toronto.

Interviewer: Well and also when you see those – the grey bins, the blue bins, the green in the front of people's homes, it changes the – we lose some of the beauty of the front of the homes.

Respondent: Yes. We have. We definitely have, and that's the problem with the student housing.

Interviewer: Oh yeah. They really have.

Respondent: And if you look, [0:40:30] they're moving out this weekend, I guess, and they just put the stuff out in the front and it sits there.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: Oh sorry, Tom. Come in, my dear. Gosh, you're a smart cat.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Animals? Animals? What have you had? What have your neighbours had?

Respondent: Maya had a wonderful dog, Spot, who she rescued from Costa Rica many years ago and she had an old cat named Dougie. Janice [0:41:00] has a cat, two cats. The only pets I've ever had here were cats, and I don't have one here now because I'm not here every day now.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent: So – but yeah. Cats are – I know. You're just checking, aren't you, to see if Maya's home or if I'm still here. That's why I like this because if I were sitting over there, you can come any time and sit in my house. But I just would be thinking – and [0:41:30] all I could think about is somebody coming in the back gate and Tammy getting out. She has no claws, front or back, so you're very patient, Eleanor. I'm grateful.

Interviewer: Well you're a very good neighbour to your...

Respondent: Well we're a good pair. There's three old broads – not three old broads. I'm the oldest [laughter], Janice is the second oldest, Maya's the third oldest, and we live sort of – and this is not particularly good. The people in it now are very nice, but this is an absentee landlord next door, and it hasn't had much luck. The other half of this house [0:42:00] is not what it was. Like this is pretty much – except for a downstairs bathroom, this is what Mrs. Langer had. [Laughs] Only it's a lot cleaner.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Mrs. Langer wasn't the best...

Respondent: No, no, no. It's just an old lady in a house that was empty for two years, and she didn't have any money to fix it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well this looks very nice.

Respondent: Oh yeah. No, Maya's – well Maya is a wonderful, wonderful tenant.

- Interviewer:** I'd like to talk about two [0:42:30] institutions. Your comments. We'll start with Kensington Market. That's kind of a – it's not in our neighbourhood, but it's just adjacent. Any comments about that?
- Respondent:** I like it.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** I understand. I remember taking some people down to eat at night and they were terrified after – it was about ten-thirty at night and there were often awfully shady-looking people down there. People say it's full of drug dealing. I don't know. I've never – I like [0:43:00] Kensington Market. It's changed a lot. I'm glad I don't have to see the chickens in their cages anymore. I mean that upset me.
- Interviewer:** So when did they change that? Do you know?
- Respondent:** Gee, I think a lot of those places went out of business in the last twenty years. They just aren't there anymore.
- Interviewer:** But it didn't give you much pleasure to see the chickens...
- Respondent:** I don't know that's – I mean I know that that's how the world is run, but I – as John used to say to me, "Avert your eyes, Sue," you know? [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Right. [Laughter] [0:43:30] Sounds like you were pretty feisty with each other.
- Respondent:** Oh, he was a wonderful man.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Oh he was. Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** Yeah, he was great.
- Interviewer:** So Kensington Market, you're glad that we're close to it.

- Respondent:** Well yes, it's got good restaurants. Loire has an offshoot down there now.
- Interviewer:** Really?
- Respondent:** Yeah, they do.
- Interviewer:** Do you know what it's called?
- Respondent:** I think Le Kensington Bistro.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** Open Wednesday to Sunday, I think.
- Interviewer:** Oh. I'll have to...
- Respondent:** Yeah. Maya and I eat there. It's really nice.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Yeah.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And what about the **[0:44:00]** University of Toronto? Do you feel that it has any influence on us? Or good, bad, indifferent?
- Respondent:** Well it's never come far enough in to bother me, but I know the people that live closer to Spadina are terrified about whether they – they own a lot of houses in the area, and I think they've just won something that the university can't tear down. A whole street of them or something like that. It's always been – it's always owned that property now. No, I respect – I used to swim **[0:44:30]** at the U of T pool. I respect the University of Toronto, but they are no threat to me or my neighbourhood, but the more you go, the more threat there is.
- Interviewer:** And the question is what they'll do with the property that they own...
- Respondent:** Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. So that's a concern. You mentioned in passing the security, and we talked about these windows here and about the lights you have when they paved your lane. What do you feel about the safety of the neighbourhood as it was in the '70s, '80s, and how it is today?

Respondent: [0:45:00] Oh, I've never been afraid, so.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: I think if I were walking in the alley behind the Brunswick, which I wouldn't do, I might be afraid, but I'm certainly not afraid here, no. No. Because – well basically you know who your neighbours are here. There's still a lot of families, or you know, couples that live in these houses and rent out rooms to students and stuff like that. It's still a neighbourhood, I [0:45:30] think. You know?

Interviewer: I've really covered whatever I was hoping to cover. When you knew that I was going to be coming to meet with you, I don't know whether you had any thoughts about what you might want to talk about. Perhaps there's something that I haven't touched on at all.

Respondent: I just know that because I worked, I didn't know as much as – do Janice. [0:46:00] Do Janice. Her house is the most beautiful thing you've ever seen in your life. Mrs. Crystal. John and I should have bought it. Oh, we should have bought it. I think they bought two years after we did, and it was all divided up, like the fireplace was covered, it was divided up into single rooms by Mrs. Crystal, and they came in and you should see it. It is so beautiful. [0:46:30] The wooden shutters pull out of the wainscoting and go right to the ceiling. You want to interview Janice just to see their house, and they did it all. They brought it all back, and I used to say, "Jesus, John, we should have bought that house." It's just so beautiful inside. The same man that built my house – he came to work on St. James Cathedral, and then he worked on the [0:47:00] Newman House, you know, on the corner of – the Catholic thing on the corner of St. George and Harbord, and Hoskin?

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: The northeast corner, that big red building. He was a mason, he came from Scotland. The reason that this house is designated is it was the first brick house ever built in this neighbourhood.

Interviewer: Your house?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: That's why there's a plaque on it. And then he built the drum travel building.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: And – oh, I forgot to tell you about that. [0:47:30] And when we bought this, the original storefront, which faced east, was there. You went in – like glass windows. You went in and it was a rental property, and I can remember there were two or three years when it was a drum store. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Oh my god. [Laughs]

Respondent: And then this Larry Smith, who owns...

Interviewer: Yeah, I know him.

Respondent: I think he still owns the [0:48:00] Women's Bookstore. He owns properties along here. He bought this and that's why I have to turn on lights in my kitchen because he built a thing. But anyway, he was going to have triangular windows, he was going to do this, he was going to do that, and it was the – it was the centennial year or bicentennial year of Toronto. I got onto the Historical Society and we got not only mine designated, but his designated, which is why when he put the big addition on, it had to be yellow brick with red [0:48:30] trim and that kind of thing. I don't know what you just asked me, but I just remembered that.

Interviewer: Yeah. But yours was the first brick home?

- Respondent:** First brick structure ever built in this neighbourhood.
- Interviewer:** And what year was your house built?
- Respondent:** 1876.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Okay.
- Respondent:** And he lived in it, and then he built this, then he built these two, and then he built Janice's, Mr. Johnson. Oh, you've got to see inside it. I thought when I saw this, I thought **[0:49:00]** to myself, "Oh, Sue. You've got to look beyond stuff." We didn't have any money to buy it, you know? We didn't have any money to buy another house, but it's bigger and...
- Interviewer:** Well I want to make a few more appointments, so I'll phone her first [laughs] and give her her choice.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah. She's busy. She's a busy woman, but very interesting. She says, "Oh, I talk too much," and I said, "Ah, that doesn't matter."
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** But she is quite – she used to work for the City for years. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** **[0:49:30]** Well I'm going to turn this off. There was something that you were going to say when the machine was off, so I'm going to [laughs] – haven't forgotten.
- Respondent:** Oh, it's just an army phrase. You can turn it off.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** You can use it in your life if you want to.
- Interviewer:** First I just want to say thank you very much.
- Respondent:** Oh, you're very welcome.

Interviewer: I enjoy meeting you...

Respondent: It's been a pleasure.

Interviewer: ...and I enjoy everything you've shared with me. Thank you.

[00:49:46]

[End of recording]