

110 Linda & Michael Farberman

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

Respondent 1: Nervous in front of the mic.

Interviewer: Yeah. [Laughs] You'll forget after a few minutes. The date today is the 8th of May, and I'm sitting with Linda Gerstein-Farberman and her husband, Michael Farberman. And...

Respondent 1: Switzman.

Interviewer: Switzman? What's that?

Respondent 1: I was a Switzman. By Farberman-Switzman.

Interviewer: So you had a hyphenated name?

Respondent 1: Well my mother was a Switzman.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: And there was seven, eight siblings, so they all lived in this area.

Interviewer: [0:00:30] Okay. Well we'll see how many I can get to speak to.

Respondent 1: Okay.

Interviewer: But the real reason that I'm delighted to speak to you is that in 1937, your grandparents bought a store on Robert and College Street, and it was Gerstein Hardware.

Respondent 2: Right. Gerstein's Hardware.

Interviewer: Wow. Could you just talk about Gerstein's a little bit? Anything you remember?

Respondent 1: Tell them the addresses.

- Interviewer:** Oh yeah. Please.
- Respondent 2:** The address? What was the address?
- Respondent 1:** 2 Robert Street.
- Respondent 2:** [0:01:00] Right. 2 Robert.
- Respondent 1:** 306 and 304 College.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent 1:** That was the corner.
- Interviewer:** So 2 Robert Street, and...
- Respondent 1:** 304 and 306 College. That's the corner.
- Interviewer:** So what do you remember about the store?
- Respondent 1:** Prior to...
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent 1:** ...buying that building, she bought 312 College in about 1932. She still has that building. My daughter's in there now with the optical store.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent 1:** With her husband.
- Interviewer:** So your daughter [0:01:30] has – short time ago, opened up an optical store at 3 – what's the address?
- Respondent 1:** 312 College. The original, well the second Gerstein Hardware. The first one was on Spadina. It burnt down.
- Interviewer:** Oh, they owned it?

- Respondent 1:** No. They rented it.
- Respondent 2:** They didn't own the building at the time.
- Interviewer:** They rented.
- Respondent 2:** They rented in the building, and she set up a hardware store. When she came to Canada, that's the business that she knew. Her family business in Poland was hardware. So.
- Respondent 1:** [0:02:00] And she was a big importer.
- Interviewer:** So she was quite a businessperson, your grandmother.
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Respondent 2:** Yes.
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Because when you're talking about it, you're not talking about your grandfather.
- Respondent 2:** No. He was a barber. He was a barber.
- Respondent 1:** He was a barber.
- Interviewer:** So the hardware was hers.
- Respondent 1:** Yes. He came to work there.
- Interviewer:** And he had a barbershop.
- Respondent 2:** When he came to Canada six months before she arrived – so he could set up a business, and have a place to live for my grandmother and my father at the time, who [0:02:30] was about nine months old.
- Interviewer:** So – but she was the big breadwinner then.

- Respondent 1:** She was the boss. She was in charge. She was an amazing businesswoman. She had exclusives with General Steel Ware, and they were in Hamilton. She used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and go by train or bus to Hamilton and buy anything and everything she could buy seconds. And they would send – only on Sunday because she didn't want people to [0:03:00] see, and she wouldn't do it on Saturday, that she was taking all this stuff up into the store. Her competition or whatever. So they had to deliver it on Sunday, she said.
- Respondent 2:** Originally, she kept the store closed on Saturdays, and then she just said, "You know what?"
- Respondent 1:** She had to compete.
- Respondent 2:** She had to compete and make money, and so she opened it.
- Respondent 1:** But she had McClary fridges, Cassidy's. Because many, many years later, I opened a hardware store. Just pushed into it by accident.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** [0:03:30] And she phoned all of her suppliers that she hadn't talked to in thirty years, and every one of them gave me credit on her – just "Hello, this is Eidel."
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Her name...
- Respondent 1:** She had a tremendous reputation as an honest businesswoman, and if she owed you a penny, she would crawl to give it to you. Like you don't do her wrong, and she will never do you wrong.
- Interviewer:** So she was a strong, independent...
- Respondent 1:** Very strong.
- Interviewer:** ...a businessperson with integrity.

- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Respondent 2:** Absolutely.
- Interviewer:** What was her name?
- Respondent 2:** Eidel Gerstein.
- Respondent 1:** Adele.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 2:** Eidel [0:04:00] [indiscernible 04:00:00] Gerstein.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 2:** And they moved from McCaul Street to Spadina. They rented a store and an apartment above, and the person who owned the building next door...
- Respondent 1:** Needed money.
- Respondent 2:** ...needed money.
- Respondent 1:** Burnt it down.
- Respondent 2:** And he burnt it down. And the...
- Respondent 1:** It was in the paper. By the newspaper.
- Respondent 2:** He burnt it down, but the building my [0:04:30] grandmother was in also caught fire, and she had gone out that night, and left her two children with a babysitter. When she came back, the place was on fire. The babysitter ran out, the fireman saved my father and my uncle. She never left them again.
- Respondent 1:** Never left them out alone.

- Interviewer:** What a story. The first time she ever hired a babysitter?
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And they had a fire.
- Respondent 2:** And – yeah. And then she moved to 312. She bought 312.
- Respondent 1:** But she...
- Interviewer:** College Street.
- Respondent 2:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** ...fed her family, clothed her family, ran the store, **[0:05:00]** where she had time. It was – they eventually bought the cottage up in Lake Simcoe, and then they built a second cottage for her father, and then later on, her uncle and father bought a third cottage on the water to share. But she was the backbone of all of that. Her uncle was one of the lucky Jews in Toronto that became a doctor back then. **[0:05:30]** And he became a pediatrician.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** And very well respected. And a professor at the...
- Respondent 2:** Associate professor at U of T.
- Respondent 1:** ...U of T. And then they offered him a floor at Sick Kids Hospital to be in charge of, and he got sick and passed away very young.
- Interviewer:** That's your father's brother.
- Respondent 2:** Right. He died at the age of fifty-six.
- Respondent 1:** Doctor Marvin Gerstein. You can look him up.
- Interviewer:** Hm. That's very young.

- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Sad story. Yeah.
- Respondent 2:** It was sad.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. There's all kinds of funds and scholarships [0:06:00] that I saw online in his name.
- Interviewer:** Did your father work in the business eventually?
- Respondent 2:** Yes. My – funny. My father went to U of T and he became a pharmacist and...
- Respondent 1:** Didn't like it.
- Respondent 2:** Well, he worked for Red Cates, who had a store on College Street, and then...
- Respondent 1:** He had a son down here. Put down Gerry Cates. I'll give you his number.
- Interviewer:** Okay. When we're done. Thank you.
- Respondent 2:** And then [0:06:30] later, he went to work in the hardware store.
- Respondent 1:** He always worked in the hardware store.
- Respondent 2:** He always worked there, you know, even as a kid. He grew up there, so he wanted the business.
- Respondent 1:** Excuse me. Her grandmother decided that to open another store in the Beaches on Queen Street, so her father would ride there by bicycle.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent 1:** By the bicycle.

- Interviewer:** Oh that's far.
- Respondent 1:** After school. And get the receipts and whatever money and everything, and bring it back to her because she couldn't leave the store. **[0:07:00]** And he never complained about it. He was too young to get a driver's license. And she had that store and maybe one more, and then she decided she couldn't control it, so she closed them. And just...
- Interviewer:** So she wanted the store, and she wanted to be in charge where she could watch over everything.
- Respondent 1:** She was in charge.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. But did you say your grandfather was a barber, but he worked for his wife? Or did he work as a barber?
- Respondent 1:** No.
- Respondent 2:** No, he worked as a barber when he first came, and probably when she opened the first hardware store on Spadina, **[0:07:30]** he needed to have money come in, so he worked as a barber. But later, he worked with her in the business.
- Respondent 1:** Well, what she told me was that the store on College and Robert got so busy that rather than hire an employee, she asked her husband. It was his choice to give up the barbershop and come in with her, and they had a mutual partnership, but she was the boss.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] At home too?
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Pretty much.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] So she was a very strong **[0:08:00]** woman.
- Respondent 2:** Very strong.
- Interviewer:** Because how many women of that generation were working? Many women of that generation stayed home.

- Respondent 1:** When she came to Toronto, she knew it was very important that she go to school and learn English. So that was the first thing she wanted to do.
- Interviewer:** And that would have been just before 1937?
- Respondent 1:** Oh, 1927, '28.
- Respondent 2:** She came in 1927 probably, because my father was nine months old. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** But she knew she had to learn English.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** She knew she had to learn English. Yeah. And she always said she didn't want the accountants to [0:08:30] know more than she knew. She had to know what they knew. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Do you remember her well?
- Respondent 2:** Very well. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** She lived with her.
- Respondent 2:** She died in 2000. She was 101.
- Respondent 1:** Oh my god. So she worked hard all her life...
- Respondent 2:** All along. Yeah. And oh my, she knew my kids. My daughters.
- Respondent 1:** She was Bubbie Eidel.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** I mean they'd go over there and make gefilte fish and watch her make cookies.
- Interviewer:** So she was their [0:09:00] great-grandmother.

- Respondent 2:** Great-grandmother. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** But more Bubbie, a grandmother, than – my kids...
- Interviewer:** Because she was so energetic, strong.
- Respondent 2:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** And your children – yes, go ahead.
- Respondent 1:** My kids, when you say, "Phone Bubbie," they always thought of Bubbie Eidel.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** You know? Bubbie Shirley, Bubbie Jean, okay, they love them, but Bubbie Eidel was Bubbie.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Did your children spend any time in the hardware store?
- Respondent 2:** No. They sold it in 1967.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. And did you spend time there at all? Or was it...
- Respondent 2:** No. You know what? [0:09:30] I would go down there. She would give me toys. Sometimes I used to – I wanted to try to work there, but it just wasn't me.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 2:** And my father didn't really want me there, and you know, because it takes time to get to know, right?
- Interviewer:** Oh, there's a lot to learn in a hardware store.
- Respondent 2:** And so I didn't, but I used to go there. I used to play with the toys. She had toys on one side, and bicycles, and the other side was all hardware.
- Respondent 1:** And she had fridges and stoves.

- Interviewer:** And that's unusual for hardwares to carry refrigerators. They're huge.
- Respondent 2:** Well stoves, and yeah.
- Interviewer:** [0:10:00] Yeah.
- Respondent 2:** All kinds of appliances from McClary. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Well when she helped me, when she was there when my hardware store started, I was opening up a discount store. And she was such an amazing individual. She said, "There's a building for sale downtown." This is in Georgetown. "Let's go look." And we went and looked, and it was a hardware store. And as soon as she saw it was a hardware store, we saw her face light up, and she went in. She goes, "Would this be good for your discount store?" I said, "It would be fantastic. [0:10:30] Free parking, main street." Okay. She went and she bought the building. She said, "If you can't pay the rent, Michael, you're my granddaughter's husband. Don't worry." She goes, "Even if you can't make a – pay the rent, don't." She was unbelievably good to us.
- Respondent 2:** She was seventy-five when she did this.
- Respondent 1:** Then she stayed in that store with me for the first four or five months, and she did something. She phoned my wife and she said, "I never knew Michael could talk."
- Interviewer:** [0:11:00] Oh. Are you usually quieter around her?
- Respondent 1:** I would sit there. I didn't want to challenge her or confront her, or have any discussions with her because she would kill me. [Laughs] But – and her father too. And she had a book. I've still got to open up a discount store, but she had a want book. I never knew what a want book was. And you came into the store and said, "I want a hammer." "I want a screwdriver." "I want this." "I want this." At the end of the day, whatever was in the till she said, "Here, the first day, [0:11:30] go with Sidney to Union Hardware and see" – whatever his name is, I forget now.

- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** "Tell him I sent you." They know Sidney. Oh, Kelly. His name was Kelly. We went in and he said, "Oh, if it wasn't for Mrs. Gerstein I wouldn't be in business today." I said, "Really?" He goes, "She was my – I was a salesman on the street. She was my first customer, and she stayed with me." And we bought everything that was on the list. I came back to the store. This was at five-thirty in the morning. We got to the store by seven, and by **[0:12:00]** eight-thirty, all that stuff was gone because people said they'd be in in the morning to pick it up. We did the same thing the next day. Then I went to Jomar Electric. Another guy who said, "Your grandmother was my first customer when I opened up my wholesale." He said that, "She made me what I am today. Take whatever you want. No limit. Her word's good enough."
- Interviewer:** She was respected and appreciated.
- Respondent 1:** Very respected.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Remember Jomar Electric?
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Cassidy's, the same thing. Very high-end china. **[0:12:30]** She asked for the president. He was retired, but the new president remembered Mrs. Gerstein.
- Interviewer:** Did everybody call her Mrs. Gerstein? Or what was she called?
- Respondent 1:** They'd call her Eidel.
- Interviewer:** Eidel.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Customers and people who came in called her Mrs. Gerstein.

- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. But she was the boss, and she bought a lot of property then. I mean she bought the store here.
- Respondent 1:** She bought houses all over Toronto.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. She would have bought more. My grandfather was...
- Respondent 1:** Enough. "Eidel, enough." She had houses on Rusholme, on – name **[0:13:00]** the street, she had. There's a few left, but not many. Then she bought a four-plex on Bathurst for her to someday retire to. And she built a home on Stormont up at Lawrence and Bathurst in 19...
- Respondent 2:** '55.
- Respondent 1:** ...'55. Beautiful home. And she bought the four-plex so her son would have – you know, get out of the store. Have a place until he bought his house up in Collinson.
- Respondent 2:** But she **[0:13:30]** wanted...
- Respondent 1:** She was going to retire there.
- Respondent 2:** She wanted to retire at the four-plex, except life isn't, you know, doesn't always...
- Respondent 1:** The whole family lived there. We lived there.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** Her sisters all lived there. Now her brother lives there now, and her son is there. So we've all been in that four-plex.
- Interviewer:** So she bought that place in 1937.
- Respondent 2:** No. Not the four-plex, but the store.
- Interviewer:** No, no, no. The store. Okay. I'm back to the store.
- Respondent 2:** Right.

- Interviewer:** When did she close the store? Or when did she...
- Respondent 2:** 1967.
- Interviewer:** ...sell it? [0:14:00] So 1967 she sold it. How old was she then, approximately?
- Respondent 2:** I don't remember. Well, she was born in 1898, right? She was born in 1901, I think. Or...
- Interviewer:** Oh. Okay. Okay.
- Respondent 1:** She was sixty-seven.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** What did she do after she retired?
- Respondent 2:** They wanted to go to Florida.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** Her grandfather got sick the first year.
- Respondent 2:** And my grandfather got sick, and he died in 1971.
- Respondent 1:** And she mourned from then on.
- Interviewer:** So shortly after.
- Respondent 2:** Right.
- Interviewer:** Oh. And she...
- Respondent 1:** She mourned from then on.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.

- Interviewer:** [0:14:30] So she was better off when she was working hard and running businesses and buying property.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. But she wanted to retire.
- Interviewer:** She wanted that. Yeah.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** But she was quite a role model for the women in your family.
- Respondent 1:** She started an empire for the family. She took – she was taking driving lessons...
- Respondent 2:** In 1955.
- Respondent 1:** ...with a man named Stan Vine from Vine Construction.
- Interviewer:** So she was in her mid-fifties in 1955. She took driving lessons. That's gutsy.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Yeah. She was a gutsy lady.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** And when she met this [0:15:00] individual, he had the land and he needed money to build. She said, "I have the money and a son. My son, he's a pharmacist, but he wants to get into building." So they built a couple of subdivisions somewhere, and they almost went bankrupt, and then they started building apartment buildings, and they were very successful in that endeavour. They were very large landlords. All through her.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. She was a force.
- Respondent 2:** Oh yeah. She [0:15:30] was a great lady.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Now Michael, you told me before I turned this on that you went to – go ahead.

Respondent 1: I went to Talmud Torah.

Interviewer: So what is Brunswick Talmud Torah?

Respondent 1: It was the original, from what I understand, it was the original Y. The Jewish Y.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: And it was also a school. When we attended classes there, I remembered the superintendent. His name was Allan, and he, for some reason, took me on tour of – and my [0:16:00] other friends, and gave us a tour of the old, because it had been closed for years, the YMHA, the building itself. And we saw a swimming pool, and a tennis court, and things that we never knew were in the basement of this building. Behind the building was the Yeshiva.

Interviewer: And that's all on College. College and Brunswick.

Respondent 1: That was on Spadina.

Interviewer: Oh wait. So it moved then.

Respondent 1: No, no. College and Brunswick. I'm sorry.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent 1: Just south where the Doctor's Hospital is now, in the parking lot.

Interviewer: So that was the Talmud Torah, the Hebrew day school, and the Y.

Respondent 1: And the Y.

Interviewer: [0:16:30] And you went to the Talmud Torah school?

Respondent 1: I went to the Brunswick Talmud Torah after school.

Interviewer: Oh, you went to cheder.

- Respondent 1:** Three nights a week and Sunday when I went.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Did they have a day school there too?
- Respondent 1:** They did.
- Interviewer:** They did?
- Respondent 1:** Yes, they did.
- Interviewer:** And then the Y at – originally was down there.
- Respondent 1:** The Y was there, but the Y that I remember going to as a young child, I guess, for thirteen, fourteen was at Bloor and Spadina.
- Interviewer:** And now, of course, it's called the Miles Nadal [0:17:00] JCC.
- Respondent 1:** Right. And I...
- Interviewer:** I would love you to talk – tell us some stories about it.
- Respondent 1:** I remember going to the Y and they had the men's health club. You couldn't go into because who could afford it?
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** And then they had the general registration. I remember going there and joining the Fathom Swimming Club.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent 1:** And...
- Interviewer:** What was that?
- Respondent 1:** That was – had just to dive, to snorkel. We had face [0:17:30] masks. I didn't stay in for more than a few months.
- Interviewer:** But they called it the Fathom Swimming Club.

- Respondent 1:** That was called Fathom.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent 1:** And then I joined the boxing club.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** And I was there for a couple of months. I remember Stan Schwartz, who lived on Euclid...
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** There were so many boys down there. Arnold Grosser, Seymour Choppy.
- Interviewer:** Choppy was his nickname?
- Respondent 1:** He stuttered, so. I actually spoke to him not too long ago.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** Just [0:18:00] Harold Thagota. The Freedman brothers, the Kaplans. I see him at [indiscernible 0:18:09] now. Sheldon, he lived on Euclid.
- Interviewer:** Tell me some more stories about what you did.
- Respondent 1:** At the Y?
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Well I remember going to the Y on Saturday nights, and they would have dances on the roof, and there was this wooden picket fence around the perimeter of the roof. I remember that. [0:18:30] And we went there because they would have snowball dances.
- Interviewer:** In the winter, you mean?
- Respondent 1:** It wasn't in the winter.

Interviewer: No.

Respondent 1: Snowball dances is when you got a snowball, and the boy will dance with a girl. You'd go pick your partner.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: So that was the only way that any of us, you know, except for maybe Stan, he was a lady's man, would get to dance with a girl. So we'd snowball. You'd get up and you'd change partners. You were just standing on the floor and they'd yell, "Snowball." You'd turn, and there'd be a girl there.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent 1: So I remember that. I remember [0:19:00] – I remember the cafeteria a lot.

Interviewer: What about it?

Respondent 1: It was just a nice place to sit and talk with the kids. It was safe there. I felt safe. There wasn't – I think I was probably one of the three or four last families that hadn't moved up north to the Manor, or to Eglinton, and there was myself, the Grossers, Thagota still lives down there. A few others.

Interviewer: But your family – [0:19:30] so you're saying a lot of the Jewish families...

Respondent 1: Had to move north.

Interviewer: ...moved north.

Respondent 1: Right.

Interviewer: And your family stayed down here.

Respondent 1: We stayed down there until I was fifteen. 1962, I think.

- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** And the city expropriated our house.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent 1:** To tear down Clinton Street Public School and build a new one, or else we'd probably still be there. My mother and father weren't movers. They moved from there to Steeles and Bathurst, and that's where they stayed.
- Interviewer:** And stayed there. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** I remember Mars [0:20:00] Restaurant. We used to go there. I went to King Edward Public School.
- Interviewer:** Oh, you did. Okay.
- Respondent 1:** And so I remember going to Mars for lunch, and they were so busy, so busy, that a lot of the kids wanted to pay, but they couldn't get to the cash. So we'd just walk out. [Laughter] And some of us would tell them, "We didn't pay yesterday," and, "Don't worry." He was a nice guy. I don't remember what he was, but he was a nice guy.
- Interviewer:** Did you get the muffins? They were famous for their muffins.
- Respondent 1:** No. Their fish and chips.
- Interviewer:** Fish and [0:20:30] chips were better at Mars.
- Respondent 1:** Mars. For me, anyways.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** Every day for lunch, it was a dollar twenty-nine or something.
- Interviewer:** So you're saying it was a really busy spot at lunchtime.
- Respondent 1:** Busy, busy restaurant. None of those other restaurants were there.

- Interviewer:** So the kids from King Eddie went and bought lunch?
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah, a lot of us did.
- Interviewer:** Really?
- Respondent 1:** Well, I lived over on Manning and I wasn't going to go home for lunch.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** So I worked on Yonge Street at 437 Yonge for Halfbeat Harold's.
- Interviewer:** I don't know that.
- Respondent 1:** There was Halfbeat Harold's, A&A Records, and Sam the Record Man.
- Interviewer:** Got it. Okay. **[0:21:00]** So I know that. I do know that.
- Respondent 1:** And Halfbeat Harold's, again, they took him out because they put up that new project there.
- Interviewer:** Can we come back to King Edward School?
- Respondent 1:** Absolutely.
- Interviewer:** Talk to me about King Eddie.
- Respondent 1:** I lost this finger. I lost this finger in the woodworking class. I was cleaning the lathe, and Frank, the Fuda – I forget his full name. Frank something. Turned the power on, thought it was funny, and my finger went like that. And in those days, all they gave you was an aspirin and put a bandage on it. **[0:21:30]** And my finger is still crooked, it's still got a scar.
- Respondent 2:** His mother went to the school as well.
- Interviewer:** Oh my god.

- Respondent 1:** No, she went to Clinton Street.
- Respondent 2:** And you said that she went to King Edward.
- Respondent 1:** No.
- Respondent 2:** And she said, "What's the teacher's name? Mrs."
- Respondent 1:** That was on Clinton Street.
- Respondent 2:** Oh.
- Respondent 1:** I had the same grade three teacher my mother had.
- Interviewer:** Oh. [Laughs] That's great. She taught for a lot of years.
- Respondent 1:** But King Edward – it was a good school. [0:22:00] A lot of nice kids there. It wasn't – it had grass.
- Interviewer:** When you went there...
- Respondent 1:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Okay. I don't know what year you were born. Approximately what...
- Respondent 1:** '49 I was born.
- Interviewer:** You were born in '49, so by...
- Respondent 1:** '52, '53.
- Interviewer:** Okay. What was the makeup in terms of religion or ethnicity, or...
- Respondent 1:** Well that's what I was going to say about – the same thing. There was – growing up, Manning – I can go by Manning because it was all Jewish. By the time [0:22:30] I went to King Edward, most of the kids had moved away.
- Interviewer:** They had moved north.

Respondent 1: Moved north. And at King Edward, I could remember Fred Brooker. He lived about the drugstore on Major. Mr. Brooker, up by Weinstein's Drugstore.

Interviewer: So he was in your class.

Respondent 1: No. He was in my brother's class.

Interviewer: Your brother's class.

Respondent 1: He was a year older, but there was so few of us back then, that we all knew each other. And it wasn't – I never felt threatened when one of my Italian friends called me a Jew because I called them a Wop.

Interviewer: [0:23:00] Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: You know, today I would – a quick example is my new neighbour up north, I said, "I got a real good deal on this whatever." And he said, "Well, you're a Jew. What do you expect?" Then the next week we saw him, he came over and he was almost crying. He apologized. He said he didn't mean anything, but I didn't take it in a bad way. And that's the way I felt downtown. Ukrainian. George [indiscernible 0:23:23]. I have Ukrainian friends. I call them the "Yuke."

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: You know, I had Italian friends. We had [0:23:30] Greek friends. We all got along. You know, we had arguments, but we got along. And there was an Italian friend of mine. His name was Peroni, and he became the senior inspector for the City of Toronto. Bylaw. And I met him in court. It was like we were together five minutes ago.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: And I won the case that day.

Interviewer: Oh. [Laughs] So those friendships are very good, and when you saw him all those decades later...

Respondent 1: Oh yeah. They're still there. If I bump into somebody, like George [0:24:00] [indiscernible 0:24:00], I haven't seen him in thirty years, twenty years. Came up to me at an event we were working at and picked me up off the ground, gave me a big bear hug, and he wanted to kiss me and, "How are you?" And she said, "I always thought he was Chinese."

Respondent 2: No. I thought he was Japanese.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent 1: Japanese. You know, just – we had good friendships. We – I would talk to them. Larry Himmelfarb was another one.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent 1: And he's a very successful accountant today, and I've seen him maybe five times in [0:24:30] forty years, but every time it was like we just saw each other the day before.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: So those warm feelings are there.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: But Linda, you didn't go to school in this neighbourhood.

Respondent 2: No.

Interviewer: Or did you?

Respondent 2: Bathurst and Wilson.

Respondent 1: Didn't you go to Lansdowne, no?

Respondent 2: No, my father did. My father went to Lansdowne Public School.

- Interviewer:** Did he talk about – have any stories that you can remember?
- Respondent 2:** No.
- Respondent 1:** He didn't – had to get right back to the store after school.
- Respondent 2:** He told me that he used to ride his bike all over the city. He would go right up Spadina to the top at – **[0:25:00]** you know, there's a park at St. Clair on Spadina. He would go up there and study. I don't know why, but he rode his bike up there. I know he used to walk home from Harbord Collegiate for lunch every day.
- Respondent 1:** I'll tell you a funny story. It's not very nice.
- Respondent 2:** No.
- Respondent 1:** Her father and her father's best friend and her uncle used to...
- Respondent 2:** You know what? Harold Grossman's still alive.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. He might – he's downtown, but he lived right there.
- Respondent 2:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** They used to stand at the window at the side of the building and pee on the drunks in the laneway **[0:25:30]** on the church. [Laughter] They were trying to pee onto the church.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. They did, and it rotted the church's roof.
- Interviewer:** Oh. [Laughter]
- Respondent 2:** They did. And they peed on the drunks.
- Interviewer:** Very acidic urine.
- Respondent 2:** And they used to drop water in paper bags down on the drunks.
- Interviewer:** And this was right near where the hardware store was?

- Respondent 2:** Upstairs.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. On College.
- Respondent 2:** They lived there.
- Respondent 1:** I remember the principal of the Talmud Torah. It was Rabbi **[indiscernible 0:25:55]** Maury **[indiscernible 0:25:56]**.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** And there was Jacob, Mr. Jacob, and...
- Interviewer:** **[0:26:00]** Also at the synagogue there.
- Respondent 1:** No, no. At the Talmud Torah. Brunswick Talmud Torah.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** And there was Gordon, and **[indiscernible 0:26:09]**, and Gordon **[indiscernible 0:26:12]**. And there's another one I remembered. Gordon?
- Interviewer:** Oh, do you have any other – your memories are around College Street because that's where you went to the Y.
- Respondent 1:** Her mother, her grandmother's hardware store.
- Interviewer:** You got...
- Respondent 1:** I got thrown out.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. My grandmother threw him out when he was a kid.
- Respondent 1:** Well when I went to **[0:26:30]** Hebrew school, I was in the store and I was playing with something, and she said, "You're not buying it? Get out."
- Interviewer:** Oh. [Laughs] And you remember it. You were a kid.

- Respondent 1:** I remember it because she scared me. I remember.
- Interviewer:** That was sixty years ago, that memory of yours.
- Respondent 1:** No, not sixty, but a fifty-three...
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent 1:** I was ten or eleven.
- Interviewer:** So she was a tough businesswoman.
- Respondent 2:** She was an amazing businesswoman.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent 2:** She knew her stuff, but my grandfather actually held her back, otherwise she would have bought more.
- Respondent 1:** There was a really good restaurant on the corner, and I forget the name. [0:27:00] It's where the corned beef place is now.
- Respondent 2:** Caplansky's?
- Respondent 1:** Caplansky's. Before Caplansky's, then it was Harvey's, but before that it was a restaurant that the Yidden used to go to. Oh, and the Lux, the movie theatre.
- Interviewer:** Where was that?
- Respondent 1:** Right at Brunswick, between Brunswick and what's the next street west? Because we used to...
- Interviewer:** That's this one. It's Borden.
- Respondent 1:** Okay. Between Brunswick and Borden on this side was the Lux theatre.
- Interviewer:** L-U-X?

Respondent 1: I think it was L-U-X, and it was a theatre. Then it became [0:27:30] a burlesque.

Interviewer: A burlesque on College Street?

Respondent 1: And we used to sneak in the back door from Hebrew school. [Laughs] Yeah. I forgot. And I remember the Pride of Israel. They had their building on Spadina.

Interviewer: What's Pride of Israel?

Respondent 1: It's an association. The shul up on Bathurst, but it's an association. They say it's a shul, but I don't know. And they had their Purim party in the Lux before it became the burlesque.

Interviewer: Burlesque [0:28:00] in between.

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: So that was movies. Did you go to movies there, or you didn't?

Respondent 1: No. I always went up to the Metro on Manning and Bloor, and the Alhambra at Manning and Bloor. I'm sorry, at Bathurst and Bloor, and the Midtown at Bathurst and Bloor.

Interviewer: So there were a lot of movie theatres. You're talking about College Street and Bloor Street.

Respondent 1: Well College Street, there was – I remember the Lux. I remember there was one on Manning. There was one – do you remember the Power Store beside the Health Bread?

Interviewer: I didn't [0:28:30] grow up in Toronto.

Respondent 1: Oh.

Interviewer: So I don't know.

Respondent 2: Where are you from?

- Interviewer:** Montreal.
- Respondent 2:** Oh.
- Respondent 1:** You don't know the original Health Bread. It was to die for. The original.
- Interviewer:** And that was...
- Respondent 1:** That was on College by Grace. It's not over here.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 2:** Where was Rochelle Peck's father's bakery?
- Respondent 1:** That was at Bloor. No, it was on College Street.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. College...
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. But we don't talk to her, so I'm not going to – [laughter]. Clary Randall, Clary Randall would know about that. He worked there. He used to count bagels for delivery.
- Respondent 2:** But her mother's alive.
- Respondent 1:** I don't [0:29:00] think you would get anything out of her.
- Interviewer:** Do you have any other memories, either of you, about College Street? Because...
- Respondent 1:** College Street? We used to play on the roofs on College Street. I mean we'd climb up the back of a building. We did things today that I would kill my kids.
- Interviewer:** So you went onto the roofs and you just kind of ran around?
- Respondent 1:** We would chase each other. It was like tag, you know? And we'd go up...

Interviewer: But on the rooftop.

Respondent 1: ...on the one side, and somewhere else – wherever. We did roof, garage. We used to have rock fights. You know, we were stupid, and my brother got hit once, [0:29:30] and blood was just pouring, but it was just a little tiny speck here, but it hit a vein, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: And it was...

Respondent 2: Me on College Street...

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 2: ...my memories are limited. I know that my mother and my grandmother used to walk me in the carriage on College Street. They used to leave the carriage outside without supervision.

Interviewer: So the baby.

Respondent 2: Right.

Interviewer: You, the baby were in...

Respondent 2: Yes.

Interviewer: ...outside the store.

Respondent 2: Right.

Interviewer: They don't do that anymore today.

Respondent 2: [0:30:00] No. I had one memory when I was four. Went to school on Major Street. It was a nursery school, and something happened with the bus. My parents were living at Bathurst and Eglinton, and I was supposed to go home on the bus. And I don't know if I missed the bus, or if the bus didn't show up. I know that I walked from there to my grandmother's store, which is a block, by myself when I was four. And I remember my grandmother schlepping me and

[0:30:30] running me back to the store, and they put me in a cab with Mr. Danziger, and he took me home.

Interviewer: But you remember that from age four.

Respondent 2: Yes. I have a lot of memories.

Interviewer: And walking by yourself.

Respondent 2: I remember she was so angry of me.

Respondent 1: Well you have a memory of leaving the school. You went to school and came...

Respondent 2: That's what I did. I walked by myself.

Respondent 1: The Brunswick Talmud Torah. Somewhere there. That's where she went to school.

Respondent 2: No. It was on Major Street. It was a little green...

Respondent 1: Okay, so Major.

Respondent 2: ...building, and that's where I walked by myself. **[0:31:00]** But I remember going shopping with my grandmother in Kensington.

Interviewer: Ah-ha. Okay.

Respondent 2: And I remember the butcher. She used to take me to the butcher.

Respondent 1: You're on the wrong side because...

Interviewer: No, but Kensington...

Respondent 1: No, but if you go...

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent 1: ...the other side of Bathurst, down to Rubenstein's Butcher, I used to watch him cut the heads off chickens for hours because they –

lucky sometimes, it'd get free and run without a head down the street.

Interviewer: Oh. That was in Kensington Market, you mean?

Respondent 1: No. Kensington did that too, but we had our own. Rubenstein's at Clinton and College.

Respondent 2: That was on the other side.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. But we are interested in the influence that **[0:31:30]** Kensington Market had on our neighbourhood, so if you had memories from there...

Respondent 2: I just remember schlepping there with her.

Respondent 1: When we were raising our kids, what did I used to do with them?

Respondent 2: He used to take them there. He said, "Do you want to go to a zoo?"

Respondent 1: We didn't have money to go to the zoo, so I'd take them to Kensington. [Laughter] I mean there was sheep, there was pigs, some of them were dead. There was the turtles, fish, the rabbits, pigeons. Not snakes, but those eels. You know?

Interviewer: And they were alive. Some live, some dead.

Respondent 1: Most of them were alive, and they would butcher it for you right there.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent 1: So I'd take my kids. "Let's go see the **[0:32:00]** zoo." [Laughter] And Joe's Food Market, which I think is still there. And...

Respondent 2: There was a dairy there too.

Respondent 1: Daiter's Creamery was there.

Interviewer: A couple of cheese stores that are still there.

- Respondent 1:** Well Daiter, the original Daiter's is now a restaurant. That's my cousin.
- Respondent 2:** Wagota to fish markets. Is it still there?
- Respondent 1:** Oh yeah. Vigota. She had a fish market. It was probably smaller than this room.
- Interviewer:** Tiny place.
- Respondent 1:** Mrs. Vigota, by herself, and her husband sold eggs out of his truck, but most of the time he was at the racetrack.
- Interviewer:** **[0:32:30]** So she was working and he was losing the money.
- Respondent 1:** She was a nice lady, Mrs. Vigota. Mrs. Vigota, not Wagota. Mrs. Vigota. Wagota was Michelle's parents.
- Respondent 2:** And they also had...
- Respondent 1:** They had a fish store too.
- Interviewer:** So you remember several women who were working and who were the businesspeople. I mean you talk about this woman and your grandmother...
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. Mrs. Vigota was a very hardworking lady.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** Very nice lady. She only had one son, Harold.
- Interviewer:** Anything else about College Street? Because that's **[0:33:00]** where your memories are for both of you.
- Respondent 1:** I'm trying to think of your side of College. I had a good friend whose family was a good friend. I still think he's a friend. Albert Oxner. His family had a little variety store beside the bank at College and

Bathurst. What is the bank there on the corner? On the southeast side.

Respondent 2: Who knows.

Interviewer: I don't know.

Respondent 1: Anyways, they...

Interviewer: The north side?

Respondent 2: [0:33:30] The store was on the north side.

Respondent 1: Yeah, the store was on the north side. The north side. On the north side. So they had – he had about a ten-foot-wide store.

Interviewer: And what was the store?

Respondent 1: It was a variety store. His father had. And the bank needed that property to expand.

Interviewer: Oh. The bank bought the property?

Respondent 1: The bank bought their property. The story Albert tells is his brother-in-law's name is Sunshine, and he owns all the SmartCentres, or the other one?

Respondent 2: I don't know.

Respondent 1: Anyways, the bank said, "We'll give you X number of dollars." And he [0:34:00] phoned up his son-in-law who's a builder, doing well, very bright. He said, "No. Tell them you want X number of dollars." And he said, "Okay." And he phoned back to the bank and he said, "We want X number of dollars, or we're not selling." And the bank said, "You're crazy." And an hour later they came in with a certified cheque for X number of dollars, and he retired.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. So that was just a tiny little narrow store.

- Respondent 1:** Little store. And I remember it had an “It” sign in front with shoe polish, [0:34:30] to sell shoe polish inside. I remember the store. It was right on the corner on that side. I guess beside Mars, close to Mars. But we became friends many, many years later. I didn't know him then.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** On the corner of Borden, I guess, there's a store that has the original windows. It looks like an antique store, but I don't know what they sell in there. [0:35:00] On the north side. I think that was Gerry Cates's father's first drugstore.
- Respondent 2:** I don't know where Cates's drugstore – I thought it was across the street from my father, but it wasn't.
- Respondent 1:** No, no. It was on the north side.
- Respondent 2:** Not across the street. Across, on the other side of Robert Street.
- Respondent 1:** Her father said that he went down to the bathroom in the drugstore and he was on the bathroom, sitting down, and this huge rat came out and he said he didn't know what to do because he didn't know whether to move or not move. But he said rats were like cats back then.
- Interviewer:** [0:35:30] Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So let's bring it to 2013, and you are going to your daughter's official opening of her optical store.
- Respondent 2:** Right.
- Respondent 1:** Tonight.
- Interviewer:** Okay. And this is in one of the properties that your grandmother, Linda, bought.
- Respondent 2:** That's right.
- Respondent 1:** First.

- Respondent 2:** It's the first property she bought.
- Interviewer:** So 1937.
- Respondent 2:** Well she didn't buy it. I think she bought it closer to 1930 because...
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent 2:** ...because they had the fire in 1930.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** And she bought the [0:36:00] other store in '37.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. She bought the corner in '37, but she bought the other store before.
- Interviewer:** So this property has been in your family since about 1930.
- Respondent 1:** Yes.
- Respondent 2:** 1930, '31.
- Interviewer:** That's a lot of years. And now your daughter has opened up an optical store.
- Respondent 2:** Right.
- Interviewer:** Daughter and son-in-law?
- Respondent 2:** Son-in-law. Yes. He's the optician.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. And she'll work there with him.
- Respondent 1:** Ah.
- Respondent 2:** No.
- Interviewer:** No.

- Respondent 1:** She was – well, she was planning on it, but she got headhunted and she's going to go work at this other job.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent 1:** She's – they offered her too much not to take it.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. But that's quite [0:36:30] incredible that this property has been in your family for...
- Respondent 2:** Yep.
- Interviewer:** ...getting close to a hundred years. [Laughs]
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Anyway, a very long time.
- Respondent 2:** Yeah. It's true. It's an amazing – it's amazing that they did that. And I guess College Street's kind of turning around now there. It's becoming more upscale. They're building the condo across the street.
- Interviewer:** Yes. And they're putting up a Loblaws too, we think.
- Respondent 2:** In the store.
- Respondent 1:** And a liquor store.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Okay. So it is. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** Yeah. Which is – it's not [0:37:00] going to hurt Kensington.
- Interviewer:** We have some concerns about it.
- Respondent 1:** People who want those kind of groceries are going to those kind of grocery stores. People who want to go to Kensington and have the experience and buy the fresh, off-the-stand, they think – it's the same vegetables. They bought go to the market and buy them. They're going to do it. It's the experience they want.

- Respondent 2:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** I hope that you're right because people love Kensington Market, and have for so many years.
- Respondent 1:** But it's changed so much.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. It is changing, but [0:37:30] there's still enough of the old that they...
- Respondent 2:** And everything changes.
- Interviewer:** Of course. Of course. Yeah.
- Respondent 1:** It's not Kensington like it was with the bakeries, the Jewish bakeries. My father was engaged to – I forget the name of the bakery. But he went overseas and she fell in love with somebody else. Lattman's Bakery.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm. But your father had been engaged to a Lattman?
- Respondent 1:** I don't know. He was engaged to – my father was engaged so many times. [0:38:00] He's very engaging. Very engaging. [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Right. It sounds like he's back into it now at eighty-eight years old. [Laughs] Now that he's...
- Respondent 1:** But he was wounded overseas, and they misplaced him for about seven months. They thought he was missing in action, but he was in hospital in England.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent 1:** And, yeah.
- Interviewer:** Well you know, I think that we've kind of covered College Street, which is the street that both of you knew because you went to cheder there, and [0:38:30] your grandmother had all that property there.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything else about this neighbourhood that you want to talk about? Or are we staying with College because that's where you had all your...

Respondent 2: Well I'm not familiar with the rest of the neighbourhood.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 2: I just...

Respondent 1: I am, but more on the other side. The west side.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, we're just talking about Harbord Village. Yeah.

Respondent 1: And Augusta. And Augusta.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: You know, my grandfather...

Interviewer: Well, but also you talked about the JCC.

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Or at the Y that you went to.

Respondent 1: Yes. The JCC was a lot of fun.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: It was a place to go.

Respondent 2: I never went there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent 1: It was a place to go **[0:39:00]** to get off the street.

Interviewer: Well, and it's still a very much-loved institution. Okay. So I think, Linda and Michael, the Farbermans...

Respondent 1: Let me find Gerry Cates's phone number.

Interviewer: Okay. I just want to say thank you very much.

Respondent 2: You're welcome.

Interviewer: This has been a pleasure.

Respondent 1: I hope something...

[0:39:15]

[End of recording]