

129 Konstantinos (Gus) Agelakos

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

Interviewer: Hello, Gus.

Respondent: Hello, hello.

Interviewer: I'm so glad you're taking the time to talk with me today. Could you please give me your name, please?

Respondent: It's my pleasure. My name is Konstantinos Agelakos. Before I arrived in Canada on the boat, they told me that my name is – I have to call [0:00:30] my name Gus. What for? I don't know. Those days was kind of different than it is today.

Interviewer: When was that?

Respondent: Sure. 1959.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Respondent: So the last name is Agelakos, which is A-G-E-L-A-K-O-S. So when I arrived here, [0:01:00] I was a barber from Greece. At the age of sixteen, I was the youngest barber in Sparta. That's where I'm from. So my sister was here, and my brother. I didn't want to come because I was making a living there. I liked what I was learning to be – a barber. But those days [0:01:30] you had no say, you know? You had to do what your parents and – and I'm the youngest of six. Four brothers, two sisters. So I had no choice. I came, and I arrived here at the 22nd of August, 1959, and – which is...

Interviewer: Today.

Respondent: Yeah. [Applause] How about that, eh?

Interviewer: Yeah. [Laughs]

Respondent: So it was Saturday. On [0:02:00] Monday, I had to go King and Yonge to work in a barbershop. Martinelli Barbershop those days. Was an old Italian barber. Okay. The money wasn't enough. I had to pay for my ticket, I had to pay for room and board, you know? Wasn't enough. So I went to work in the restaurant, which is not there anymore. Tops Restaurant. Yonge and Dundas. I [0:02:30] worked eighty hours a week for forty dollars. So I was inside paying my ticket. I went to the barbershop. The place that I started working, that same week on Wednesday, one of the barbers who used to work there, and I took his chair, he came. He asked me, "Where are you from?" All this. And he happens to be from the same [0:03:00] town. But he was here since – I think he's born here. He was here very young. So anyway, before we closed, he asked me if he can show me his barbershop, and he brought me on Bloor and Brunswick. He had the barbershop with his father, and he says, "My father's going to retire, so what do you think? [0:03:30] Can you come and we'll work together?" So February 22nd, 1960, I start working there. Anyway, after a couple of years, I took over. I bought the place. Now that's half block there from my store to Brunswick. It used to be Honest Ed's. He was the owner of twelve [0:04:00] stores down south Brunswick to the lane. And he had two factories, I remember, in the back, and he was making plastic toys, combs, spoon, forks, things like that. So before the '70s, he sold the place there, [0:04:30] and he bought at Bathurst and Bloor where he built his new extension he did there.

Interviewer: So he had no store on that half-block.

Respondent: He had – he built the Poor Alex theatre.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: And he said he put ninety-nine cents because one hundred cents he had to build two bathrooms. [Laughs] Smart guy.

Interviewer: And that was the – he called it the Poor Alex?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: [0:05:00] And that would have been on – fronting...

- Respondent:** I think it's still there.
- Interviewer:** Yes. A different name.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And it fronts on Brunswick.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Right. And you were on the south side of Bloor, just around the corner.
- Respondent:** Yes. Yes.
- Interviewer:** Do you remember the number?
- Respondent:** 499.
- Interviewer:** 499 Bloor Street West?
- Respondent:** Bloor Street West.
- Interviewer:** Right. And so originally, Ed Mirvish was your landlord.
- Respondent:** Yes. Of course, for quite a few years.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** So we used to charge fifty cents a haircut. I was paying [0:05:30] seventy dollars rent. Every year he was increasing twenty-five dollars.
- Interviewer:** Hm.
- Respondent:** And I had to increase my price. Twenty-five dollars. Twenty-five cents. [Laughs] So it's beautiful memories.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

Respondent: Especially the neighbours.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Because I was very young. I was nineteen years old since.

Interviewer: And the owner. Already the owner.

Respondent: No. No. [0:06:00] No. After 1964 I bought the place, but I was the youngest in the area. Everybody else there, the stores – most of the stores was Jewish owners, older people.

Interviewer: Like Ed Mirvish.

Respondent: Yes, yes, yes. And you know, I've got to say that I'm thankful for the support that [0:06:30] even today, all these years, these people. I will never forget most of them because they were – they treat me like their own son. They put me in their family. Now, slowly things start changing since Mr. Mirvish sold the place. Seven people bought it with – anyway – with no money [0:07:00] actually.

Interviewer: They bought it without any money?

Respondent: Well, Mr. Mirvish sold it for five hundred and seventy-five thousand.

Interviewer: The whole half-block?

Respondent: The whole thing with fifty thousand down. Now I don't know how they put the mortgage because he had to pay six hundred thousand. He bought the corner there at the same time.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: So since then, for a while, for a few years, it was okay. These people, they [0:07:30] did on the back where the factories were, they created three schools.

Interviewer: Hm.

- Respondent:** If you are familiar to that.
- Interviewer:** Mm-mm.
- Respondent:** Yeah. I remember they got about a hundred thousand dollars from the government from Wintario.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Yes. And how these gentlemen, which I don't know if I should say his name, he passed away. He – you know, he [0:08:00] liked me so much. Anything I was asking him, he was doing it. So slowly, he started kicking the people out. Most of the Jewish people.
- Interviewer:** So the man who owned your building...
- Respondent:** Yes. He, he, he...
- Interviewer:** He started buying the other one.
- Respondent:** How he did it, he kicked everybody out and he became – he owns the whole thing.
- Interviewer:** Like Ed had originally?
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** [0:08:30] So – and he start doing his own stores. He was – now everything, he called it the Other.
- Interviewer:** Oh okay.
- Respondent:** This is very interesting.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Actually, I had to help to at that time. We created the smallest [0:09:00] country on Earth, okay?

Interviewer: [Laughs] Go on.

Respondent: It's very interesting. Very interesting.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Call the Other Kingdom. That was the name of that little half a block.

Interviewer: Half a block.

Respondent: They have them up also for these things. And if you want to become to be a President or to have a position on that little [0:09:30] country...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: ...you had to pay some money. In order to collect money he did that. [Laughs] Okay?

Interviewer: [Laughs] Okay.

Respondent: So I have a button in the barbershop, which says I'm an Other.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Respondent: Yeah. He used to share it, I used to share it in the store too for five dollars.

Interviewer: Okay?

Respondent: Yeah. So anyway...

Interviewer: What were the other stores then? Because you then became Gus the Other Barber.

Respondent: It was the Other Books, the Other Art [0:10:00] Supplies, the Other Café.

- Interviewer:** And what happened to them?
- Respondent:** Now I ask him because I had no lease...
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** ...to make sure if I can use the name.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** It was Gus's Barbershop.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** Oh. He says, "Gus, it's a good idea. Don't worry. I'm going to send somebody." And right away, he sent somebody because it was an art school at the back.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And he put "The Other."
- Interviewer:** [0:10:30] Mm-hm. A sign.
- Respondent:** But I took the idea because in our profession, they start – they didn't like to call themselves barbers. Yeah. Everybody started becoming hair stylists, hair designers, whatever. I says, "No. I'm a barber. I'm proud to call myself a barber. I'm going to keep this place, men's place, because I think we deserve a place." [0:11:00] We're around, talk politics, you know? Whatever. Sports.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** And the Other means different. Gus the Other Barber means different. And I got the idea from that. And the Other Kingdom was signed by the Queen.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** It was registered for a couple of months.

- Interviewer:** Oh okay.
- Respondent:** So this is [0:11:30] about the neighbourhood there, so.
- Interviewer:** So about how long did the Other Kingdom exist? From about when to when?
- Respondent:** Two or three months.
- Interviewer:** Oh, two or three. What year then?
- Respondent:** Two or three months.
- Interviewer:** What year, do you remember roughly?
- Respondent:** Oh goodness. Must be...
- Interviewer:** Was it '60...
- Respondent:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** '60s.
- Respondent:** '60s. Yes. '66, '67.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Something like that.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So when you took over the store, the barbershop, it was Gus's Barbershop, and then you added "The Other."
- Respondent:** Oh, before it used to be when the – it was George's Barbershop.
- Interviewer:** [0:12:00] George's. Okay.
- Respondent:** George's Barbershop.
- Interviewer:** Okay.

- Respondent:** And then after I took over, I...
- Interviewer:** Gus.
- Respondent:** ...changed it to Gus.
- Interviewer:** And I know that you work with other barbers from Greece. Was that always the case? Other barbers from Greece? Or other...
- Respondent:** Most of the time. Yeah. In the beginning when I took over, I had two barbers from Greece.
- Interviewer:** Was that...
- Respondent:** Actually, I forget that one's still with me.
- Interviewer:** [0:12:30] Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Forty-three, forty-five years now. Byron.
- Interviewer:** Byron?
- Respondent:** Yeah. And the other guy, Gus his name too.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** I knew him from Greece.
- Interviewer:** Oh, I didn't know.
- Respondent:** I was apprentice on the south side and he was working as a barber right across...
- Interviewer:** In Sparta.
- Respondent:** ...from me in Sparta. And 1973, two of my barbers went to Greece...
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

- Respondent:** ...for good, and I was by myself.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** So I put an ad on [0:13:00] the Greek radio, and guess who? My old friend saw it.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** And he start working since. So – but I had Hungarian because the area where I was there, Bloor and Brunswick, was a lot of Hungarians. Mostly Hungarians.
- Interviewer:** Oh. As clients. Customers.
- Respondent:** No, no, no, no, no. Business.
- Interviewer:** Oh. Oh yes, yes.
- Respondent:** Still.
- Interviewer:** Right, right, right. Like the restaurants. Like the restaurants.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Restaurants. [0:13:30] It was the – I lived up at the bakery across the street.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** Was the Hungarian Castle.
- Interviewer:** Yes?
- Respondent:** Which they sold it, I think, because the lady – they passed away.
- Interviewer:** It's a bookstore now. The BMV.
- Respondent:** Oh that's a – yeah? You know, since I moved from there, I never want to think about it because it was heartbreaking, believe me, the way – because the owner, he start selling the buildings.

- Interviewer:** Mm.
- Respondent:** [0:14:00] And he moved, he invested in France and in England.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** He was from England.
- Interviewer:** Mm.
- Respondent:** But too bad, he blew it. He lost everything.
- Interviewer:** So when did you leave – what was the number on Bloor? Four...
- Respondent:** 499.
- Interviewer:** When did you leave 499 Bloor Street?
- Respondent:** October 1st. October 1st, 1980.
- Interviewer:** '80. [0:14:30] And then you moved west to your current location.
- Respondent:** I moved west of Bathurst right across from my friend, Honest Ed's.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Oh, so no, say more about the other businesses. I think that's interesting.
- Respondent:** Yeah. It was Hungarian, mostly Jewish, then a couple of Greeks moved there because the Greek community was where I am now before.
- Interviewer:** Where you [0:15:00] are now?
- Respondent:** West of Bloor. Bloor to Ossington was mostly Greek area.
- Interviewer:** Mm.
- Respondent:** Right now it's only me and another gentleman since. Everybody else is – actually, I don't know anybody anymore.

- Interviewer:** I have to ask you what about the Danforth? That's known as a Greek part of town.
- Respondent:** Yes. Yes. They moved from there to Danforth.
- Interviewer:** And that happened around?
- Respondent:** Oh, started after '70s.
- Interviewer:** **[0:15:30]** After the '70s.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Well there were some there, but then slowly all the business from that area, they moved. They moved except for me.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Everybody was saying, "Why don't you come down there? You know most of your customers there. They come from there, here, blah, blah, blah." I says, "No. They are enough down there. Let them fight by themselves. I'm happy."
- Interviewer:** So – and George, the original barber, he was Greek.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** So he was part of that settlement of a number of Greek people **[0:16:00]** doing business in that area and, like you said earlier, in the '60s, say. In the '50s and '60s. Then people from Greece had opened businesses...
- Respondent:** He moved 1959 at that place.
- Interviewer:** Right. Right. So do you have an understanding of why people from Greece, like people from Hungary or, you know, were in that area on Bloor Street?
- Respondent:** Well, all the newcomers at that time, they were looking especially for barbers.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: [0:16:30] Where do I find a Greek barber? So they came. You know? They was asking, they were telling them, they were coming there. So after one year or two years, they liked the area. They opened...

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: They start there. There was a ladies' wear, there was a shoe store. After the Jewish people were moving out...

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: You know, it was Hungarian. It was one Italian, and actually across on [0:17:00] the north side closer to Brunswick, it used to be an Italian barber.

Interviewer: Oh. Almost kitty-corner.

Respondent: Sold it to a Hungarian, and now it's still only a few Hungarians.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: The other – you know, since I sold the place, I don't even pass over there.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I can't.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you say a little more, what made it attractive then to these new immigrants, [0:17:30] that part of Bloor Street? That area? What – you know, you just said how it was not just your barbershop or George's barbershop, but you mentioned other businesses that the people from Greece or from Hungary were opening. So why that part of Bloor Street? Why not the Danforth? Why not some other part of Toronto?

- Respondent:** You know, I think because of Honest Ed's store, it was those days – I don't think there is any person [0:18:00] from anywhere in the world didn't pass from the old Honest Ed's.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** So and I think he kept the area, you know, well known. So people start, as they did lately, and you see what's going on out there.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** I don't know much what's happening now in Bloor and Brunswick, [0:18:30] but it was a very interesting area.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** I don't know. I think it still is.
- Interviewer:** Yes. [Laughs]
- Respondent:** But...
- Interviewer:** Tell me more about the people, then, who were your customers back then.
- Respondent:** Most of my customers were Greek newcomers, and a lot of Portuguese because a lot of Portuguese used to be down there. Italian, Hungarian, and Jewish.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [0:19:00] What languages were spoken? All of them?
- Respondent:** Oh, I had to learn a few words from each.
- Interviewer:** You did?
- Respondent:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** And you still know them?

- Respondent:** Yeah, I still know them. And people are surprised, you know, when they come in. You know, Hungarian, or Italian, or this. Oh yeah. You're Magyar, you're Hungarian.
- Interviewer:** Oh, Magyar. Hungarian. Yes.
- Respondent:** It's a region.
- Interviewer:** Right, right, right. Right.
- Respondent:** Anyway.
- Interviewer:** [0:19:30] Did you speak Yiddish with Ed?
- Respondent:** Only a few things.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** Jokes.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** We used to say a lot of jokes.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** You want me to tell you one that he told me?
- Interviewer:** Sure, sure.
- Respondent:** Okay. Once there was – while he was putting a special, special?
- Interviewer:** Oh yes. Special. On special.
- Respondent:** On special. He says there's a married couple, married [0:20:00] and age over seventy-five. Over seventy-five years of age. They can – he used to have the restaurants downtown.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Oh, I used to eat there.

- Respondent:** Okay. So he go any of his stores, something or, you know, for dinner or whatever, free.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** But they had to bring their own parents with them. [Laughter] That was [0:20:30] one of the good jokes that he was telling me.
- Interviewer:** Yes. Okay.
- Respondent:** And I'm thankful and I will always – I never will forget him because he treat me like family all these years. I was his personal barber for forty-eight years.
- Interviewer:** And it started when he was your landlord.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Yes. He was coming, he didn't have to be treated differently than anybody else.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Actually I used to take – he was coming Saturday [0:21:00] and I had five, six, seven people waiting early in the morning. Wintertime. Snow. I said, "Mr. Mirvish, why don't you call before you come?"
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** "No, no. I go and I come back." He says, "I don't want to be treated. I'm the same like everybody else."
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** That's what kind of person he was.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. What kind of customers – you said how you had Portuguese, Hungarian, Italian. And anything you can say about

them [0:21:30] as customers. You know, was there something – other stories you can tell about customers from the '60s or '70s?

Respondent: Well...

Interviewer: Maybe they're children, for instance.

Respondent: Oh, the children, I still give them haircuts.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Respondent: I still give them lollipop.

Interviewer: Because I know you...

Respondent: I cut four generations.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Respondent: Four generations. No. It was a [0:22:00] beautiful experience for me there for my life, I should say still. You see, they like me, they respect me. That's why I don't want to change. I got hurt many times from them, especially younger people who were in trouble.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: With drugs, with the parents...

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: They were in love with – those days wasn't like today.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: [0:22:30] We all wanted to find the guy or a girl from our own roots to get married.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Today, it's changed a lot.

Interviewer: Like you said...

Respondent: Those days it was big problems...

Interviewer: Because a lot of your customers...

Respondent: So I had to be – I had to be between the father and the son.

Interviewer: Sometimes. Uh-huh.

Respondent: Oh, a lot of times.

Interviewer: Really?

Respondent: A lot of times.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: The guys that were with drugs.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: And, [0:23:00] well, I didn't want to remember this, but I've got to tell you that I feel bad because I could not save one guy. I saved so many.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: One I could not, and he was a Croatian guy.

Interviewer: A what guy?

Respondent: Croatia.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Respondent: He was born here.

Interviewer: So it wasn't just Greek fathers and sons.

- Respondent:** No. No. My places, they're national.
- Interviewer:** No, I know. But these personal issues. Personal problems.
- Respondent:** Too [0:23:30] many personal problems.
- Interviewer:** But...
- Respondent:** And you know what people appreciate is that whatever we discuss in my chair, it stays there. I never, never – well I said a few stories to help others what happened, but no names.
- Interviewer:** No names.
- Respondent:** Nobody. But this boy...
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** ...and I love him so much.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And he loved his father too much too, but he was a bit [0:24:00] arguments between them because he was working. You know, he was going high at home, the father was tough. I had the same experience with one of my sons too, but thank god, you know, through my experience in the barbershop, listened to the stories from everybody. From Jewish people, from Italians, Hungarians, Greeks, from everybody. That's how that area was there.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** There was [0:24:30] a few people from all over the world, and who couldn't speak English either.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Not well. [Laughs]
- Respondent:** No. Well, me I was young. Yeah. But the older people...

- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And my area there is personal. I met my first girlfriend as soon as I started there, and she was the one who teach me English.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Because...
- Respondent:** The government didn't help or anything, you [0:25:00] know? I couldn't go to school.
- Interviewer:** And so was she Greek-Canadian?
- Respondent:** No, no, no. She was Italian.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Born in...
- Respondent:** Born here.
- Interviewer:** Born here.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And so she helped with your English.
- Respondent:** Oh yeah. Oh yes. She was there. My teacher.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And I thank you.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** It keeps you want to have the story.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So but it's mainly the men. You did not have women customers.
- Respondent:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** Sometimes women came to you?

- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** [0:25:30] Okay.
- Respondent:** Yes. When I said a men's place, that doesn't mean we didn't like ladies.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** No, no, no.
- Interviewer:** As customers.
- Respondent:** We love ladies.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** We love ladies.
- Interviewer:** Could they get their hair styled?
- Respondent:** Yes. Yes. And some wig styles. Since then I remember, and I have some postcards that they send me. Yeah. It was the time that society was changing. The styles were changing, you know? The girls started having more freedom, which they [0:26:00] did not before. And different – you know, the hippies were then – and that was a big argument that we had with almost all the nationalities. The older people. Because they want their sons to have a short haircut, and the kids were crying, "No. I want this and that." So – and I was losing a lot of kids.
- Interviewer:** A lot of...
- Respondent:** They start hate me. "No, I don't want to go to Gus." [0:26:30] And I take the fathers private. I would say, I said, "Listen, just let me do my job." For a while, let him...
- Interviewer:** Grow his hair.

- Respondent:** Tells me what he wants. What style he wants, okay?
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Because if he's not going to come here, he's going to go to a salon or something and they're not going to even allow you to go inside and tell them what to do.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** So slowly, like this, and [0:27:00] they're still coming and they bring their own kids, and they bring their grandkids also.
- Interviewer:** Now that really is interesting. I'm thinking about long hair in the '60s, and what you're saying though, it wasn't just, you know, you let your hair grow and grow and grow. These young men who had grown up, many of them maybe as children that you'd cut their hair, and you'd cut it short like the dad's, father's hair, and that was the normal thing to do. But now they wanted long hair, but [0:27:30] they could still come to you to get their long haircut, just not cut short.
- Respondent:** Yes. Yes. You see, from the time I born until even now, it's all the different styles, so I have no problem.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** You want short, I give you short. You want the long style, long. You want a brush cut, you want a crew cut, you want a Mohawk, doesn't matter what. Actually, we have a lot of [0:28:00] faux-hawks now. It's a new style, which a famous soccer player started.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. And so how – going back though, how did you learn about new styles? Did some of it you pick up from the customer? Or did you talk to other barbers, you know, among yourselves?
- Respondent:** No, no, no. If you saw me – I don't know. It's a charisma, I think, in – it's not just – you see, you have to see the customer, [0:28:30] his face, and create what is best for him.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: So even if I look in the magazine, 1966, it was a contest at Royal York hotel.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Fifty barbers. And I went to participate. You have to register what you're going to **[0:29:00]** do before you start. So I signed down four different styles on the same model, the same customer, the same person. At the end, all the barbers, they stop and they all came behind me to see what I'm going to do next.

Interviewer: Because you did one after another on the same model?

Respondent: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: A man.

Respondent: Yes. Yes. And I got the first prize.

Interviewer: I see. **[0:29:30]** 1966?

Respondent: 1966.

Interviewer: Did they ever do that contest before or since?

Respondent: I think so. They're doing it, but I went one more time. I just participate, not to – and I didn't like it. Everything changed.

Interviewer: But it was fun the first time.

Respondent: Oh.

Interviewer: What if you hadn't won? You still would have enjoyed it?

Respondent: Of course.

Interviewer: It was great.

- Respondent:** Of course.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. And so you could do four styles, like cutting a little more hair and shaping it a little differently?
- Respondent:** [0:30:00] Yeah. It was long hair.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** So I got beautiful style, the first one. Then I went shorter like the '50s, you know?
- Interviewer:** Sideburns? Or ducktail? Or?
- Respondent:** That one you're getting.
- Interviewer:** Oh yeah? [Laughs]
- Respondent:** No. Ducktail wasn't then.
- Interviewer:** Not that. Okay.
- Respondent:** Not '66. That...
- Interviewer:** That was '50s then.
- Respondent:** That came after. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** So, and I end with a brush cut.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Oh. Short.
- Respondent:** And I was doing it because in Greece [0:30:30] we had no electric clippers, so whoever wants brush cut, and they were watching the wrestling. The wrestlers used to keep it like that. They asked me and I had to go with a comb and the scissor.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.

- Respondent:** That's why I love to work with the scissor. Mostly then...
- Interviewer:** If you had to, you could cut a man's hair just with scissors.
- Respondent:** I do.
- Interviewer:** I know. But you could – that could be all you need, absolutely if you had to.
- Respondent:** That's all.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** That's all.
- Interviewer:** The comb and scissors.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** **[0:31:00]** Could you do a woman's hair too?
- Respondent:** Of course.
- Interviewer:** With scissors too? Just the – you could if you had to?
- Respondent:** In ladies those days, because lately I try not to get so many. You know, I'm too busy, and it takes more time. Before I started, I used to go comb and the razor only.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** No scissor.
- Interviewer:** Hm.

- Respondent:** Now, [0:31:30] I use the scissor only. Some they want a men's style, short, so we use the clippers.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Now you're talking more recently, but do you think that could be a reason a woman goes to a barber like yours thinking that you can cut a man's kind of haircut?
- Respondent:** First of all, in the barbershop we don't charge so much.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** You go to a stylist, you know, just for a simple haircut, they charge you at least sixty dollars to a hundred and twenty.
- Interviewer:** [0:32:00] There you go.
- Respondent:** So you come to the barber, you pay twenty dollars, and you get a better job, better treatment, more friendly.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Right. And going back to what you said earlier about the problems that you helped...
- Respondent:** Oh god.
- Interviewer:** ...with so many families, it sounds like, there was more to it than ever. There could always be more than just a haircut. It could be...
- Respondent:** No, no, no.
- Interviewer:** ...that [0:32:30] it's this going to the barbershop to talk to the barber and to have a social interaction.
- Respondent:** It's there to be a barber.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** It's not only to know how to cut hair. It's a beautiful profession. The public relation is the most important. People come in or, [0:33:00] you know, sometimes on TV or in the newspaper they ask me, says, "You have a lot of fussy barbers, eh, in your time that you're

doing." I said, "No. For me there is no fussy. Word doesn't exist for me." These people who you think they're fussy, for me, they're sport guys. [0:33:30] They love the perfect thing. If somebody comes and says, "You know, Gus, one sideburn is longer than the other." I appreciate that. Or, "I don't like my hair this way, or comb it a different way," I like that because for me, every time I even I have customers for over fifty years, every time they come, I try to do better. And [0:34:00] I saw them, the new styles too because I used to get a lot of phone calls from their wives or their girlfriends that says, "Gus," when the long hair start at that time, most of the customers, they didn't want the long hair, but their wives, they want it. So they call me says, "Gus, you know, even if he tells [0:34:30] you cut it short, can you leave it a little bit longer?" And I teach them with a new style. I go with my way without even tell them that their wives...

Interviewer: So what might – yeah.

Respondent: And my secret still...

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: ...I said if I can please the woman, I will never going to lose this guy.

Interviewer: Right. [Laughs] [0:35:00] And it makes me think that in some families where a father might be talking to you about the son who's got some issue about the hair and his lifestyle, the wife is calling you to tell you how she wants the husband's hair cut.

Respondent: Oh yes.

Interviewer: You know? [Laughs]

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So it's working down the line.

Respondent: Yes. That's right. [Laughter] That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh. That's an amazing story. And to think that it happened over and over again for you.

Respondent: Every day, my friend.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Every day, every day. I always said – [0:35:30] because I get hurt very much. I get hurt for a few things. As I told you, that young guy, he jumped from the Danforth bridge.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: That's why I feel so bad I could not, I could not save him.

Interviewer: Save him.

Respondent: Although his two friends, they still come to my store and we still talk about...

Interviewer: Him. Yeah.

Respondent: ...that. And they remember. You know, they hug me and they cry. Even today, now.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: [0:36:00] So it's – oh god. No.

Interviewer: Are they glad that the barriers have been put up on the Danforth bridge?

Respondent: No. Who glad?

Interviewer: Because you said this man jumped off the Danforth bridge. They're now barriers so you can't do that anymore.

Respondent: Well he wasn't the only one.

Interviewer: No, no. I know.

- Respondent:** There's so many.
- Interviewer:** That's what I mean. So...
- Respondent:** But that barrier personally, I don't like it. If somebody was suicidal he's going to go there? Well, somebody jumped from here the other day.
- Interviewer:** [0:36:30] Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** You know, it doesn't look good. I had some newcomers that say, or tourists, "What? Why? Oh god, doesn't look good." Anyway, that's...
- Interviewer:** Right. But it's the one that got away, you know? So many people you did save or you helped, you know, the families.
- Respondent:** A few more. A few more older. Not only.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** I feel bad about it.
- Interviewer:** I know we're talking about [0:37:00] '60s and '70s for you, but would you say that that period then, you know, with the hairstyles changed and the hippies, and you know, it's never been that much – I don't know. I don't know what word you would use, but a difficult time ever since? Or do difficulties still happen just the same way...
- Respondent:** For me?
- Interviewer:** ...you know, when – yeah. What people bring to you, the difficulties they bring to you, were there more because it was the '60s? Or is it always that way? [0:37:30] It doesn't...
- Respondent:** No, no, no. Now it's nothing like that.
- Interviewer:** Nothing like that.

Respondent: No, no, no. Even before, it used to be – even my area there, a lot of discrimination.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Which I don't like the word.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Discrimination. You like somebody or you don't like somebody.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: Now you cannot even – we used to joke, we used to laugh. Now you can't even say a joke to somebody. I say **[0:38:00]** for my own race.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Right.

Respondent: You know which one I respect? The Jewish people. They come and they tell me so many...

Interviewer: Jokes.

Respondent: ...jokes, and I use it with them.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: So.

Interviewer: Right. Were the jokes – used to be about Jewish, Portuguese, Italian, Hungarian.

Respondent: Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: About different people. Greek. And now you're saying you can't make jokes about people – where they're from and who they are.

Respondent: Now you cannot even laugh. Society changed completely. **[0:38:30]** You look somebody funny.

- Interviewer:** Hm.
- Respondent:** Bloor and Brunswick...
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** ...was the best – anyway. I didn't know too many neighbourhoods at that time because I'm stuck there for thirty-nine years, right?
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** My life's still there, although I'm up there, but my life and my memories are all there. It's like I feel like **[0:39:00]** an immigrant.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Did you ever live – how close did you live...
- Respondent:** Yeah. I used to live on Major Street.
- Interviewer:** Thank you, Gus. I should have asked that earlier.
- Respondent:** I lived on Major. I lived on Brunswick also.
- Interviewer:** Yes? What numbers?
- Respondent:** Oh, I don't remember. I don't remember.
- Interviewer:** What cross-street?
- Respondent:** I don't remember. When I first came, I used to live down Sherbourne and Gerrard for a while. Then I went Dovercourt and Bloor. **[0:39:30]** Then '62 on Major. Then I moved to Howland and Bloor.
- Interviewer:** Howland and Bloor. Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** North.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

- Respondent:** There.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** That was when I got married. 1963.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** My honeymoon was there.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] Howland and Bloor.
- Respondent:** **[0:40:00]** And from there, oh quite a few times. In the first year we had the first baby. I went to Brunswick south of Bloor. There's one street there. I don't remember.
- Interviewer:** Sussex. Sussex is the first street.
- Respondent:** Sussex.
- Interviewer:** Sussex.
- Respondent:** Okay. Right there at the corner.
- Interviewer:** At the corner. Do you remember which corner? Sussex and Brunswick. Northwest? South?
- Respondent:** No. On the west, south side.
- Interviewer:** Southwest. Got it. **[0:40:30]** Yes.
- Respondent:** Right there. And then I had to buy – because they changed me – the baby was crying...
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** ...I couldn't find the room with kitchen. Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** You couldn't find...

- Respondent:** To rent.
- Interviewer:** Oh. That had a kitchen. I see.
- Respondent:** I need a room, one room and a kitchen.
- Interviewer:** Right, right.
- Respondent:** I had one son. You know, baby, he was crying. Bothered them. So as soon as I go ask, "You renting?" **[0:41:00]** "You have children?" "Yeah." They want baby, small. Sorry. No.
- Interviewer:** People were just renting rooms, is that it? You couldn't get a place...
- Respondent:** Yeah. You couldn't afford to buy...
- Interviewer:** ...with an apartment.
- Respondent:** ...flat, apartment. You know? So I had a thousand dollars, 1964, and I bought a house on Dufferin and St. Clair.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So that was your first real move away, wasn't it?
- Respondent:** **[0:41:30]** Yes.
- Interviewer:** To Dufferin, St. Clair.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And how long did that last? I know we're...
- Respondent:** Until 1980 and I moved here.
- Interviewer:** To Mississauga.
- Respondent:** Mississauga.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you.

Respondent: But my life still down there.

Interviewer: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes.

Respondent: You know, I told you earlier that if you are in one place for so many years, you meet the people around there, okay? Some they go, others moving in. It's [0:42:00] an interesting profession, okay? You meet everybody. You heard everything. Different cultures, different, different. When you move from one country and you go into the other, you are divided. You taking the memories from one country and you kill it on the other. You see, you kill your memories.

Interviewer: You kill [0:42:30] the memory.

Respondent: I tell you what.

Interviewer: Yes. Yes, please.

Respondent: I born and grew up in Greece. I was eighteen years old. The beautiful, most beautiful years of our lives, okay, when we grow up. All the friends, parents, and that. And I moved here, although I've been here so many years. Every time I'm here, my mind goes to Greece. I go to Greece, my family, my friends are here. So I want to come [0:43:00] back here. I'm here still, and I want to go there because my parents and my grandparents are all buried there. My older brother. I have two sisters, I have brother, so you see?

Interviewer: You're divided.

Respondent: The same thing is when I – in my barbershop on Bloor and Brunswick. Thirty-nine years. Now I'm not too far, but I don't walk east of Bathurst because the memories. And all of the Jewish people that I met, [0:43:30] and they helped me, they're dead.

Interviewer: Hm.

Respondent: But, thank god, I have their sons and I have their grandsons.

Interviewer: Yes.

- Respondent:** Still coming. So you see? But when I see you coming there, I knew your father, I knew your grandfather, so my mind goes...
- Interviewer:** To the past.
- Respondent:** ...to where I met them.
- Interviewer:** And good memories. Good memories.
- Respondent:** Beautiful memories.
- Interviewer:** Wonderful. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** So I will never forget.
- Interviewer:** Did you visit their homes, like in that neighbourhood? **[0:44:00]** Like when you were living on...
- Respondent:** Some.
- Interviewer:** ...Major or Brunswick?
- Respondent:** Some of them.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Some of them. And some when they were older, I had to go to give them haircuts in the home.
- Interviewer:** So apart from the business, when it came to living in that part of Toronto on Major or Brunswick, or Howland even, you know, and you could walk through those streets like Sussex, and Brunswick, and Major, what was it like?
- Respondent:** Beautiful. People were friendly. Even if you **[0:44:30]** didn't know anybody. It's like where I am now. Okay. Face-to-face, I know, except my customers, of course. But all the new people that they move there, it's nothing. I'm very disappointed. I'm very disappointed.

- Interviewer:** That now people...
- Respondent:** We lost what we had.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** I don't want to mention, but anybody can [0:45:00] see the big change that comes there.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** But farther down I think it's better. I don't know. I haven't been, as I told you.
- Interviewer:** Right. You don't walk down Brunswick or Major Street, or even east of Bloor, you know, on the section between Spadina and Bathurst.
- Respondent:** I went once on Brunswick because I still have family from there – Greek, and the lady's very old, the husband dies, and I used to – I bring her some olive oil or [0:45:30] some olives that she wants. She cannot...
- Interviewer:** Really get out of the house.
- Respondent:** But I go.
- Interviewer:** North or south of Bloor on Brunswick?
- Respondent:** Oh, it's on south of Bloor.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** Actually, they are two. One in the corner, the old Greek guy, I had his father. I had his father. Now I have still him. He's about close to ninety. His son and his grandson.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** I used to give them – I still give the three haircuts, but the old man dies. So [0:46:00] they are side-by-side.

- Interviewer:** Two Greek families still on Brunswick.
- Respondent:** There are a lot of Greeks there too, but they all moved. Hungarians moved too from there. Jewish people moved. They're still some. Still one right on the – he has the restaurant, café, what is on – west-north corner, Bloor and Brunswick. It's a café there. It's a Jewish café.
- Interviewer:** Oh, oh. [0:46:30] Yeah. By the Way.
- Respondent:** Since then – yeah. Since then.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And farther up from him used to be the Elizabeth Delicatessen.
- Interviewer:** You know, for a long time, the By the Way had the sign about the chicken.
- Respondent:** Mm-hm.
- Interviewer:** Maybe you could tell, what was that about? Right across from your store.
- Respondent:** I don't know. Right across it was, yeah. He's still coming. I'm going to ask him next time.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Because one time they – they still had the sign, even though they said, "We don't serve chicken." [Laughs]
- Respondent:** Well, this is some ideas, [0:47:00] you know?
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Did you eat at the Hungarian restaurants on Bloor Street?
- Respondent:** Oh yes.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Did you have any favourites for food?

- Respondent:** Well, the favourite it was strudel. How they call it? When it's like a veal thing. And goulash soup.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Right. Right. So anything else favourite about stores and...
- Respondent:** No. Used to be another. Actually, it used to be a Greek restaurant [0:47:30] farther down from my store. A couple of doors.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And they used to make beautiful, like, homemade things. What else can I tell you?
- Interviewer:** When you were living, like, at Howland and those other locations, you obviously just walked to work.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Once you moved to St. Clair and Dufferin...
- Respondent:** Sometime I used to walk too. Wintertime was a lot of snow. Was no bus. [0:48:00] Oh. One more beautiful thing that it was, was the streetcar.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Yeah. I remember very well.
- Interviewer:** What was your usual route? What would you do to get to work and go home?
- Respondent:** Bus to Bloor from Dufferin, streetcar.
- Interviewer:** No subway.
- Respondent:** Was – no, no. So many people, and a lot of times, I had to get up at Spadina and walk up. I [0:48:30] couldn't get off...
- Interviewer:** Oh.

Respondent: ...because people were studying the front, you know, on top of the other.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Respondent: Yeah. I remember. That was something that I miss. I remember when they built the subway.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: Well, as I said, I don't know. I should pass through there to see what has changed.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: Down at the...

Interviewer: Take a little walk past – but you are going to Brunswick to visit these [0:49:00] families on occasion.

Respondent: I don't go from Bloor. I go from the other side down.

Interviewer: From Spadina side. Uh-huh. Right. Okay. How about the Brunswick House? Was it always there?

Respondent: Oh god. You see, I forgot the Brunswick House. [Laughter] I had the two brothers there. Oh. Brunswick House. We had a lot of problem with that too. Oh, a lot of fights.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: Oh.

Interviewer: When your business was open?

Respondent: [0:49:30] Yes.

Interviewer: Really?

Respondent: Actually, was a Greek guy who was the guard there.

- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Tough guy. I – there was his dog. Get involved so much. You're going to be in trouble. They killed him.
- Interviewer:** They killed him.
- Respondent:** Not in there, but wait for him somewhere else and...
- Interviewer:** Really?
- Respondent:** Yes, sir.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** Yes, sir. Brunswick House. And we had some young girls that were singing there, [0:50:00] and they were coming to the barbershop. I asked them – I play the guitar, and I asked them if they sing in the barbershop. I get her a free trim. [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Oh yeah. It's – it was interesting.
- Interviewer:** And I think we can now maybe mention something you haven't talked about before, that you're a musician.
- Respondent:** Yes, I am. I was actually. [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** Well, how did that relate to your career as a barber, you're also performing as a musician?
- Respondent:** Well, [0:50:30] oh, it was tough when we came. Very tough. Money was making at the barbershop wasn't enough, especially...
- Interviewer:** Forty cents a haircut? What did you...
- Respondent:** Fifty.

Interviewer: Fifty cents. Okay.

Respondent: Actually, I have one sign. The old sign, seventy-five cents.

Interviewer: But that's after it went up a quarter from the rent, right?

Respondent: Yes. [Laughter] The one – seventy-five. And then a dollar, dollar twenty-five.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: But we're still very reasonable. Now with the tax and everything, it's [0:51:00] twenty-one dollars I charged.

Interviewer: But you're paying the rent and the other barbers have to make a living too, right? So yeah.

Respondent: Oh, of course.

Interviewer: Yeah. So...

Respondent: No, the music – when I was seven years old...

Interviewer: Seven.

Respondent: ...we had the small accordion they sent us from United States. It was my father's brother's – and father. They were in Georgia.

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: So they send quite a few things, especially after the Civil War, you know, the body was pulled there. Back home I'm talking about.

Interviewer: Oh yes. The Greek Civil War after the [0:51:30] Second World War.

Respondent: So, and they had one small accordion. My older brother started playing. Then, the second brother start playing, then they stopped. I was seven years old and I took it, and I start playing myself.

Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Respondent: So then, when I start working as an apprentice in the city, I was collecting the tip I was getting, and I went – I give a down payment, **[0:52:00]** and I bought a regular accordion, okay?

Interviewer: Mm-hm.

Respondent: I took some lessons and I mostly – I start by myself. So I came here. First thing, I bought an accordion.

Interviewer: Oh. You couldn't bring the accordion with you?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Oh. [Laughs]

Respondent: No, no.

Interviewer: Too heavy? Too...

Respondent: No. How? How what – you could – only a few things from there.

Interviewer: One bag.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: **[0:52:30]** I give, I remember, a hundred bucks. I bought one hundred twenty, bass, and I start playing. Soon as I was getting there, my brother died in Greece.

Interviewer: Your older...

Respondent: The oldest brother. Thirty-three years old. I put it in the closet.

Interviewer: Hm.

Respondent: Then 19...

- Interviewer:** That's because he played accordion, is that right? Or you just didn't feel the music anymore?
- Respondent:** No, no. Usually **[0:53:00]** back home, if somebody pass away from the family, for five years we have no music. Those days.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** And we had to...
- Interviewer:** It's like women wearing black.
- Respondent:** Yes. Even, yeah, my sisters, they were wearing black.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. And an armband.
- Respondent:** At least for...
- Interviewer:** And a black armband for the men.
- Respondent:** Yeah. And I remember when I went to the barbershop, oh, now that was for my mother. I was twelve, thirteen when my mother died.
- Interviewer:** But it was tradition. You were **[0:53:30]** respecting tradition to put the accordion away.
- Respondent:** Yes, yes, yes. Well, even here. But now, you know, it's not like it used to be. And I met my brother-in-law. I was the youngest. I got engaged with Nicky, '60 – no. Before I got engaged. I met his – he was playing bouzouki, the Greek instrument. Then he met my sister. He was – he had hard time make a living in the beginning here. **[0:54:00]** So he says, "You play accordion?" I says, "Yes." He says, "Take it out." So we start, we're practicing, two of us we start. And then it was five of us. We had the best – one of the best in the first Greek orchestras in Toronto.
- Interviewer:** Right.

- Respondent:** So every weekend, all year round, we are booked to play in weddings, baptism, anniversaries, and sometimes **[0:54:30]** I had to play every night, especially once a year for two weeks. It was the Greek pavilion down at St. George and Bloor. The Greek church there.
- Interviewer:** For the Caribana?
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Caravana.
- Respondent:** Every night. Work whole day in the barbershop, finish seven o'clock, put the accordion on the taxi, and we had no car, and I was going. And that helped me, helped me a lot, you know, to survive and – yeah.
- Interviewer:** **[0:55:00]** Was it just financial, or also the whole experience of being able to play music again?
- Respondent:** Well, financial mostly because, you see, by playing the accordion, I meet a lot of people. And I was – since then, everybody likes me. I don't know why. Maybe was my grandmother's and my mother's blessing. That's what – how I feel. And by working in the barbershop, it was a lot of newcomers.
- Interviewer:** **[0:55:30]** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Then some, they were gathering with the papers to get married and stay here, because you could do that in those days. So I had to play in their wedding.
- Interviewer:** Right. And then when the babies come...
- Respondent:** And customers too. So one job was helping the other.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.

- Respondent:** And besides, you know, my reputation came with the music because I play only [0:56:00] Latin music, and everybody loves it. Like Argentinean, you know, tangos, waltz, that...
- Interviewer:** Oh. But it was a Greek band with accordion and bouzouki, and...
- Respondent:** I play only Latin.
- Interviewer:** Only Latin.
- Respondent:** No – the clarinet and the bouzouki, there was just Greek. Me, the tambo. Okay. So I was doing. But I never play Greek music. After few years, one after the other...
- Interviewer:** [0:56:30] Okay.
- Respondent:** ...they're going.
- Interviewer:** Okay. So it did start when it was Greek music.
- Respondent:** Not me.
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** When I'm learning?
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** Back home.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** Yes. Only two songs. [Laughs]
- Interviewer:** Okay. And then – but then with the friend who encouraged you to take out the accordion and his bouzouki, you were playing Greek music then, weren't you? No? That was Latin music right from the beginning then.
- Respondent:** Yes, yes, yes.

- Interviewer:** Right from the beginning. Oh, thank you.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Okay. And all of these weddings, and any [0:57:00] other parties that you play.
- Respondent:** Oh, we're playing the Greek music until we make them tired. We stop for ten minutes, and me, play guitar and the drummer, was my job. Just to...
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** ...entertain them.
- Interviewer:** To entertain. And that would be Latin. Like some of your favourite pieces would be what? Name a few pieces you might play.
- Respondent:** La Combersita. The Anniversary Waltz.
- Interviewer:** But with a Latin flavour.
- Respondent:** Oh. [Laughter] [0:57:30] The Anniversary Waltz. The [indiscernible 0:57:33], and [indiscernible 0:57:36]. Chitarra Romana. Then O Sole Mio.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** This.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Okay.
- Respondent:** And some others I don't know the title in...
- Interviewer:** In English.
- Respondent:** ...in English. But beautiful song. Like...
- Interviewer:** Yeah.

- Respondent:** You know, the theme of Godfather, Love Story.
- Interviewer:** [0:58:00] Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** All these...
- Interviewer:** Yeah. You stayed up to date with some of the music too? New – like when the movie came out, like when The Godfather, then you'd start playing the theme from The Godfather.
- Respondent:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** Everybody loves it.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** And I play in three different ways, that song.
- Interviewer:** It's like you can cut the hair in so many ways.
- Respondent:** Oh right. Oh right.
- Interviewer:** All right. Okay. So there was a connection in that your customers at the barbershop could also know about, you know, the musical life you had.
- Respondent:** Yes. I became [0:58:30] quite famous because one day you are bringing musicians from Greece, they use some of the musicians from here...
- Interviewer:** To back them up.
- Respondent:** ...it was senior, or because they could not afford to bring all the group here.
- Interviewer:** You're right.

- Respondent:** So.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** One of the most famous was here. I played two nights with him, and...
- Interviewer:** And that would have been about when?
- Respondent:** Oh, well actually...
- Interviewer:** It's okay.
- Respondent:** **[0:59:00]** It was October 1972.
- Interviewer:** In Toronto?
- Respondent:** Yes. At Bloor and Lansdowne. Was the Acropolis Theatre.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Acropolis Theatre, Bloor and Lansdowne.
- Respondent:** Yes. They came from all over Ontario.
- Interviewer:** Because this was a big star from Greece.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Yeah.
- Respondent:** But they had a poster like the window there.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Big.
- Respondent:** So big.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. About six feet tall.
- Respondent:** My picture, myself with the accordion **[0:59:30]** outside the theatre.
- Interviewer:** Oh.

- Respondent:** There it was, the accordionist, "Kostos Agelakos."
- Interviewer:** Oh. You were always Kostos there. Not Gus.
- Respondent:** In Greek, yeah. To Greeks, I'm...
- Interviewer:** Kostos.
- Respondent:** ...Konstantinos. So in short, Kostos. I got more applause than that guy.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Because we were in the back of the stage, and everyone they call, I came out, everybody goes [1:00:00] nuts.
- Interviewer:** Great.
- Respondent:** I have the music too. I have. I record it.
- Interviewer:** You recorded it.
- Respondent:** That night. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Oh. And how did you choose? Because you knew this would be a special occasion, so...
- Respondent:** No. Usually I was taking the...
- Interviewer:** Recorder?
- Respondent:** ...small tape recorder, put it in the back, and I have quite a few tapes with...
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** I have one, we travelled as far as Calgary to play in a Greek association there.

- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** So, [1:00:30] no. And I love music.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** As I love people.
- Interviewer:** Right, right, right, right.
- Respondent:** No, really. Really. I don't know. I'm blessed. I'm blessed.
- Interviewer:** And the music, does it continue for you?
- Respondent:** No. The last time I play was on my fiftieth anniversary in the barbershop.
- Interviewer:** And yeah...
- Respondent:** Three years ago.
- Interviewer:** Three years ago. That was fifty years.
- Respondent:** And I play actually, I had to play because David Mirvish.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** [1:01:00] He came, you know? He wants to cut my hair because I used to cut his father's.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** And before he leaves, I play the Hava Nagila, which is...
- Interviewer:** Right. Jewish.
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Perfect.

- Respondent:** Beautiful. My son's playing the guitar also.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** That's the most pleasure thing that now I feel so happy when I play with him.
- Interviewer:** Right. So that's just for your pleasure.
- Respondent:** Yes. Yes.
- Interviewer:** [1:01:30] Right. Right.
- Respondent:** I play what I like, and as long as I like.
- Interviewer:** Oh. So I'm thinking about how you would have these musical experiences going back that far. Something else that, you know – did you feel a part of a Greek community? Was that part of it too?
- Respondent:** I always being a part of the [1:02:00] community, but I never got involved in any of the associations because I play in all of the Greek associations.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** The music.
- Interviewer:** As far away as Calgary.
- Respondent:** And I meet everybody person to person behind the [1:02:30] curtain.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And I didn't like what was happening. And I'm sure, because I'm playing in some – not – I play Hungarian party, I play in Italian party. Everybody. You know, they try to...
- Interviewer:** Get you involved.

- Respondent:** ...sabotage the Presidents because somebody – now it's not so bad. [1:03:00] Always been, but those days was bad because a lot of us, we came from farms.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** Poor.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Some not well-educated.
- Interviewer:** Yes.
- Respondent:** So they create an association.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** So if they see that they're talking about you nicely, eh, some other guys, they try to...
- Interviewer:** It's like there's different sides and they want you on your side.
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Like that.
- Respondent:** So I said no. [1:03:30] Everybody likes me. I'm happy this way. No. I help them, you know, if sometimes they want to do something, they want, you know, a few bucks here, as much as I could...
- Interviewer:** It sounds political.
- Respondent:** Still. Even now here with St. George's and that, I'm a member. I'm a member in the Greek community.
- Interviewer:** Yes. Is this St. George's Church?
- Respondent:** No, no. Here on [1:04:00] – Profit Ilias. We have a new George here in Mississauga.

- Interviewer:** I'm not quite sure.
- Respondent:** Profit Ilias.
- Interviewer:** Profit Iliia.
- Respondent:** Iliia.
- Interviewer:** Is an association?
- Respondent:** No, no. It's a Greek church.
- Interviewer:** Oh, it's a church. A Greek church. That's the name of the church.
- Respondent:** In Mississauga.
- Interviewer:** Okay. I – sorry.
- Respondent:** Oh, so many Greek churches.
- Interviewer:** Yes, yes, yes, yes.
- Respondent:** And no. If I can, I help, but nothing else.
- Interviewer:** Right. So it does sound political, right? That's what you were trying to [1:04:30] avoid, it sounds like.
- Respondent:** Yes, yes.
- Interviewer:** Is that true also of regular politics?
- Respondent:** Oh yeah.
- Interviewer:** [Laughs] Okay.
- Respondent:** Oh yes.
- Interviewer:** And not to pry.

- Respondent:** Greek without politics [laughter], no.
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Because you could talk politics in the barbershop, couldn't you? Or did you try to...
- Respondent:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** ...maybe that was too sensitive and people get, you know...
- Respondent:** I do.
- Interviewer:** ...excited about it.
- Respondent:** I do.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** And I don't have too much about politicians.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** Actually I spoke in the deli-style once. They ask me. [1:05:00] I suffer to make a living.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** You know, I'm busy. A lot of people say, "Oh, you know, he makes a lot of money. How you make a lot of money?" I need at least half an hour for each customer.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** And we're not busy all day. Anyway, this is nothing to do. They pass a law about the garbage, okay?
- Interviewer:** Yeah. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** To take one, [1:05:30] first of all, we have to charge GST, HST.
- Interviewer:** Yes. Yeah.

- Respondent:** Okay? And increase the price two dollars, which is not even cover the HST.
- Interviewer:** Mm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** In order to pay to the government every three months, and sometime I don't have it.
- Interviewer:** Hm.
- Respondent:** Okay?
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
- Respondent:** To take one bag of hair in the garbage, I had to pay three-fifty per bag.
- Interviewer:** [1:06:00] Three dollars and fifty cents.
- Respondent:** Please.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm. City of Toronto.
- Respondent:** Where is the politicians?
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** Fifty-three years I am in the neighbourhood.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** Nobody ever came. "How are you doing, Gus? How you make it? How?" Nobody. And I tell it publicly, I don't want no politician in my barbershop.
- Interviewer:** No. Okay.
- Respondent:** If they come here and they want to talk about sports, about something else, yes.

- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** [1:06:30] Otherwise, no haircut.
- Interviewer:** Right, right, right.
- Respondent:** Any politician.
- Interviewer:** Right, right. They can – I think I saw Joe Pantalone in your store. [Laughs] But anyway, they can go, but not to talk about politics.
- Respondent:** Pantalone, David Mirvish brought him over.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh. Oh. Okay.
- Respondent:** Okay? And I ask him, I says, "How can I help you?" Because I appreciate he came. Without – he says, "Nothing. Just nice work here." That was – he was.
- Interviewer:** Okay. Yeah.
- Respondent:** [1:07:00] I never see him again.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** And somebody actually – once he started saying something, somebody screamed, "Gus, for real." [Laughter] He says he's not too late.
- Interviewer:** Not too late. You know, you mentioned Greek radio once, about how you advertised. Is that still...
- Respondent:** Still. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** And like, and your music going back to – and you had recordings you made. So would some of your recordings have been played on a Greek radio?
- Respondent:** No.

- Interviewer:** No. You [1:07:30] didn't sell any of your recordings.
- Respondent:** Oh no, no, no, no, no.
- Interviewer:** No. You never did that.
- Respondent:** Actually, I'm thinking to make a CD because we did once here. Me and my two sons, and a guy was from...
- Interviewer:** And you have a niece, don't you? A niece?
- Respondent:** Oh, my niece. Yes.
- Interviewer:** She's a singer, right?
- Respondent:** Yes, yes, yes. Yes.
- Interviewer:** Right.
- Respondent:** So beautiful, my niece.
- Interviewer:** And she's still performing music?
- Respondent:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Yes?
- Respondent:** Not professional, but everything – when everything happens, some [1:08:00] things, they invite her, she goes and sings.
- Interviewer:** Right. Right. That's good. And you think maybe it's time after all these years, you'll finally put your music on a CD?
- Respondent:** Yes. Because we already have about hour-and-a-half live.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** Live. But it's a lot of dancing, a lot of "Opa!", you know?

- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.
- Respondent:** But there are a few really beautiful songs.
- Interviewer:** Some ballads?
- Respondent:** [1:08:30] What do you mean?
- Interviewer:** A ballad. You know, something melodic, and you know, maybe a romantic song.
- Respondent:** No, no, no.
- Interviewer:** No?
- Respondent:** It's mostly – we call it real Greek old songs.
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** "Rebetiko," we call it.
- Interviewer:** "Rebetiko."
- Respondent:** Pure. Hundred percent "Rebetiko."
- Interviewer:** And you would be recording that now.
- Respondent:** We do have it on a cassette, but we plan it with my son to make a CD. You know, [1:09:00] a few of them.
- Interviewer:** Wouldn't some of your older recordings be the real "Rebetiko"? Some of that being very authentic.
- Respondent:** No.
- Interviewer:** Before? No? No. I see.
- Respondent:** No.
- Interviewer:** Better to do it now. Do it now.

Respondent: This is – it's beautiful. And we came back. Actually, we started because we was taking this guy, was working the boat. He came for two months, and I took him to some of the Greek nightclubs, and he asked the guys for the bouzouki, he takes the bouzouki, and he was playing.

Interviewer: [1:09:30] Yeah? Well, you know...

Respondent: And they love it. And they start doing it.

Interviewer: Yeah. And there's still a lively Greek music scene?

Respondent: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Well you know, Gus, I think this is a perfect place to end our interview because if you do that, your music will live on. And by allowing me to record this interview, you know, your words, describing your memories of...

Respondent: I believe it.

Interviewer: ...yes, will live on too.

Respondent: I believe it. Thank you very much.

Interviewer: You're very welcome.

[1:09:58]

[End of recording]