

Transcription: BV023.16.1

Interview with Shirley Cohen

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0001_003.mp3

Interviewer: Eric Damer (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Shirley Cohen (SC)

Date of Interview: September 6, 2023

1 INTVWR: Hello, I am Eric Damer. It is Wednesday, September 6th, 2023. I'm speaking here with
2 Shirley Cohen at the Burnaby Village Museum. Shirley, hello. Welcome back.

3 SC: Thank you.

4 INTVWR: It's good to have you here and talking about your life in Burnaby, how you got here,
5 the things that you did, and what's going on. Now, we have talked a little bit earlier, so I know a
6 little bit about you, but you can probably tell us lots more, I'm sure. Maybe we could start with
7 your, sort of with your roots in this part of the world. You were born and grew up in Detroit, but
8 your parents came from elsewhere so maybe you could tell us how your parents came to Detroit
9 and..

10 SC: Okay so my roots are not in this part of the world, they're in the Detroit part of the world.

11 INTVWR: Right, right.

12 SC: My parents were both born in Hungary, my father in a small town. town called Kishvarda, and
13 my mother in Budapest. My dad **00:01:00** came over to Detroit, sponsored by his brothers in '34,
14 after trying to come for many years, but the U.S. tightened their immigration opportunities, which
15 was very hard for him. My mom came in '39, they came separately. They didn't know each other.
16 And she came as a sponsored refugee to her aunt in Detroit. And at the time she came, things were
17 heating up under Hitler in Germany. And I remember her telling me she had to hide in between
18 some suitcases in the Frankfurt train station -

19 INTVWR: Wow.

20 SC: as she left Hungary to the U.S.

21 INTVWR: And, and when you think back to your parent's situation and how they had basically to
22 flee to the United States for safety, what does that make you feel about, what what does that
23 conjure **00:02:00** up in you in terms of your thoughts about your parent's origins? Does it make
24 you angry? Does it make you think about people that would have to flee, and uh, under those sort-
25 of-circumstances?

26 SC: Well, obviously it was a horrific time. My dad didn't have to flee, but the opportunities were
27 very limited for him as a Jewish person. I have one letter that was dated a few years later that
28 mentioned a relative, a distant relative who couldn't get a job as a dishwasher, and he was an
29 educated person, as he said, because he was a Jew. So, things were pretty tight, but my dad didn't
30 have to flee, whereas for my mom, I think things were getting worse. Even then, she didn't have
31 to flee, but it was hard getting out, and people were trying **00:03:00** to leave and she, she was
32 sponsored as a refugee at that time. The Nazis came into Hungary in '44 -

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- 33 INTVWR: Okay.
- 34 SC: With a vengeance and killed hundreds of thousands of Jews. They just swept the countryside
35 and then into Budapest. So, thankfully my parents were gone by then, but my dad had two sisters,
36 two brothers-in-law, and I had a two-year-old cousin who were murdered by the Nazis.
- 37 INTVWR: Wow.
- 38 SC: So, how does it make me feel. It makes me feel thankful that they came to the U.S.
- 39 INTVWR: Right. And Detroit, what you said, had quite a large Jewish population at the time?
- 40 SC: There were probably about 100, 000 Jews
- 41 INTVWR: Oh
- 42 SC: So when I grew up, so it was really a very thriving community.
- 43 INTVWR: And how did your parents connect then, given that they didn't know each other
44 previously?
- 45 SC: So, my dad read the Hungarian paper, and he read about a woman who had just arrived as a
46 refugee, and he decided to look her **00:04:00** up.
- 47 INTVWR: Why would you do that? Just take the name out of the paper.
- 48 SC: Well, if you don't have plenty of fish, you know, and you're 33, I guess you have your eyes
49 open as to opportunities, so.
- 50 INTVWR: Wow. And they both spoke Hungarian, presumably.
- 51 SC: Yes, yes, yes.
- 52 INTVWR: Do, did they speak much English as well when they came?
- 53 SC: My dad, I think, knew some English. My mother didn't know English.
- 54 INTVWR: Within the context, though, of the community in Detroit, though, could you get by
55 without speaking much English?
- 56 SC: Well, if you're not in the work world, you could. Like my mom had mainly Hungarian Jewish
57 friends, so her English was not as developed during my lifetime. My dad was a small business
58 accountant, though, so he learned English and was quite fluent.

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- 59 INTVWR: Sure. Yeah. I guess numbers no language.
- 60 SC: Right. And, but they spoke Hungarian to each other, **00:05:00** so, I picked up some of it, but
61 I'm not fluent.
- 62 INTVWR: Right. Right.
- 63 SC: It's not a very useful language.
- 64 INTVWR: No. No? I know a few Hungarian people. I don't suppose they spoke other languages
65 as well. Was Yiddish spoken in Hungary?
- 66 SC: No. The Hungarians didn't, by and large to my knowledge, speak Yiddish. My dad knew some
67 Latin, but he didn't speak it, and he knew some German because he had to learn it in school.
- 68 INTVWR: So, they were married about –
- 69 SC: 1941.
- 70 INTVWR: 1941, and you came along a little later.
- 71 SC: '47.
- 72 INTVWR: And you grew up in Detroit right and so what does it mean to grow up in a Detroit
73 Jewish community what's, what's going on in those days?
- 74 SC: Well, so I should just backtrack a little, the years between '41 and '47, there were very few
75 communications between my dad in Detroit and his siblings in Hungary just because things were
76 getting tighter. And toward the end of the war, they really didn't know who was alive. **00:06:00**
77 And I think there was uncertainty in terms of having children, whether they were going to have
78 children or whether they wanted to. And I, my cousin Agnes, who was born in '42, was orphaned
79 in '44. And when they learned about it, her existence, that she was still alive, they actually looked
80 into adopting her, bringing her to the U.S., in which case, you know, I might have been precluded
81 (laughing), who knows, who knows. But anyway, she was situated, they learned with a family, and
82 stayed with that family and then...
- 83 INTVWR: And, and your father got established in work and -
- 84 SC: Yeah.
- 85 INTVWR: Was ready to have a family one way or the other.
- 86 SC: Yeah. Well, he was already older, he was 46 when I came along.

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87 INTVWR: So here you are. What does it like to grow up in a Detroit Jewish community?

88 SC: Well, interestingly **00:07:00** enough, the schools that I went to had other Jewish kids, but we
89 were still the minority. We weren't exactly in the Jewish school zone area. So, I think I was aware
90 of being Jewish, but I don't recall any kind of anti-Semitism or –

91 INTVWR: And these are the public schools?

92 SC: Yes, or any difficulties. We were made aware of Henry Ford, though, who was a devout anti-
93 Semite in the earlier part of the century, and I remember my dad not wanting to buy Ford cars for
94 quite a while.

95 INTVWR: Right. Right. And, and growing up Jewish though, you observed Jewish holidays. Did
96 you attend a synagogue?

97 SC: We didn't. I'm not sure why. Maybe it was the cost. They were modest, my parents, or maybe
98 they just weren't that religious, but it was important to celebrate the holidays with my cousins and
99 my uncles and aunts.

100 INTVWR: And bar and bat mitzvahs?

101 SC: I did not have that.

102 INTVWR: Oh really? **00:08:00**

103 SC: No.

104 INTVWR: Oh, okay. And so, the Jewish holidays of importance, a lot of people know of Hanukkah
105 and that's in December. And how does that, is that an important, one of the important holidays?

106 SC: Well, I guess theoretically, Sabbath is one of the most important holidays you know, every
107 week to put time aside and to be thoughtful and prayerful, if you observe it. Otherwise just to be
108 aware of it. Yom Kipper, the Day of Atonement, comes at the end of the 10 days of the high
109 holidays, which were coming to Rosh Hashanah, starts I think the night I think it starts the 16th,
110 the night of the 15th, of September and then Yom Kipper, is 10 days later. That's important,
111 Hanukkah just kind of looms larger because of Christmas. You know, I think everybody thinks it's
112 the Jewish Christmas. So uh, and maybe **00:09:00** for some Jewish kids, it also gives them a
113 backup. You know, they get some presents.

114 INTVWR: Sure. But for those who think it is kind of a Jewish Christmas, what is it really?

115 SC: Well, it's a celebration of religious freedom, as are most of the holidays.

116 INTVWR: An, and lights play a big role?

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117 SC: Yeah, well lights...

118 INTVWR: You know, the Menorah.

119 SC: Each night you light, one more light, on a nine candle, candelabra, and the one in the center
120 you take to light the others. So, you start off with the first one, and then the second night you light
121 two, and then you keep going till the end, until it's fully lit.

122 INTVWR: And as you say, the deeper meaning is to celebrate freedom.

123 SC: Right.

124 INTVWR: And other holidays?

125 SC: Well, there's Shavout which is the Harvest Festival, where religious Jews will build a
126 temporary structure where they'll eat in it and say some special prayers in that **00:10:00** and then
127 there's the giving of the Torah which comes in June. What else.

128 INTVWR: Now the Sabbath is Saturday, isn't it?

129 SC: Right. Beginning of Friday night. The Jewish holidays begin the night before the day of.

130 INTVWR: I remember reading somewhere why Saturday or Sunday, sort of took place Saturday,
131 from Saturday in western Christendom, but I can't quite remember how that shift happened. But
132 for Jewish people, the Sabbath is Saturday.

133 SC: Yeah, and Seventh-Day Adventist.

134 INTVWR: Oh, right, right. Of course.

135 SC: Right.

136 INTVWR: Okay. So, public schools in Detroit, any favorite teachers, favorite subjects, anything
137 stand out from those that era, any?

138 SC: I had good English teachers. They were good for creative thought and good English and
139 grammar and stuff, and so on.

140 INTVWR: Did you learn any life lessons that may have stuck with you for a long time? **00:11:00**

141 SC: I'd have to think about that one.

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142 INTVWR: Okay, if you think about it, feel free to come back with that. And so elementary school,
143 through high school, high school, what were you studying in a particular area? Was that um, were
144 you drawn to any particular subjects? Did you have the freedom to select?

145 SC: Oh yeah, no, I was actually good in math and in English. I was in honours for both of those. I
146 was on the school newspaper. I was in probably every club imaginable, just 'cause that was nice
147 to do and fun. And I actually was chosen to be a cheerleader just by chance, which was not my
148 forte, but it was by lottery and it was almost embarrassing, but I served as a cheerleader for
149 probably a semester (laughing).

150 INTVWR: Very good. And so as high school comes to an end, what sort of plans did you have
151 after that? **00:12:00**

152 SC: Well, I knew that I would want to go to university and I was accepted to, I think, two, and I
153 chose the University of Michigan.

154 INTVWR: And the expectations, were the expectations that you would go on? There's this notion
155 that the Jewish people really prize education, is that –

156 SC: Yeah, I think I was always encouraged to study.

157 INTVWR: By your parents?

158 SC: Yeah. Well, my dad especially, but my mom I think also, although she had, I think, only a
159 grade school education, probably because she had to work and whatever. I don't think she had the
160 opportunities.

161 INTVWR: But also, the era, pre-war people weren't always expected to go to high school and
162 beyond at this point.

163 SC: Right.

164 INTVWR: It was quite reserved for quite a small number of people. So which university did you
165 end up at?

166 SC: University of Michigan.

167 INTVWR: Michigan. That's a very prestigious university.

168 SC: Yes (laughing softly)

169 INTVWR: And what were your university days like? **00:13:00** This is the 60s now, sorry -

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170 SC: Yeah, well they were growing up times, making good friends, trying to figure out the future,
171 dating. Yeah, no I think they were maturing times and I, I decided after looking at school
172 psychology and social work, I decided to go into social work.

173 INTVWR: I understand University of Michigan though had some campus political turmoil in the
174 late 60s.

175 SC: Yeah, we had, I guess, Hayden, Tom Hayden, and we had Vietnam sit-ins, and yeah, it was a
176 very active place. I wasn't really that politically active. I was pretty studious.

177 INTVWR: But you were aware of it?

178 SC: Oh, of course.

179 INTVWR: And was it a little intimidating? Was it exciting?

180 SC: Well, no, it was, it was, you know, you were, were kind of proud that this stuff was happening.
181 To a degree, yeah, until they started becoming obtrusive. But to a degree, **00:14:00** for sure.

182 INTVWR: And you ended up in social work.

183 SC: Right.

184 INTVWR: In social work, so, you did a degree in social work, and that led to professional work in
185 social work. And somewhere near the end of that, you met your husband, your future husband.

186 SC: Right. So, we actually met at the campus Jewish Association, which was called Hillel, so um

187 INTVWR: Right. And what does that mean? Because a lot of campuses have a Hillel.

188 SC: Well Hillel was a philosopher who basically, I think he, some of what he said, was if I'm not
189 for myself, who am I? I think that's what he said. Anyway, he was a famous Jewish person. So, the
190 campus –

191 INTVWR: There's a whole sort of network of Hillel -

192 SC: Right, right. At the universities, they're called Hillel.

193 INTVWR: Did you know who sponsors them? **00:15:00**

194 SC: Probably different donors and maybe getting some money from the community. Then. the
195 university.

196 INTVWR: And your husband's studying?

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197 SC: He was studying political science, working on a PhD.

198 INTVWR: So, you were married. I hate to ask, there's a stereotype. Anyone who's seen Fiddler on
199 the Roof, has heard about matchmakers. Is that a real thing in Jewish life?

200 SC: Well, I mean it could be maybe in the Orthodox community, maybe in big centers like Detroit,
201 and maybe there are paid matchmakers here, and maybe there are people who just like to match
202 their friends off.

203 INTVWR: That's not, that wasn't the fact at all.

204 SC: No, no.

205 INTVWR: Not in your case.

206 SC: No. We met over corned beef sandwiches.

207 INTVWR: Alright. So, you're married, a Jewish wedding?

208 PINTVWR: Yeah, **00:16:00** very small in his backyard. His dad had died a few months earlier.
209 My dad had just had surgery, so and Ted did not want a large wedding, so.

210 INTVWR: Now I was snooping around and there's a Houdini connection with your husband.

211 SC: Oh, yeah, yeah.

212 INTVWR: What was that?

213 SC: Well, that's fascinating. So, Ted's father was a doctor, Dr. Daniel E. Cohen, in Detroit. And
214 when he started out in 1924 or 1926, he was a substitute doctor at a hotel. And Houdini was staying
215 there when he did his Detroit tour. And he became ill. He had been punched in the stomach in
216 Montreal.

217 INTVWR: That's Houdini.

218 SC: Houdini. Right. Anyway, he traveled with a lot of discomfort, came to the Detroit Hotel, did
219 the performance, and then afterwards I think he just was in a lot of pain and collapsing. **00:17:00**
220 Anyway, Dr. Daniel Lee Cohen, was called to the bedside because he was the hotel doctor. Houdini
221 was admitted to hospital and my father-in-law spent a few days basically with Houdini, because
222 he had the time as a young doctor, the hotel doctor, and he brought him farmer's chop suey which
223 was his request, cottage cheese mixed with vegetables, and yeah. So, I actually had documents
224 related to Houdini's death, which I donated to the museum of, I think it was theater in New York,
225 part of the New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Library System. There's a special museum
226 for the whole entertainment industry.

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227 INTVWR: Oh, okay.

228 SC: And so, they have the documents and an included Dr. Cohen's certificate about cause of death,
229 and prescription drugs, and insurance papers, **00:18:00** and payment details, yeah.

230 INTVWR: And as it turns out, Harry Houdini's family is also Jewish.

231 SC: Yes, yes. Yeah.

232 INTVWR: I guess just a coincidence.

233 SC: Yeah.

234 INTVWR: That's his doctor, that's another little connection. Okay, so –

235 SC: Well, that's why he requested that Jewish dish, the farmer's chop suey, so, yeah.

236 INTVWR: Oh, I see. I see. And your –

237 SC: Dr. Cohen knew about it.

238 INTVWR: Father-in-law –

239 SC: Yeah.

240 INTVWR: He's familiar with it.

241 SC: Yes.

242 INTVWR: So, big marriage, small marriage in Detroit.

243 SC: Small wedding.

244 INTVWR: And I believe you were soon after, your husband of course finished his doctorate there
245 and so he was looking at an academic career and you, were you in Detroit long after that?

246 SC: Well, no, we weren't there at all actually, Ted had started a job at University of Western
247 Ontario and he had been there in the fall of '70, and we were married in May of '71, so he -

248 INTVWR: So, he's already on his career.

249 SC: Yeah, he imported me.

250 INTVWR: **00:19:00** And so, any thoughts about moving to Canada, was that you're not that far
251 from the border anyway.

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252 SC: No. It just, it didn't seem like such a big deal, really.

253 INTVWR: No, I'm thinking Detroit, that's just across the river from Windsor.

254 SC: Yeah.

255 INTVWR: And so, then London's not too far away from that. And how did you find your new
256 home in London? Was that, was it good?

257 SC: It was fine. So, I worked for six years with family and children's services in adoption. And
258 that was a good job. And we made some close friends. There were actually three synagogues in
259 London, Ontario, and they had sample memberships where you could join for 50 dollars or so, and
260 so we tried different ones just to see which worked. We did we did feel some anti-semitism there.

261 INTVWR: Really?

262 SC: Yeah, yeah when we went for Tay-Sachs testing **00:20:00** Tay-Sachs is a genetic disease
263 which is higher amongst Ashkenazi Jews, Jews from European backgrounds. And when we went
264 for the testing at the synagogue, there was a vehicle being driven around with some swastikas on
265 it by the local Nazi there Martin Weiche. So, the police were there too. And there were some
266 references made at work too, things like my Jewish coffee, and...

267 INTVWR: Wow.

268 SC: Just felt a little, a little strange. And then it was a pretty white city.

269 INTVWR: It must have been really uncomfortable though to see any hint of that.

270 SC: Yeah, oh it was for sure.

271 INTVWR: And so, I guess that made, so I know your husband then got employment at Simon
272 Fraser University. Did it make it a little easier to leave knowing that [inaudible]?

273 SC: Well, I think he felt this was a much more diverse community and department. Yeah, **00:21:00**
274 his department there was pretty, pretty Uni, Uni background, university background.

275 INTVWR: Sorry, at SFU or at?

276 SC: Western.

277 INTVWR: At Western, it was all sort of monocultural.

278 SC: Yeah.

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279 INTVWR: Wow. And so, you didn't know anything about Burnaby when you came out here -

280 SC: Nothing

281 INTVWR: At all?

282 SC: Nothing (laughing)

283 INTVWR: What did you discover about Burnaby when you came out?

284 SC: Nice, nice small community.

285 INTVWR: And this is about what year? This is?

286 SC: '77.

287 INTVWR: '77. So, Burnaby's not, wasn't quite the city it is now at that time.

288 SC: No, much smaller.

289 INTVWR: Right. And a little more rural, lots of open spaces still.

290 SC: Yeah. Metrotown was just a thought.

291 INTVWR: And so, what area of Burnaby were you in when you came here?

292 SC: Middlegate.

293 INTVWR: Middlegate. So that's near Edmonds and Kingsway.

294 SC: Yeah, near Highgate Mall.

295 INTVWR: And so, what was your neighborhood like when you moved in?

296 SC: Nice. We had a small house there. And people were friendly

297 INTVWR: Big yard? **00:22:00**

298 SC: Medium yard. And I had, my son Daniel was five months old when we moved here. So that
299 was, that was hard. It was, you know, know kind of isolating but Ted suggested that I go to a
300 mother-baby group, and I thought well you know I'm just going to be discussing diapers, but I
301 learned that I needed to discuss diapers. So, we actually met, I met my closest friend there who
302 chose not to be interviewed, because she comes from a Holocaust background and just didn't want
303 to have more publicity on her.

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304 INTVWR: Fair enough.

305 SC: So anyway, we became good friends and the families became good friends, and we celebrated
306 holidays together for many years.

307 INTVWR: Excellent. And is it important to make connections with other Jewish people? Is that
308 comforting, give you a sense of belonging?

309 SC: Well, it was for us. Yeah. I mean, in a sense, you kind of speak the same language, social
310 **00:23:00** background language, cultural background language, have similar interests.

311 INTVWR: And you're not, are you working as a social worker as well, or time out for the family
312 for a few years?

313 SC: I did some group leadership for Burnaby Family Life, and then I got a half-time job at Burnaby
314 Hospital when my youngest son was, I think, four and a half, and I stayed there.

315 INTVWR: Oh, for many years?

316 SC: Yeah, 'til 2016.

317 INTVWR: Oh, okay. And so that is as a resident social worker?

318 SC: Right.

319 INTVWR: And then what does a social worker do at a hospital?

320 SC: Oh, many things. I worked in a number of different departments, maternity, emergency,
321 medical, rehab, surgery, **00:24:00** a little bit of palliative. Social workers are really important in
322 terms of helping families deal with illness, death, financial issues, possible abuse, life, life choices,
323 living situations.

324 INTVWR: And, and part of it must be kind of in a counseling role. Is part of it also helping connect
325 people to resources?

326 SC: Right. Right.

327 INTVWR: Government or otherwise.

328 CS: Right, yeah.

329 INTVWR: And it must be pretty difficult to do that job, and I mean there's lots of values attached
330 to all these decisions I would imagine.

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331 SC: Well, you try to help empower people, so that they can make their best decisions and be in
332 their best situation to go through whatever they're going through. **00:25:00** And you have to be
333 open to different cultures of course.

334 INTVWR: Right.

335 SC: And there are different ways. of making decisions and whom they involve.

336 INTVWR: I'm, I'm wondering if the sort of environment you work in changed over your career
337 there, whether, you know, the different cultural backgrounds of the people change, the kinds of
338 decisions might change, the kinds of values that play change?

339 SC: Well, yeah, if you do a history of Burnaby Hospital, you'll see that it became much more multi-
340 cultural over time, much more diverse population.

341 INTVWR: That must have been a challenge for you as a social worker to adjust to all those social
342 changes that you're dealing with.

343 SC: Well, the hardest thing to adjust to was the idea we had to really work to discharge people
344 quickly, and that's more of an issue now, just because hospitals are so crowded, and so pressed.

345 INTVWR: Right, right. I'm sure you've been by recently. I have a whole big new wing **00:26:00**
346 construction, so I mean that will lighten the load a little bit. Okay, so you're working at the hospital.
347 You have your family going, what outside of your work, what did you find to do in Burnaby? I
348 know you're an avid walker.

349 SC: Right, I would use Brown Pool. What else did we do? I think there wasn't a whole lot of time
350 for too much other than, you know, taking advantage of Burnaby's Parks and the Burquest
351 Association started, the Burquest Jewish Association, so we got the kids involved with their
352 Sunday school, until we decided we wanted more and we registered with Temple Sholom.

353 INTVWR: Right. And so, Burquest is, was much more informal.

354 SC: Yeah. I think they had a visiting rabbi. They did have teachers, so they did have a Sunday
355 school, and we did make some close friends there.

356 INTVWR: **00:27:00** And it was important to you for your kids to have a bit of a background in
357 the Jewish heritage.

358 SC: Right, right.

359 INTVWR: Temple Sholom, though, there are different, denom-. I don't know if you'd use the term
360 denominations for, or different traditions in Judaism. You have your reform, your conservative,

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361 your orthodox. What is the difference between them, and where does Temple Sholom fit in with
362 them?

363 SC: Temple Sholom is Reform. Beth Israel is Conservative. Schara Tzedek is Orthodox. And
364 then there are other smaller synagogues with different traditions, degrees of observance. Temple
365 Sholom is the only reform one. So, reform I like to think of as progressive, liberal. We don't believe
366 that the Messiah is a person. We hope that there will be a better future. That's kind of our concept
367 of the Messiah. And **00:28:00** some people keep kosher, other people don't. But the synagogue is
368 kosher style in terms of the food that they serve. And you can drive to the synagogue, whereas for
369 an Orthodox synagogue you're supposed to walk.

370 INTVWR: The language is English, do you use?

371 SC: A lot of Hebrew.

372 INTVWR: A lot of Hebrew.

373 SC: Yeah, but our books have the English right next to it, plus a transliteration. So, if you didn't
374 know Hebrew, you could still say it from the transliteration. And also, women are more involved
375 in Reform.

376 INTVWR: Right. Now, now bar and bat mitzvahs, they take place in all the synagogues, I presume.
377 And part of that is learning Hebrew.

378 SC: Mm-hmm.

379 INTVWR: I understand. That, and to a reasonably decent level. So, anyone who's been through
380 that will know at least a little bit of Hebrew?

381 SC: Yeah.

382 INTVWR: Be able to follow along. And, and your children **00:29:00**?

383 SC: A little bit that they retain.

384 INTVWR: But they went, they had bar and bat mitzvahs.

385 SC: They had bar mitzvahs. And my younger son had a confirmation.

386 INTVWR: And they picked up a little bit of Hebrew, a little bit of along the way.

387 SC: Right.

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Interview with Shirley Cohen
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388 INTVWR: So, I also, oh, I'm wondering whether you were involved, your kids went to school in
389 Burnaby, public schools, and was that also where you were still in Middlegate at that time?

390 SC: We moved in '82 to our home near Garden Village, Garden Grove. No, no. No I think it's
391 called Garden Village near, it's actually close to Kingsway and Grange.

392 INTVWR: Okay.

393 SC: Yeah.

394 INTVWR: And so, what schools did they go to?

395 SC: Well, they went to Morley because it was French Immersion.

396 INTVWR: Oh, okay, right.

397 SC: Yeah.

398 INTVWR: And so, were you involved at all in school related activities?

399 SC: Oh, **00:30:00** sure.

400 INTVWR: So, what goes on in schools in those days?

401 SC: Well, you just attend the parent meetings and I would bring in things like potato pancakes
402 around the time of Hanukkah.

403 INTVWR: And did kids understand the significance?

404 SC: Well, I would do a brief story.

405 INTVWR: And those would be latkes?

406 SC: Yeah, right.

407 INTVWR: And I don't know what actually the significance of latkes are, I know they're –

408 SC: Well, it's to represent the oil. There was apparently enough oil supposedly for one night, but
409 it lasted eight nights, and so that was the miracle, and then so when you fry the potato pancakes,
410 you're you know using oil –

411 INTVWR: Right okay.

412 SC: So, that's just tradition.

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413 INTVWR: And so, do you think kids understood what that was all about or was it just a chance to
414 eat some food?

415 SC: Well, I read a little story, so hopefully there was some exposure.

416 INTVWR: And well received, like were there many other Jewish kids in the school you think—

417 SC: No, maybe two handfuls. **00:31:00**

418 INTVWR: Although one of the people I talked to, said he thinks there were two Jewish kids in his
419 high school, out of three hundred or something like that.

420 SC: Yeah, no there might have been —

421 INTVWR: The earlier era.

422 SC: There might have been maybe five to ten, at Central and at Morley well, maybe, maybe ten.
423 Yeah.

424 INTVWR: And was that at all a big deal? I mean, I was saying earlier, how when I went to school,
425 I wasn't aware of any kids in my school being Jewish. Do you think anyone knew your kids were
426 Jewish? Is that...?

427 SC: It might have come up. You know, our kids wouldn't have been talking about Christmas, but,
428 you know, they would celebrate and do the art activities or whatever along with everybody else.

429 INTVWR: Do you think they felt a little, I don't know, left out of that, or is it just, you know, we
430 celebrate our things? **00:32:00**

431 SC: I'll have to ask them.

432 SC: Yeah, exactly.

433 INTVWR: We always wanted to have Christmas.

434 SC: They might have, but then, you know, we had Hanukkah, so, you know, you try to get the kids
435 to look in that direction.

436 INTVWR: Great. And so, on the PAC committee, can you remember any issues that arose with
437 the activities?

438 SC: Well, the only thing that came up, I mentioned earlier, that when it was high school graduation
439 for one of the kids, it was proposed to have it in a church, because the school auditorium was either
440 wasn't available or was too small, and I just was really uncomfortable with that idea.

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441 INTVWR: But why do you think someone made that suggestion?

442 SC: Well, because it was right next to the Willingdon Church, the Moscrop School.

443 INTVWR: Oh, okay. And probably just didn't occur to them that not everyone would find that
444 comfortable.

445 SC: Yeah. Well, and Willingdon, I think, **00:33:00** is a particular, particularly evangelistic kind
446 of church so maybe that was just a little more uncomfortable.

447 INTVWR: Okay and after, after you're kids graduated again, they were off onto greater more
448 wonderful things, any of them follow the family patterns, any scholars, or social workers?

449 SC: Well one one's in public health, and the other is a social worker.

450 INTVWR: And so, with them out of the nest, what kind of activities, a little more, free time
451 perhaps? Do you enjoy other fruits of Burnaby living? So, yeah, I enjoy, again, the parks and I'm
452 in a hiking group and, you know, we do. do come to some of the Burnaby parks. We go to SFU
453 sometimes, Fraser foreshore, Deer Lake, Burnaby Lake, although so many trees are missing there.
454 **00:34:00**

455 INTVWR: Yes, yes. Any arts and cultural activities?

456 SC: Come to Shadbolt, enjoy that. Burnaby Village Museum. Yes of course.

457 INTVWR: Come here. What, what goes on at the Shadbolt that caught your attention?

458 SC: The opera, the lyric opera, and I guess some plays sometimes, and I went to that Pechakucha.

459 INTVWR: Oh, yes, Pechakucha.

460 SC: Yeah, a few years ago. That was fun.

461 INTVWR: Never actually been to one. I just know the word. Yeah. What, what, what are they?
462 People stand up and talk for 90 seconds or something?

463 SC: They talk. Well, no. I think they have seven minutes.

464 INTVWR: Seven minutes.

465 SC: Or something like that. So, they're kind of self -appointed, and they must be screened somehow
466 or other. I remember the stuff I saw was interesting. So, I mean, I try to stay on top of Burnaby
467 politics, such as they are, and put my two cents worth in about the parks and things like that.
468 **00:35:00**

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Interview with Shirley Cohen

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469 INTVWR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, the, and, and Simon Fraser University, related activities. Your
470 husband is still doing his career up there.

471 SC: Right, so the SFU Retired Retirees Association, Ted started along with two others, the hiking
472 group that I'm still part of, and so that's been going for 14 years.

473 INTVWR: Wow.

474 SC: Yeah, yeah, and I attend some of the activities of the SFU retirees. Yeah.

475 INTVWR: And just sort of from what you heard from your husband was a career at Simon Fraser
476 University, pretty decent career?

477 SC: Oh yeah.

478 INTVWR: Was that pleasing, more or less?

479 SC: Yeah, there's a lot of pressure as an academic, but he really loved teaching and he ended up
480 publishing several books, including one that he was able to finish in eighth edition shortly before
481 **00:36:00** he died, so.

482 INTVWR: And were you able to join him on say sabbatical trips?

483 SC: Yeah, Mexico for six months. The other sabbaticals I think we just stayed around here. So
484 SFU, I don't think was particularly conscious of when they scheduled major exams like on Yom
485 Kippur. So I think there were some issues between Jewish profs and the administration. So, I don't
486 know what's happening with that now and also, yeah, the Hillel was a good place for students, just
487 because campuses are not that friendly to people who want to discuss Israel.

488 INTVWR: Oh, right, right.

489 SC: These days, there are Israel apartheid weeks where Jewish students just don't feel so
490 comfortable, so I think Hillel plays a really important role.

491 INTVWR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. **00:37:00** I mean, thinking back about, see, you're born in '47.
492 That's about the time when the state of Israel is created, and when you sort of think back over that,
493 I mean, can you sort of see patterns of attitudes towards Israel? Was that ever a big part of either,
494 you know, your family discussions? Was that an important element in your awareness, being
495 Jewish? Where, or is it too far away?

496 SC: No, well, I mean, people who say they're not anti-Semitic, but they're anti-Zionistic,
497 sometimes the two are just closer than they would ever realize. So, I think the bottom line is, you
498 know, can somebody support the State of Israel as a home for Jews, and, you know, and also
499 support the rights of Palestinians. **00:38:00** Palestinians, and my hope is for a two-state solution.

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500 But this is where things get really ticklish and people become very, whatever you want to call it.
501 The speeches, the speeches are not always pretty about Jewish people.

502 INTVWR: No, and imagine the opinions quite diverse over that and other political issues as well.

503 SC: Yeah, yeah.

504 INTVWR: And even among your friends in Burnaby who are just, just probably a diversity of
505 opinion on that.

506 SC: Oh, I agree yeah. Well, the joke is, if you have two Jews, you're gonna need three synagogues.

507 INTVWR: Oh, I've never heard that one. What other favorite things in Burnaby? Any favorite
508 foods you mentioned the latkes. Are there any traditional foods that you would like to buy?

509 SC: Well, you won't be able to buy latkes in Burnaby.

510 INTVWR: No, not at all. It's a homemade thing.

511 SC: Right.

512 INTVWR: You mentioned **00:39:00** Challah bread.

513 SC: Challah bread. Well, the –

514 INTVWR: It's in some bakeries.

515 SC: Yes, you can get it in some bakeries. I know there's one in Metrotown, and they actually call
516 it Challah. So that's interesting.

517 INTVWR: What makes it different from other bread?

518 SC: Well, it's usually made with an egg and it's usually braided.

519 INTVWR: And it's just a long tradition in Jewish culture.

520 SC: Yeah, yeah.

521 INTVWR: The bread to eat.

522 SC: Eaten on the Sabbath.

523 INTVWR: Oh, it is? So, it's a ritual element to it as well.

524 SC: Yeah, you say a blessing and then you share the bread around.

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525 INTVWR: And how about other foods that might be Jewish? There are different kinds of borscht
526 I know that are Jewish.

527 SC: Well, you'd probably want to go to Vancouver for those, yeah.

528 INTVWR: One of my other contacts here said that Jewish people in Burnaby aren't quite as united
529 that they're a little more dispersed, is that your experience as well?

530 SC: Well, we could belong to different synagogues, **00:40:00** or to no synagogues, yeah. There is,
531 I think there might be a place, Mark Tsemak, did you get his name?

532 INTVWR: I don't think so.

533 SC: Okay, 'cause he started Red Square.

534 INTVWR: Oh, yes, yes.

535 SC: Red Square Bakery.

536 INTVWR: Yes, I had to process it.

537 SC: So, he had some Jewish type products for a while. He actually would get the round Challah
538 that we use at the time of the New Year, but I think he stopped doing that. But he makes a poppy
539 seed loaf, or he did. I haven't gone there for a while, but he'd be an interesting person to talk to.

540 INTVWR: Yeah, I actually read a little description of him in his business. He sounds really busy,
541 though.

542 SC: Okay.

543 INTVWR: Sounds hyper busy always. I don't know if he'd be available for an interview. And so,
544 and just sort of recently then, so, if you were to describe, you know, your daily kind of life in
545 Burnaby or from week to week, **00:41:00** what sorts of things do you get up to? I mean, just kind
546 of everyday sorts of activities or what do you do? If someone's looking back at this period and they
547 want to know, what do people do in their daily lives?

548 SC: Well, I work one day a week.

549 INTVWR: Okay. As a social worker?

550 SC: Right. Right. I like to garden. I'm still in a house that requires some effort. I see my kids who
551 live in Eagle Harbor. I joined Temple Sholom, so, I go there sometimes, and I joined the Jewish
552 Center, so I go there sometimes. Our pool situation is not good in Burnaby now, as you are
553 probably aware with Brown Pool -

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554 INTVWR: The swimming pool, yes.

555 SC: Being torn down, so. And I go, sometimes to Christine Sinclair Center to work out.

556 INTVWR: And now that the COVID sort of problems are somewhat behind us, but not completely,
557 are you back at the Shadbolt? Did you go to the odd live show? **00:42:00**

558 SC: Yeah, well when there's something that interests me. Yeah.

559 INTVWR: And how about getting around? Are you a driver, transit user?

560 SC: I take transit whenever it makes sense. I won't use it at night, but I do take transit a lot. Actually,
561 I'll walk to Patterson and get on the Skytrain and sometimes take the R4. Yeah.

562 INTVWR: So that works out for you?

563 SC: Yeah.

564 INTVWR: I was also wondering when it comes to changing neighborhoods, one change which of
565 course is big but not quite as visible, as internet and computer linkages. Is that something that
566 impacted what you do during your day?

567 SC: Oh of course.

568 INTVWR: So, thinking back, 30 years, you know, what do you do differently now? You probably
569 don't go online, you didn't go online 30 years ago to check out.

570 SC: I probably wrote some letters. (laughing)

571 INTVWR: Oh, or more email and fewer handwritten written letters.

572 SC: Right.

573 INTVWR: **00:43:00** I'm sure that was huge also in scholarly work, that impacted -

574 SC: Oh, did I tell you the story of Ted's thesis?

575 INTVWR: Oh no.

576 SC: Okay, so he had it done on whatever it was, onion skin or whatever. He handwrote, I think he
577 either hand wrote it or had it typed, at any rate. He had one copy and he was going to catch the bus
578 to Detroit, and he had it on the back of his bicycle, or maybe he was going to the, to Xerox it,
579 whatever. He had it on the back of his bicycle. That's what he was doing, and going to Xerox it.
580 And there was just this huge lineup that he had to bypass of people taking the bus to Detroit.

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581 Anyway, there was a humongous wind that came up, blew his thesis out of the back of his bike,
582 and he just yelled out, "My thesis!" and in that kind of surrounding, everybody came running, and
583 everybody was gathering papers from far and wide, and in the end **00:44:00** he got all the pages
584 back.

585 INTVWR: Wow.

586 SC: So that's pre-computer.

587 INTVWR: Mmhhh, now it's like Ahhhh! a hard drive crash.

588 SC: Right, right.

589 INTVWR: Unless it's stored in the cloud and you wouldn't have that problem at all. Changes in
590 Burnaby you've seen over the years. I mean you got here you see '77 and probably not as densely
591 populated.

592 SC: Right, yeah, more pressure on the parks lots of trees gone.

593 INTVWR: Higher buildings.

594 SC: Yeah, busy downtowns and Metrotown being too busy. Yeah those are the main changes and
595 a more diverse population.

596 INTVWR: You wouldn't have had Skytrain in 1977 either.

597 SC: No, '86, yeah.

598 INTVWR: So, some of the transportation has changed as well. Do you recall if you think back to
599 your first five years here or, were you **00:45:00** moving about a little bit more?

600 SC: Well, my first five years here were busy with kids.

601 INTVWR: That's what I'm thinking.

602 SC: So, I wouldn't have taken transit too often. But I would have walked if I could have, you know
603 with the kids.

604 INTVWR: And did your kids, where did they play when they were really young?

605 SC: Well, we had a backyard.

606 INTVWR: You had a backyard.

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607 SC: Yeah.

608 INTVWR: I wonder how many kids today don't have a backyard to play in. Did the parks do you
609 call it, like the parts of some old stumps still in it, were they kind of messy and scrubby and brushy,
610 was that?

611 SC: Well, I don't think they could swim in Deer Lake even then, but and I don't think we ice skated
612 there, but yeah we went to the, we would go to the parks. I mean, you know, they didn't love going
613 to parks unless it was a playground.

614 INTVWR: Oh, really? Oh.

615 SC: But later on, we got them more interested in -

616 INTVWR: **00:46:00** Mucking around in the dirt, and that sort of thing.

617 SC: Right.

618 INTVWR: And what other changes might we have? You said Metro Town was just an idea when
619 you moved in, and now that's huge, it's now sort of being called the downtown of Burnaby. And
620 do you think we need a downtown?

621 SC: No.

622 INTVWR: One of the, the town center idea was actually floated in the late 1960s, with the idea
623 that we would not create a single downtown of Burnaby. We'd spread it out a little bit. Even though
624 Metrotown was being envisioned the most important for the largest one, which probably a good
625 idea not to have that. But now we have Brentwood Center. I don't know if you've been by there
626 lately.

627 SC: Oh, sure. Yeah.

628 INTVWR: And how do you react to that now?

629 SC: It's pretty sterile.

630 INTVWR: Pretty, pretty big.

631 SC: And I know people don't like the architecture of the buildings, and there are too many **00:47:00**
632 and too high. We don't seem to have limits on height like they do in other municipalities. Well,
633 certainly West, and North Van, don't have this kind of skyscraping towers.

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634 INTVWR: And so, what would you like to see then in the future of Burnaby, if you think, ah, I
635 want this to be a town that my kids can grow up in or have families. What would be your wishes
636 for the future of this?

637 SC: Well, I know we need to provide housing, and I hope that can be done. I hope that we can
638 continue you know having a social conscience and you know I did I have noticed that there's an
639 effort to house the homeless yeah, I'm well aware of that. I would just like to see less pressure on
640 the parks for development. Let's just keep the parks as they are, and try to sustain them as best
641 **00:48:00** we can.

642 INTVWR: Did you think when you first moved to Burnaby, that it was an affordable place to live
643 in?

644 SC: Yeah.

645 INTVWR: Has that changed over the years?

646 SC: Well, I mean I'm not a young person looking to buy a house, so I mean I'm okay but I know
647 that it's, it's not as easy to buy here now. Things are very expensive.

648 INTVWR: Let's see if I have any last sort of questions to follow here. I guess in general, I mean,
649 it sounds like you've enjoyed your years here in Burnaby, that by and large, it's worked out for you
650 quite well.

651 SC: Yeah.

652 INTVWR: Any thoughts if you were to write your memoirs on my life in Burnaby, what those
653 highlights might be, maybe even the low lights **00:49:00** I suppose?

654 SC: Well just living as a Jewish person in Burnaby requires some effort to connect with either
655 other Jewish people here, or with the Jewish community in Vancouver.

656 INTVWR: And then the connection again it's important to you, what it gives you a sense of like,
657 what does it give you a sense of?

658 SC: Well, a sense of connection with people with a common, common background.

659 INTVWR: Do you think some Jewish people might not need that connection, that is, that very as
660 well –

661 SC: Well certainly possible. Yeah, it's, it's been important for me, but some people might not need
662 it and some people probably don't, you know, choose to identify as Jewish and they are Jewish, so
663 it's certainly a variation.

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664 INTVWR: Very good. So, we've been going for quite a few minutes now. Anything **00:50:00** you
665 might like to add to, to our discussion?

666 SC: Well, I'm glad you're doing the project.

667 INTVWR: Yes, yes.

668 SC: And I appreciate the time you're putting into it.

669 INTVWR: Oh, thank you very much, yes. And we hope that it does help people to understand a
670 little bit better the diversity of people who live here and contribute to Burnaby. And in the future,
671 people looking back will be able to say, ah, yes. Many different people who make Burnaby what
672 it is in a good way, I would hope. So, Shirley, thank you very much for coming along and speaking
673 with us again.

674 SC: Oh, thank you Eric.

675 INTVWR: And we'll hopefully see you in the future again.