

**Transcription: BV023.16.5**

**Interview with Joanne Smith**

**Audio Recordings: 2023\_0016\_0005\_003.mp3**

**Interviewer: Eric Damer (INTVWR)**

**Interviewee: Joanne Smith (JS)**

**Date of interview: May 11, 2023**

1 INTVWR: Hello. I'm Eric Damer. I'm interviewing Joanne Smith. It is May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Joanne,  
2 thank you. Thank you for the interview. Good to see you.

3 JS: Hi, Eric.

4 INTVWR: It's a beautiful sunny day.

5 JS: Indeed.

6 INTVWR: Beautiful nature all around us. So, Joanne, tell me how, how you came to be in Burnaby.  
7 Where did you originate? What's the story of your start?

8 JS: That's a good questions. Well, my husband Stanis and I immigrated from South Africa in 1986.  
9 We left – it was during the apartheid era. We didn't see a great future ahead of us, and we had  
10 visited Vancouver. We'd been told that there was no chance of immigrating here unless you had  
11 either a job offer or family member who was here, and we had neither. So, we went back to South  
12 Africa. We applied to various other countries, being Australia, the States. And we thought, well,  
13 you know, there's a lot of work that goes into applying. **0:01:00** So, we thought, "Why not just  
14 put in the application to Canada?" And as luck would have it, I was on their wanted list as an  
15 occupational therapist. I got very high points, and I could speak a little bit of French. And within  
16 three weeks, I was contacted. And within three months, we actually had our papers. So, it was  
17 just... It was made to be. We were just so excited because, as I said, when we come here – we  
18 were doing a trip in the States. We'd come to visit our one friend that we knew here (Leora Kepner),  
19 and she'd been here many years. And she actually lived across the road from where we are now,  
20 and we just fell in love with the environment and the views that we have here. And just really  
21 enjoyed Canadians. So, it was just very fortuitous that they wanted us, as well. Stanis, being an  
22 architect, was not on the wanted list, but he was married to me, so he was accepted. **0:02:01** And  
23 he has eventually made good, for sure. In fact, it didn't take him long at all. He's done very nicely.  
24 So...

25 INTVWR: Did you grow up in South Africa as well?

26 JS: Yeah, we grew up in South Africa, we married in South Africa, and we lived...

27 INTVWR: Did your schooling in South Africa?

28 JS: All our schooling, university was in South Africa.

29 INTVWR: And it sounds like you wanted to get out of South Africa. You weren't trying to come  
30 here, per se, but you weren't happy...?

31 JS: We wanted to leave South Africa. As I said, it was during apartheid era. We probably wouldn't  
32 wanted to live somewhere else for a while, anyway, but both of us, our parents had done that in

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33 their early years. But, it would probably have been with a view to return to South Africa, whereas  
34 this was more permanent. We just did not – we would never have foreseen that Mandela would  
35 come into power, and there was this incredible period of glory where it looked like everything was  
36 going to be okay. And you know at that stage, we might've thought, "Well, you know, I wonder if  
37 we made the right decision." But it was fleeting, those thoughts, because we've always just been  
38 thrilled to be in Vancouver right from the earliest days. **0:03:06** We've just settled in and loved it.

39 INTVWR: Are there aspects, though, of growing up in South Africa that you still remember fondly?

40 JS: There is. So, I would say the wildlife. We loved going to the game reserve, walking tours in  
41 the game reserve were just, you know, one of the very, very, very special things that we did. But  
42 you know, as the years go by, one yearns for less, and one can go as a tourist and experience those  
43 game reserves again. And, you know, the foods I missed initially, quite honestly. We've got such  
44 a rich option of, of different cultures, of different kinds of foods here, that it's really nothing that  
45 I, I feel like I can't live without it. A lot of things you could get here anyhow, if you wanted to.  
46 Rooibos tea, I was never one for it, but it's now very trendy.

47 INTVWR: Yes, it is.

48 JS: So..

49 INTVWR: And if I may back up just a touch more, how did your family come to be in South  
50 Africa? **0:04:08**

51 JS: Yeah. So, our family came from Lithuania, Latvia, and they came at the turn of the century  
52 generally to avoid conscription, which was not going to be very pleasant. And they obviously heard  
53 about opportunities in South Africa. You know, I think when one person makes their way here,  
54 and then sends back word that the jobs that are available...

55 INTVWR: I'm trying to think what, what the opportunities around 1900 were in South Africa for  
56 people from Eastern Europe.

57 JS: I think my mining gold.

58 INTVWR: Ah. Okay, of course.

59 JS: Yeah, I think that was one, one of the things.

60 INTVWR: The British are kind of trying to get the Dutch out of South Africa at the time, aren't  
61 they?

62 JS: My South African history isn't good enough to comment on at the moment...

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63 INTVWR: You know, and I happen to know... I have a family member from South Africa as well,  
64 but his roots are English. **0:05:01** And I know one other person from South Africa who happens  
65 also to be Jewish. So, was that a coincidence? Was there a large Jewish community?

66 JS: It was a – very large and very active Jewish community. Absolutely. So, you know, there's...  
67 Yeah. I, I think that particularly is, you know, how they ended up there, the Jews came and sent  
68 back for their family to come and join them because there was opportunity. And thriving – thriving  
69 South African, Jewish community in South Africa.

70 INTVWR: And, and is this in the big cities? Were you in, like, Johannesburg or...?

71 JS: We were. We were. At the end, we were in Johannesburg. I was born in Pretoria. I lived in a  
72 little town called Clarkson and my father was a pediatrician, and he worked in a smaller community.  
73 So, he took us there for, for quite a while, but um..

74 INTVWR: And is schooling in South Africa, similar to – same sort of model we have here?

75 JS: **0:06:01** So, uh, well, I think 40-50 years ago, it was different here to what it is here today. You  
76 know, we sat in rows in school, and we listened to our teachers... And I wouldn't say corporal  
77 punishment was allowed then, but my husband would say that there was a little bit of that. I never  
78 experienced it, but it was a traditional British education.

79 INTVWR: Right, right, and then you moved through that.

80 JS: And university – then we went to University of Witwatersrand both my husband and I. I studied  
81 occupational therapy. He studied architecture, and... Yeah. I would say that was very comparable.  
82 I think the standards of education were extremely high in South Africa, which is why they were  
83 pretty much accepted here – although, we did have to do our exams like everybody else has to do.  
84 We had to redo them.

85 INTVWR: Now, you mentioned studying occupational therapy – and that's what you do as a career.  
86 You've moved into that field, but you have a specialization as well.

87 JS: **0:07:01** Yeah, yeah. Correct. Yeah, so, occupational therapy is a very broad field. And fairly  
88 quickly, I specialized in hand therapy. So, I officially became a hand therapist in 1991, although  
89 I'd worked in hands before then. So, it's been, it's been a while. But I do a sort of random number  
90 of things. I've got a fairly eclectic practice. So, the majority is hand therapy, but I do odds and  
91 sodds. Like, I do some animal splinting. I work with one of the big animal veterinary clinics  
92 (Canada Way, that used to be in Burnaby). They're now just across on the Vancouver side of  
93 Boundary, and... I mostly work with the neuro team to do back braces and neck braces for, for  
94 dogs. Mostly dogs, although I have had a lama.

95 INTVWR: Oh wow.

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96 JS: That's about the most interesting we've ever had. I think we've had one cat and one duck. So,  
97 apart from the animal splinting, I make face masks for athletes who break their noses

98 INTVWR: Wow.

99 JS: and have to return to play. **0:08:02** So, I make face masks so that they can play with those.

100 INTVWR: Interesting.

101 JS: And um, also very interesting thing of treating ear keloids, which you probably don't need to  
102 know the details about, but I've got a little device for. It's like a kind of scar that grows on the ear  
103 after – whether it's piercing or cosmetic procedures, and it keeps the scarring under control.  
104 Anyway, that's a very different kind of thing that we don't need to go into here. But so, as you can  
105 gather, I like doing different things. Definitely not the run-of-the-mill. In fact, I'm not sure that  
106 anybody else does those things that I do.

107 INTVWR: It was on your website, and you actually make these splints – custom splints.

108 JS: I do. I make most of them using low-temperature plastic, which my the office I've just got a  
109 big hot water bath. A special hot water bath, and the plastics come in sheets, and I cut out the  
110 pattern, pop the sheets in the hot water which makes them malleable, and then I just mold it directly  
111 on the hand.

112 INTVWR: Oh, you do! **0:09:06** But you also make casts of people's hands, or...?

113 JS: I make casts of the hands to make leather braces or high-temperature plastic, which has to be  
114 done in an oven and is, you know, for the plastic can't go on the skin... So again, those are sort of  
115 more, more niche than the average hand therapist.

116 INTVWR: Do, do you also have manipulative exercises for people?

117 JS: I do, yeah, so, I work pretty much if you think of a physio for hands.

118 INTVWR: Right, right.

119 JS: So, to be a hand therapist, you can either come from a physio or an OT perspective. So, I do  
120 everything from wound care exercises, splinting, return to work, ergonomic stuff – because often  
121 problems come when people are poorly positioned at their keyboards.

122 INTVWR: Right, right. Is that, is that a growth area of you, your work? Computer, bad computer  
123 patients?

124 JS: Not for me. I've tended to feel that the equipment is developing faster than I can pay attention  
125 to it. **0:10:00** And on the latter end of my career, I'm not really wanting a whole lot more work.

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126 So, I tend to leave that to the ergonomists. I have contact with a specific ergonomist that I work  
127 with and recommend because she knows about hands, and she knows most about ergonomics.

128 INTVWR: And, and so coming from a medical family, I guess, that explains possibly some of  
129 your interest. But how does one end up specializing in, in hands?

130 JS: In hands? You know, I think that was just how it worked out, where as a new graduate, you  
131 often go through a number of different areas. And when I got to hands, I was working with some  
132 great surgeons who made me feel like what I was doing was really worthwhile and valuable, and  
133 then there was a creative side of the splints that I really enjoyed. So, I just got more and more  
134 interested and did more and more courses and... When I came to Canada, I actually worked on the  
135 burn unit, which was my dream job. I worked there for a couple of years and just really loved it.  
136 But then, that was part of the orthopedic team, and hands fell under that same umbrella. **0:11:05**  
137 And after a couple of years, I was asked if I wanted to be a senior – a young senior – in the ortho  
138 team. But that senior's position was actually in hands, and not in burns, and I had already had an  
139 introduction to hands. I knew that was something I was already interested in. So, I was thrilled to  
140 accept the position, and that was the time that I really started focusing much more on hands.

141 INTVWR: It's one of those specialities that you might, you know, people might never think of  
142 until you need one.

143 JS: Exactly.

144 INTVWR: Until your hands... I have a few friends who have some mobility problems. Their hands,  
145 and yeah – it's, it's difficult.

146 JS: Yeah. Like most things in our bodies, we don't think about them until they're not feeling too  
147 good.

148 INTVWR: Yeah. Now, you mentioned you came to Vancouver in 1986. Did you come to Burnaby,  
149 per se, at that time?

150 JS: We did. When we visited a few years prior to that, we visited our friend Leora, who lived  
151 across the road as I mentioned, and we just fell in love with the area. **0:12:01** We lived with her  
152 for two and a half months before we moved to Vancouver for a couple of years, and then we  
153 decided we wanted to buy a place before having a family. And Burnaby was a lot more affordable,  
154 and we'd already been in her home that had this incredible view... And you know, a few properties  
155 were just awfully cheaper than they are on the west side. The west side was definitely not  
156 affordable for a view, and... You know, we were able to buy a place with a view. Not this house  
157 that we're in, but just still on Capitol Hill a few blocks away, and we had a lovely view there. And  
158 we were familiar with North Burnaby, so I guess it was thanks to the fact that we had a friend who  
159 was here that we landed here in the first place. But we were very happy to settle in, and it's been  
160 – it's been wonderful. You know, we had our children, and I was... I was working part time when

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161 I had the children and was involved with the school. So, in terms of community involvement, I  
162 was chair of the parent advisory council of the school. **0:13:03** So, I always felt like I knew what  
163 was going on.

164 INTVWR: Were there any sort of significant events during your PAC years that you had to deal  
165 with?

166 JS: I was lucky to have the most wonderful principals at the schools. So, they were always positive  
167 situations. You know, and I've heard of ones that aren't positive – and mine was great. It was  
168 always good stuff that I was involved in. It was not...

169 INTVWR: And any sort of particularly good initiatives that stand out, or that you're, you're  
170 pleased maybe to have helped support or put on?

171 JS: You know, the projects were organizing the playground or Irish dancing, which the kids were  
172 involved with. So, I'm not, I'm not sure they were great philanthropic causes or - It was just making  
173 the school a, a good place for my kids to be.

174 INTVWR: And they, they went to Capitol Hill Area Schools.

175 JS: **0:14:02** They went to Aubrey School because of French immersion. So, they did the French  
176 immersion program, and then they went to Burnaby North.

177 INTVWR: And other activities maybe you're involved with outside of your work and school?

178 JS: Yeah, so, I was involved on the community advisory panel for Chevron at the time, parkland  
179 at the moment. And then, I, I... I don't know. I think I did that for about six years, and that was  
180 really just to have a community voice, know what's going on, make sure that Chevron or Parkland  
181 were being responsible. Knowing that there were people who were interested in what they were  
182 doing because when we first came, there was quite a lot of smell in the area. You know, we don't  
183 get that anymore. So, there's that community. And then, I've always been both in this home where  
184 we've been for 23 years, and our previous one on the hill. **0:15:06** I was Block Watch Captain.

185 INTVWR: Ah, okay.

186 JS: So, you know, felt it was a way to get to know people in my community. So, there were the  
187 main sort of community involvements. But in terms of hobbies and that sort of thing, Stanis and I  
188 have a tandem bicycle, which is...

189 INTVWR: Oh, wow. Not many people can say that.

190 JS: Which is lots of fun! And it's a folding one, so we've been able to travel with it. It breaks up  
191 into two suitcases, so you can actually pack it into normal suitcases. So, we've traveled around the  
192 world with it, and it can fold, and we're always around here... I don't actually own a single bike.

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193 So, if we're going to go by bicycle, we go with that. So, that's, that's... And it's been a nice way  
194 to travel, being able to do bike tours in different parts of the world. You know, it'll be a stepping  
195 off point, and then maybe we'll do other things as well. So, cycling is a big thing. We're big opera  
196 lovers.

197 INTVWR: **0:16:07** Yes.

198 JS: And symphony. We've been... My husband has been involved on the board of the symphony  
199 and of the opera, so that's been afforded us nice opportunities and involvements.

200 INTVWR: And what do you see of the Burnaby art scene, in that sort of [inaudible 0:16:20]?

201 JS: So, the Burnaby art scene, well, let's see. It's the first – second year – of Opera in the Park. So  
202 last year was the first year.

203 INTVWR: I hadn't heard of that.

204 JS: It was incredibly successful! It was so delightful to be out there in that incredible location, and  
205 there were families with children running around, and the opera... They made it very accessible  
206 to people. So, you must go this year. I think it's July the 16<sup>th</sup>, if I remember correctly.

207 INTVWR: And this is at Deer Lake?

208 JS: At Deer Lake, yes. And then, of course, the Symphony in the Park. Of course, we, we always  
209 do that. And then there's Burnaby Lyric Opera at the Shadbolt. We try and do that when we can.

210 INTVWR: Have they operated in the last few years?

211 JS: They... There was a period of COVID that they didn't, and then we, we've seen them recently.

212 INTVWR: Okay.

213 JS: Yeah. So, it looks like they're back.

214 INTVWR: And is the Lyric Opera sort of homegrown, or are they people from, say, Vancouver  
215 put that on?

216 JS: I don't know too much about it, but they do a lovely job, you know, within their means. It's  
217 also really, really impressive production.

218 INTVWR: Oh, good. I mean, I've seen a few of them, as well.

219 JS: Yeah, yeah.

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220 INTVWR: I think I remember Murray and you or Stannis talking about Così fan tutte many years  
221 ago, probably.

222 JS: Yeah, yeah. And then I joked this summer, we've most recently this last summer, there's  
223 always activities... in, we would go to Confederation Park. Stanis and I look after our  
224 granddaughter on Wednesdays. Every Wednesdays in the summer, we'd go to the, the park, and  
225 there's be wonderful things going on there. **0:18:04** You know, free activities for, you know...  
226 You know, apart from the waterpark and the playgrounds and the actual live, live magicians or...  
227 There was a theremin player, and just a mix of activities. Really, really delightful. And we've  
228 certainly been to the Burnaby Village Museum with our granddaughter, and with our daughters,  
229 of course, before that. Occasionally to the art gallery, and then, as I mentioned, the Nickie Lewis  
230 who's the artist who did the twig sculptures during COVID in the Robert Burnaby Park, we  
231 commissioned her to do a sculpture for, for our own garden. So, you know, we like to support  
232 Burnaby in ways that we can.

233 INTVWR: Did you get your children also involved in, in arts, as well?

234 JS: Our children? Yeah, actually, they were involved in a performing arts program, very involved  
235 in a performing arts program. Which largely took place in Burnaby. **0:19:08** It was called the  
236 Jennings Institute for Performing Artists. So, they were – they were partly located in New  
237 Westminster and partly in Burnaby. And that was singing, acting, dancing, musical theater. So,  
238 yes, we did.

239 INTVWR: That's, that's super. Now, you had a few items there, as well.

240 JS: Yeah. Actually, we've covered – we've covered every... Oh, I guess what I didn't mentioned  
241 is I think it was about 10 years after immigrating, we bought Stanis' parents out.

242 INTVWR: Oh, oh, great.

243 JS: Down in Hilton, and that was absolutely wonderful. They – we built a home. We built the suite  
244 downstairs for them to live with us, very independently. We were very respectful of one another's  
245 privacy. For the children to grow up with their grandparents, they were just wonderfully close and  
246 had the most wonderful relationship. **0:20:04** So, that was very positive. Stanis' brother came out,  
247 too.

248 INTVWR: Were they also – was it an easy move for them? Were they happy to move out of South  
249 Africa and...?

250 JS: The parents? They were very happy to move out of South Africa and adjusted so well. They  
251 got involved in all sorts of initiatives. Stanis' dad was very involved with the Humanist Association,  
252 and his mom was involved with Burnaby's Senior Outreach Services. You know, so, fairly  
253 philanthropic ideals. Community involvement. Stanis' dad was very involved with the chess club



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254 at the children's school, at Aubrey School. And they participated in the Hats Off Parade, yeah, on  
255 at least one occasion. So, that was really quite delightful.

256 INTVWR: And, and, did you make connections or pursue your Jewish heritage at all? Was that  
257 something important to you?

258 JS: We have not. The only thing we did was our children did have bat mitzvahs, and that was  
259 through the Parents' Institute – which, again, is a humanist, not a religious organization. **0:21:14**  
260 We are not religious. We enjoy our cultural aspects of our Jewishness, but we are, you know, we  
261 don't believe in God or... So, the religious side is not something we're interested in.

262 INTVWR: I do remember Hilton, though, using some Yiddish terms that I wasn't familiar with.

263 JS: Yes, Yiddish is...

264 INTVWR: I remember knosh before that.

265 JS: Oh, my gosh. Yiddish is a wonderful language, and it's a very important one, too, to keep alive.

266 INTVWR: It's so onomatopoeia. It sounds like what you mean.

267 JS: I think a lot of people use... Oh, gosh. What are some of the words? But they it's made its way  
268 into mainstream language.

269 INTVWR: Schlepping yourself along, you putz...

270 JS: Yeah, exactly.

271 INTVWR: Excellent. Well, is there any, anything else in your list that maybe...?

272 JS: I think that's... I think we've, I think we've covered it. **0:22:04**

273 INTVWR: Very good. So, in general, it sounds like you're very happy with life in Burnaby here.  
274 It sounds like it's a good community for you.

275 JS: Yeah, absolutely. It's... I think we're so central to whether we want to go hiking on the north  
276 shore or cycling at the Pitt River... We just really like – we love the quiet and the beauty of Capitol  
277 Hill. It's like being away from the city when you're here, and of course, it's been a luxury working  
278 from home because, you know, who'd know we were in the city, and yet we're half an hour away.

279 INTVWR: And given you're interested in the arts, do you ever feel that, you know, you have to  
280 go downtown to Vancouver to get satisfied?

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281 JS: Yeah. Yeah, I would say there is some of that. But that's okay. It's, you know, it's you know  
282 maximum once a week and probably not as often as that, and it's nice to have an outing, too. So,  
283 we don't feel deprived. I mean our friends who we came to stay with when we first immigrated  
284 here, they moved down to Yaletown, and it's lovely. **0:23:06** They can just walk down to, to the  
285 opera or the symphony or whatever, and I can see the merit in that. But then, they do have  
286 emergency vehicles regularly passing their windows, and a lot of noise – all the negative sides of  
287 living downtown. So, you know, on balance, we're very pleasant with our haven over here.

288 INTVWR: Yeah. Although, I'm sure you've seen some changes. You've been here probably 30  
289 years or so?

290 JS: We have, indeed.

291 INTVWR: Burnaby must have changed a little bit over those decades.

292 JS: It certainly has. If we look across the water, which now we can't see because of the trees but  
293 in the winter we can, and there's a huge amount of development. And now, there's actually talk of  
294 NAV Can. changing the flat path.

295 INTVWR: Oh.

296 JS: And they plan on coming exactly over Capitol Hill – which is very distressing. And currently,  
297 we have a petition which I will send to you to get you to sign it, to get them to change their plans.  
298 **0:24:06** So, yeah. It's not as quiet as it, as it used to be. Lots more development. You think of  
299 Brentwood – that is a completely different beast. But yeah, I don't think there's anything that's  
300 too negative. I think there's lots of positives. Certainly, Burnaby Heights is a much more  
301 interesting place than it used to be. So, yeah, not, not too concerned about anything – and yeah.  
302 When it comes to happy immigrants, we're it.

303 INTVWR: There you go, very good. Well, Joanne, unless you have something to add, we can cut  
304 it off here. And thank you very much for participating. It was wonderful, and I look forward to  
305 hearing that you have many more years living happily in Burnaby.

306 JS: I hope so. Thank you very much.

307 INTVWR: Okay. Bye-bye. **0:24:56**