

Transcription: BV023.16.6

Interview with Ellen and Bill Schwartz

Audio Recording: 2023_0006_0006_003.mp3

Interviewer: Eric Damer (INTVWR)

Interviewees: Ellen Schwartz (ES) Bill Schwartz (BS)

Date of interview: May 15, 2023

1 INTVWR: Hello, It is May 15th, 2023. I'm Eric Damer. I'm speaking with Ellen and Bill
2 Schwartz. Hello, welcome and thanks for the interview. We have two of you together, we might
3 have two slightly different stories and then overlapping story. Where do you come from? Where
4 did you grow up?

5 ES: We're both from the US originally. I was born in Washington, D.C., grew up in New Jersey,
6 and went to University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin. After graduating from the
7 University of Wisconsin, I moved to a farm in Southeastern Pennsylvania to visit a friend. That's
8 where I met Bill.

9 BS: Yeah, it was a long time ago. I grew up outside of Philadelphia or **00:01:00** inside and
10 outside of Philadelphia. And Well, I'll follow your lead. I graduate high school, went to
11 university, graduated university at Penn State, and then I traveled a bit and Ellen's 3 years
12 younger. Anyhow, when I got back to Pennsylvania, I had been riding with a friend of mine for a
13 long time and it we didn't like the pollution back east and we didn't like the politics of the
14 Richard Nixon administration. We figured, "Okay. We'll save money." We did research and
15 decided to move to British Columbia then we wrote to the government here and they sent us 12
16 little yellow booklets about **00:02:00** the different regions of the province. We read those and we
17 came to the idea that the most appealing test was the Northern Okanagan and the Southern
18 Kootenays. After we all quit our jobs at the same time, there was five of us at the time, Ellen and
19 I took one vehicle and the other three went in another vehicle and we crossed Canada and came
20 to BC and started looking around. I guess a funny story would be we were supposed to meet the
21 other three at a certain date at Needles, BC. But Needles was underwater and the Columbia River
22 Treaty and the dam. Anyhow, it took us a long time to find **00:03:00** each other. But we
23 homesteaded in the Kootenays, a very isolated area of the Kootenays called 'Galena Bay'. Ellen
24 just published a book about that, 'Galena Bay Odyssey' about our time there. We stayed there and
25 had experiences. We had children and that kind of changed things.

26 INTVWR: Homestead, you were farming?

27 ES: Yeah. We bought 3 acres of forest and we ended up clearing the whole back to the land
28 thing. We built a cabin, we put in gardens, **00:04:00** we had built a chicken coop and raised
29 chickens, we had honeybees, outbuildings, and on. The problem was that Galena Bay was
30 isolated and there was no electricity, no town, and we couldn't make a living. We kept having to
31 move away for periods of time, work, and then go back. In 1980, our older daughter was a
32 toddler, Bill was offered a one-year contract with the Department of Energy Conservation in the
33 province in Vancouver. We thought, "Okay, one year. How bad can it be? We'll go there for a
34 year and figure things out." We moved down to Vancouver, the contract turned into a job, and
35 then we had our second child. I wanted to go back to grad school to study creative writing and
36 **00:05:00** on and on. And so, we've stayed in the Lower Mainland ever since.

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37 INTVWR: I mean, that's an absolutely fascinating journey. Just to back up a little bit, I'm
38 curious, was there something about where you grew up or who you grew up with that made you
39 feel that you could leave that behind and come to the homestead and the wilds of BC?

40 BS: I'll let you answer that.

41 ES: It was a combination of wanting to leave the Vietnam War. Watergate hadn't quite broken
42 the news, it broke just after we left the US. But crooked politics, environmental degradation, and
43 wanting to have an adventure. For me, particularly, moving from this - basically, I grew up in the
44 suburbs of New York to the wilderness of British Columbia was completely **00:06:00** foreign
45 and terrifying prospect. But at the same time, it was exciting and we were very idealistic. We
46 thought we were making a difference in the world.

47 INTVWR: How did your family react? Did you grow up in a socially conscious active family?
48 Or is this a big - did you rebel by way of **[inaudible 06:22]** this?

49 ES: Not particularly. I mean, my parents were center left, but no, they were heartbroken. In fact,
50 they thought that they'd never see me again. I mean, what did that mean? Moving to the middle
51 of British Columbia? I think the same for Bill's parents. Maybe not quite as heartbroken, but
52 mystified.

53 BS: Oh, they kept expecting us to move back.

54 INTVWR: Was there something in your social context? Like, did you have high school friends
55 who were onto this or was there...

56 ES: It was the '70s **00:07:00** and Bill was referring to his friend that he had been communicating
57 with. They had been writing letters back and forth during university, both having grown up in the
58 suburbs of Philadelphia, about this back to the land, where should we go, and how can we do it.
59 That was in the air at the time. I mean not everybody, obviously, but there was talk about
60 alternative lifestyles, rejecting materialism, and all that.

61 BS: I lived in San Francisco for a while and that was much more of a hot spot for the ideas than
62 the East Coast.

63 INTVWR: Is there a Jewish strain that all influences that? Is there a tradition?

64 ES: There is in left politics, for sure. I don't know much about the back to the land movement
65 **00:08:00** at the time, other than the fact that Jewish kids probably tended to be well-educated.
66 They come from middle class families for the most part. And so, they had the advantage of
67 having studied and thought about social movements and political movements. And so, we're
68 keyed into the idea but there was no particular Jewish strain. I don't think so.

69 BS: We were just young and idealistic.

70 ES: Yeah, that was really what it was. It was great fun. It was a revelation that somebody like,
71 for me particularly, somebody like me who knew nothing about gardening, I'd never even been

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72 camping before we left the States could actually dig a garden and cut branches off **00:09:00**
73 trees.

74 INTVWR: When you first came to B.C. then how hard was it to get started and get going?

75 BS: Well, we came here and we met up with our friends and we were supposed to buy land
76 together and have a commune here, but it turned out that we liked different properties. We
77 actually split up three of them - two of them went one place and three of us went to the other.

78 ES: I mean, there was land for sale. That wasn't a problem.

79 BS: Yeah. We had lived together in a farmhouse in Pennsylvania and we had saved money
80 together. We had a common bank account and all that. When we came to BC, we had much
81 money to buy property **00:10:00** and much money to keep us on our feet. We split the money.

82 ES: I mean, we were buying forest. It was second-growth forest, it was cheap. Even after buying
83 the land, we had money left over.

84 BS: It was 20 acres for \$5,000.

85 INTVWR: The land clearing isn't easy.

86 ES: Oh, no. For the very first clearing, we hired a local logger to cut trees in a quarter acre. Then
87 he pulled the stumps and we were left with the worst soil imaginable, and we dug.

88 BS: We did that, yeah.

89 ES: Yeah. I mean, stones, it was brutal. That was one of the few times I thought, "I can't. I don't
90 think I can do this."

91 BS: We **00:11:00** were using hand tools.

92 ES: Yeah.

93 BS: **[inaudible 11:02]** saws.

94 ES: We would not use a chainsaw, we were too pure, that first winter. But we learned and we did
95 it, we just did it. We read books about how to frame a cabin, and fortunately, at opportune times,
96 friends or acquaintances would show up who had skills. Like when we were framing the cabin of
97 a friend, a couple of friends showed up and one of them was a builder. We just followed his
98 instructions and framed the cabin. You asked your neighbors, there weren't very many neighbors
99 there but there were a few and they were old timers. They were helpful. We just figured it out.

100 INTVWR: How long did it take before you thought you were making a go of it that you were
101 established? Things were working out?

102 ES: Oh, certainly within the first year.

103 INTVWR: Within the first year?

104 ES: Yeah. **00:12:00**

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105 INTVWR: And you had your first child while you were...

106 ES: Yeah, but not for several years later. For the first 7 years or so, we lived on the land, kept
107 developing, cleared more land, put in more gardens, and so on.

108 BS: Ellen was doing that first 7 years, you taught...

109 ES: Yeah, my career.

110 BS: A couple of times.

111 ES: Initially was a special education teacher. That was a desirable skill. I was able to get jobs
112 easily. I would go teach school, Bill would get a job somewhere, then we'd get money, and go
113 back.

114 INTVWR: Where did you teach school?

115 ES: I taught in Revelstoke for a year and a half. One full year and then half a year, I took over
116 from a teacher **00:13:00** who had to leave. For another year in town of Slocan, we were living in
117 Nelson that year, Bill had gone back to school to get his teaching certificate. I taught in Slocan
118 and that was it. That was all the teaching.

119 INTVWR: These were public schools?

120 ES: Yeah.

121 INTVWR: Did you run into any alternative schools or is that **[inaudible 13:22]**?

122 ES: I did. Interestingly, when I was teaching in Slocan, I had a grade one-two class and I had
123 gone to regular primary. There was an alternative school in the Slocan Valley called the Vallican
124 Whole School. I had some students in my class who were in grade two who had started at the
125 Vallican Whole - they were very creative, imaginative, and could not read or write.

126 BS: They can probably do math. **00:14:00**

127 ES: Yeah, I don't think they could do math.

128 BS: They can do **[inaudible 14:04]**

129 ES: Very undisciplined, but I mean, they were delightful kids but I really had to start from the
130 beginning with them like I was doing with the grade ones.

131 INTVWR: Was the idea that the kids would choose what they wanted to learn?

132 ES: Yeah, no discipline and no homework or, that would be a dirty word.

133 INTVWR: Very idealistic, egalitarian, and democratic.

134 ES: I mean, teaching was fine, and then we went back to Galena Bay. I think it was maybe not
135 long after that that I got pregnant with our first child.

136 BS: During that time, Revelstoke dam was in the works and we got...

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137 ES: I forgot all about that.

138 BS: We became active environmentalist on this committee. Even **00:15:00** though we didn't see
139 the Revelstoke and we used to go to these meetings and met with politicians. From that, We
140 became provincial-wide environmental activists. Through that, we ended up with a job with a
141 federal government. Somebody told them about us called the 'energy van'. We used to travel. We
142 traveled around BC, going to schools, and talking to the media about energy conservation,
143 renewable energy, and the whole GAMUT recycling.

144 ES: All the stuff that's in play now - like solar, wind, geothermal, and so on.

145 BS: We used to teach school. Anyhow, Ellen was pregnant **00:16:00** and we had it all timed out
146 where we would be back in the Kootenays. She had kept in contact with her doctor who we
147 knew.

148 ES: The baby came early when we were on Vancouver Island, so we were stuck on Vancouver
149 Island for a month while she was in the hospital. Finally she got big enough to be discharged and
150 we went back to Galena Bay for a year and a half, that's when Bill was offered the one-year
151 contract in Vancouver. We were at a point where, "Now, we have a kid. How are we going to
152 support ourselves?" We thought, "Okay, when you're in Vancouver and now here". That was
153 1980 and now it's 2023.

154 BS: My goodness. We're in Vancouver renting and then we decided to buy a house.

155 ES: No. We lived in Southeast **00:17:00** Van to begin with. Bill's contract turned into a job and
156 while we were living there, our second daughter was born. I was accepted into the creative
157 writing program at UBC, so we moved into family housing at UBC which was wonderful. Living
158 on campus was the closest thing that we had seen since leaving the Kootenays because it was all
159 green and beautiful. At that point, our kids were 5 and 3, the older one started kindergarten and
160 the younger one was like preschool. I got my master's degree and it's a 2-year program, but I
161 stretched it out into 4 years because I had two little kids and it took a while to get my stuff
162 written, and then we started looking for a house.

163 BS: Yeah. Since **00:18:00** I had a job at the time, which I think was a government job and a paid
164 well.

165

166 ES: Actually, by the time we started looking for a house, you had started Polestar.

167

168 BS: Oh, yeah. I was a consultant then at the time. Anyhow, we got a pre-approval for a mortgage
169 and one of our rules is we didn't want to go over a bridge and we want to go too far down the
170 freeway. We started looking in East Vancouver. Ellen turned out to be a very particular real
171 estate client and she had a list of things. We couldn't find it in East Vancouver because Ellen
172 wanted a yard and a lot of the yards there were...

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173 ES: I mean, it was nothing extravagant - two **00:19:00** bathrooms, a yard, at least two bedrooms,
174 a quiet street, and preferably walking distance to a French immersion school because our kids
175 were in French immersion. I guess that's a pretty steep list.

176 BS: There was more. But anyhow, we slowly started moving out east way and we looked at
177 some houses in Burnaby and we found one we liked. We made an offer and they wouldn't accept
178 it, so we kept looking. To make the long story short, we finally bought the house in Burnaby that
179 we wanted which was owned by somebody who really didn't keep it up that well. What would
180 you call it?

181 ES: Well, structurally, it was fine.

182 BS: Structurally was fine. Interior was pretty ugly.

183 ES: It was a mess.

184 BS: A **00:20:00** paint job and everything would do wonders for it, so we bought it.

185 ES: That was in 1988, we moved to Burnaby in 1988. We're in the same house.

186 INTVWR: What neighborhood is that?

187 ES: Deer Lake, we're just up the hill.

188 BS: We're just up the hill.

189 ES: Yeah. By the time we moved here, our kids were 7 and 9, so starting grade four and grade
190 two. They went to Morley Elementary, which was then the local French immersion school,
191 which was great because it was a short walk.

192 BS: They were in French immersion. Ellen didn't want to send them to French immersion, I did.
193 But in East Van, where we were living at the time, if you sent kids to regular school, it was all
194 English as a second language. Our **00:21:00** kids didn't need basic English, that's why we ended
195 up in French.

196 ES: It was a wonderful thing. And coincidentally, both of our daughters partners are
197 francophones. One from Quebec, the other from France - although, he lives here. French
198 immersion was a good idea as it turned out. Anyway, we're in the same house, we renovated it a
199 couple of times, we have a big garden, and Deer Lake Park is our daily walk which is heavenly.
200 The other reason that Burnaby turned out to be a really great place to live was that - well, a few
201 things. We ran own communications consulting business, Polestar Communications, and most of
202 the time we worked at home. But if we had to go to meetings **00:22:00** or work in clients offices,
203 it was an easy Skytrain trip downtown. We never had to commute by car, which was a huge
204 advantage. The other thing is that our kids played sports and in the winter they played ringette.
205 There was no girls hockey at the time and Bill coached both of their teams, and we spent the
206 winter in ice rinks. Burnaby was a great central location because the ringette association ran from
207 Squamish to Abbotsford. It was relatively easy to travel all over the Lower Mainland for the kid's
208 activities.

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209 INTVWR: And once in Burnaby, you mentioned work-wise was around your communications
210 company. What work does Polestar do? What clients? Is it anything for anyone?

211 ES: Anything for **00:23:00** anyone is the short answer.

212 BS: When somebody asked us if we could do something, we said yes and then figured out how
213 to do it our subcontracted. But we wrote a lot of stuff, went through phases. For the first, I had a
214 lot of work with the Council of Forest Industries writing education curriculum. Ellen wasn't
215 involved in that.

216 ES: No, I guess I was still in grad school.

217 BS: Yeah, Richard and I did that.

218 ES: I should say Polestar Communications is three people - Bill, I, and a colleague who has
219 worked with us from the very beginning and still does.

220 BS: Yeah. One point, we had to decide whether to grow or just keep it small. We decided to keep
221 it small, so what kind of projects? Well, Ellen was mainly **00:24:00** writing. And the first while,
222 I was working on contract, I had a contract with council first. We moved into [inaudible **24:13**].

223 ES: BC Hydro had just launched the PowerSmart program - Energy conservation, and I got a
224 part-time contract as a writer writing material for the public, like brochures, ads, information
225 sheets, newspaper articles, and that kind of thing. That's a lot of what our company did.

226 BS: That's what you did at the time. I was more like - one of the things they did for hydro. Well,
227 I wrote it first and I started writing marketing plans and education **00:25:00** curriculum. We did
228 a number of education and reports for them.

229 INTVWR: For the Ministry of Education?

230 BS: No, for hydro. I started organizing events for hydro conferences.

231 ES: International conferences and stuff like that.

232 BS: Yeah.

233 ES: Bill has been more on the marketing and event organizing side, and our colleague Richard
234 and I have been more on the writing and editing side, but we all work together on whatever
235 project. It was always contract work from one project - some projects went on for years and
236 some projects were a month or two, it just depended.

237 BS: I organized the Queen's Baton Relay for the Victoria Commonwealth Games. Well, I
238 organized the BC **00:26:00** part of it. I was a vice president of the Asian Development Bank's
239 seminar society. Anyhow, we helped we Asian Development Bank met in North America for the
240 first time. It was in Vancouver. I organized a 2-day conference to bring a lot of delegates to
241 Vancouver earlier. I was hired by hydro, but the committee was basically all kinds of people
242 though. It was the business community because they wanted to bring people here and expose
243 them to Vancouver. That was a long project.

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244 ES: And then, we did a lot of curriculum writing for different organizations. We wrote extensive
245 school materials for the Heart and Stroke Foundation over years and years **00:27:00** about heart
246 health. We wrote extensive educational materials for everybody from kids through adults on
247 financial literacy, initially for the BC Securities Commission who wanted to provide curriculum
248 for the new planning 10 course, which was new in B.C. at the time. The federal government
249 liked what we had done in B.C., so they hired us to develop the financial literacy program for
250 Canada.

251 BS: There was a string - the BC Securities Commission, like what we did for Heart and Stroke.
252 We wrote for Heart and BC Securities Commission. This is like groundbreaking on financial
253 literacy for kids using techniques that hadn't been used before. That's **00:28:00** the way it went.
254 We became kind the experts in writing fund financial literacy education in Canada. That led to a
255 number of things.

256 ES: Well, lots of reports for the province. There was a big thing about illegal guns for the police
257 association, another one about reclaiming contaminated lands throughout the province. It's all
258 over the place. That's basically...

259 BS: We stopped doing events and focused on writing. And now, we don't do much of the
260 writing. We delegate it.

261 INTVWR: Did you move into other media like broadcast media?

262 ES: No.

263 BS: We **00:29:00** were involved in making some videos.

264 ES: Yeah, that's true, on the educational side.

265 BS: Ellen wrote scripts for them.

266 INTVWR: Oh, okay. Has it shifted to more online computer writing?

267 BS: Yeah. Right now, the company and contracts, I don't even know what they are anymore.
268 They're for different, mainly provincial government agencies. And also, CMHC, it all goes
269 through cycles. The politician comes in and says, "Oh, we're going to cut this out". And so then,
270 things slow down. And once they slow down, they find out they can't do the work and they start
271 hiring all these consultants again. But right now, we don't do much of that. We're the companies.

272 ES: Yeah, we still have the company but Bill and I are pretty inactive. Our colleague, **00:30:00**
273 who's a little younger than we are, is still doing.

274 BS: I do the administration.

275 ES: And I avoid doing the work.

276 INTVWR: Now somewhere in there, Ellen, you started writing fiction as well.

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277 ES: That's right, yeah. I started writing when we were in Galena Bay by writing educational
278 stories for kids about the environment and energy conservation.

279 BS: Let me finish one thing, this relates to the environment, that's why. I was on the Burnaby
280 School Board Environment Committee for about 6 years and I was on the City Council
281 environment committee. Not as a councillor, but as a volunteer for 6 more years, that was
282 environment. I was on a national task force for the Federal Ministry of Finance on financial
283 **00:31:00** literacy. That went on for a couple of years.

284 INTVWR: The environmentalism is a huge theme that runs through your life?

285 ES: It is, it really has. The other thing I don't want to lose track of is that when our kids were
286 playing sports, Bill coached them in both ringette, softball, and what you're in - like, the
287 Provincial Hall of Fame or something.

288 BS: The community organizer, I don't know which Hall of fame - but I'm in one of them and got
289 awards for softball coaching.

290 INTVWR: Excellent.

291 ES: Yeah. Our kid's teams have won provincial championships, but Bill also has lots of trophies
292 for his coaching. And also recognition - I mean, it shouldn't be made light of the amount of time
293 he put in on the City of Burnaby committees of various kinds like really worked on the
294 environmental **00:32:00** side.

295 BS: The task force took a lot of time. Yeah.

296 INTVWR: What I know of because I'm a little bit later coming to Burnaby, there was quite a bit
297 of cleaning up of Burnaby in the '80s, '90s, and early 2000s.

298 BS: Oh, yeah. After I was on the city council test, I was put on a steering committee.

299 ES: Oh, yeah.

300 BS: For the developing a sustainable strategy for Burnaby.

301 ES: Yeah, that went on for a year.

302 BS: It's a sustainable environmental strategy that went on for a couple of years.

303 INTVWR: And we still have one, of course.

304 BS: Yeah, right. Theoretically, people have to look at it before they submit things. Environment
305 was a big thing.

306 ES: Yeah, and volunteerism. I mean, I do volunteer work in other areas particularly children's
307 literature, but **00:33:00** Bill has always put his volunteering in Burnaby activities, which I think
308 is admirable.

309 INTVWR: We see the rise. I mean, the cleanup of Steele Creek, Burnaby Lake, and the rise of
310 the stream keepers.

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311 BS: Yeah, we saw that. They would come before that city council committee to get approval and
312 all that stuff.

313 ES: And also, there was the Environment Committee of the school board had to approve. They
314 had to look at plans for new schools and make sure that they incorporated environmental
315 features, land use, and stuff like that.

316 BS: And approve the kind of toilet paper they were buying. Well, you didn't know that one.

317 ES: I didn't know that.

318 BS: They did a study on the toilet paper that they were going to use in the schools.

319 ES: Well, okay.

320 INTVWR: I don't want to drop your [inaudible 33:56]. Environmentalism was part 00:34:00 of
321 your...

322 ES: Yeah, that's how I got started writing. Writing educational stories. The first one I wrote in
323 Galena Bay, I sold to the province of British Columbia which was interested in environmental
324 education. They published it, it was called Adventure in Entropy. It was like fantasy, and they
325 published it as a combination storybook or coloring book. And printed, I think, 75,000 copies
326 and distributed them around B.C. I had never thought of writing before, but I enjoyed that. I
327 wrote another energy education story and sold it to the National Film Board and they turned it
328 into an educational cartoon, an animation which was distributed as part of a big package of
329 energy education materials. Then I thought, "Okay." That's when I decided 00:35:00 I wanted to
330 go to grad school and really study writing, which I did, and published my first trade book in
331 1983. It was a picture story book called 'Dusty'. I guess I was just about to start grad school. I
332 published Dusty in '83, started grad school in '84, and have continued since then. I have recently
333 published my 19th book, two of which are for adults and all the rest are for kids.

334 INTVWR: Although, a well-written young adult novel is good for adults too, isn't it?

335 ES: Oh, absolutely. Yes. I have two YA novels, but most of my books fall into what's called
336 'middle-grade fiction', which is for about 9-12 year olds, grades four or five.

337 BS: And a couple of picture books.

338 ES: Yeah, a couple 00:36:00 of picture books but not very many picture books.

339 INTVWR: What themes do you explore? Environmentalism and some of them?

340 ES: Not so much in the fiction. The fiction probably, if there's one, there's not one theme that
341 goes through all the books, but a theme that pops up in a number of books is social justice. I
342 wrote two chapter books, like books for about 7-10 year olds - well, this is going back to Jewish
343 history, they have to do with Jewish people living in Eastern Europe in the late 1800s or early
344 1900s when pogroms were going on. That's the story of how our grandparents fled Eastern
345 Europe and came to the United States, although in my books they come to Canada. The first

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346 **00:37:00** one of those two books is that story, it's basically my grandfather's story but
347 fictionalized with lots of made up elements. The sequel to that is set in Montreal and it has to do
348 with the early labor movement in Canada. One thing that I discovered when I was doing research
349 for that book, which I didn't know, was that a couple of generations earlier, the first Jewish
350 immigrants came to Canada, mainly from Germany. They thrived, they were well to do, and they
351 set up factories and businesses when the huge wave of Russian, Polish, Romanian, and
352 Lithuanian immigrants started coming. At the turn of the century, they were mostly poor and
353 illiterate - and the wealthy Jewish factory owners in Toronto and Montreal hired **00:38:00** them
354 in their sweatshops and exploited them. That's where the labour movement started. I was
355 horrified to find out that wealthy Jews had mistreated the next wave of poor Jews, but it was
356 fascinating history. That's those two books. First one is called Jesse's Star, and the second one is
357 called Yossi's Goal.

358 INTVWR: If I may intervene, do you intend those books to be written? Well, obviously by
359 everyone, but do you have in mind perhaps Jewish children reading them?

360 ES: Not really.

361 BS: One got nominated for the Sydney Taylor?

362 ES: I think it was Stealing Home. I wasn't one of those. Not particularly. I think I write Jewish
363 stories - mean, **00:39:00** not all of my books have a Jewish anything in them but a number of
364 them do. I write those because it's what I know, it's the voice I hear in my head - my
365 grandmother's and grandfather's voice speaking in that European tone, the sing-song voice. And
366 also because there are social justice issues involved with immigration, just like now,
367 immigration, employment, finding a new home, and all those things that I'm interested in. That's
368 where the Jewishness comes from in my books. I started writing books that had to do with social
369 justice and sports. **00:40:00** The first one was called Stealing Home and it's the background story
370 is the story of Jackie Robinson becoming the first African-American baseball player in the major
371 leagues. But it's a fiction about a kid who's half white and half black who lives in New York at
372 that time. There's baseball, racism, also the personal story of the kid, and so on. That book won a
373 lot of awards and was nominated for a lot of awards. Another sports injustice, it's this - I can't get
374 away from it, is a more recent book called Heart of a Champion which is about the Vancouver
375 Asahi Baseball Club and the Japanese internment. I wrote that because I just happened to see a
376 documentary on TV, an NFB documentary **00:41:00** called Sleeping Tigers, about the Asahi
377 team. I was just, "How could I not have heard of this team?" And so I decided to write a
378 children's book about it, and that's when I became acquainted with a lot of people at the Nikkei
379 museum. I mean, it's such a boon to have that in Burnaby. People helped me with the research
380 and I, in turn, did a lot of writing for the website. I still do some editing work for the Nikkei
381 Center. That book came out 2016, I think, then another book came out a few years later called
382 'The Princess Dolls', which also has to do with the Japanese internment, although at a slight
383 remove from the main part of the story. What I'm working on now is **00:42:00** a nonfiction book
384 for kids about the Colored Hockey League, which was an actual hockey league in the Maritimes

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Interview with Ellen and Bill Schwartz

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Date of interview: May 15, 2023

385 from 1895-1930, formed by black players who were not allowed to play on white teams but they
386 were great hockey players.

387 INTVWR: I'll have to read that. I've never heard of it.

388 ES: Well, it's only in manuscript right now, but it's fascinating. I went to Nova Scotia to do
389 research and that's what I'm working on now. Bill's laughing because I arrived in Nova Scotia the
390 day before hurricane Fiona hit last fall. Bill had said to me, "Maybe you should postpone your
391 trip." And I said, "Oh, no. It'll be fine." Anyway, I ended up in a hotel room for a couple of days
392 in the cold and dark, but that's another story.

393 INTVWR: Well, **00:43:00** it sounds like writing, communication, and the research behind it is a
394 big part of your lives.

395 ES: It is.

396 INTVWR: What else do you get up to in Burnaby? Do you have favorite areas to visit?

397 BS: Well, favorite Deer Lake.

398 ES: Deer Lake, of course. Number one, it's partly why we bought our house where we did.

399 BS: In Deer Lake, when we bought our house, you could swim in Deer Lake.

400 ES: It was the last year.

401 BS: Yeah, little did we know. I mean, because we had two young kids we figured, "Oh, we can
402 just walk down the hill and they could swim." And then the next year, they closed it off.

403 INTVWR: What was the main problem of closing it?

404 BS: All the drains.

405 ES: Geese, ducks, and runoff.

406 BS: Well, the biggest problem really was the runoff because all the city storm drains up there,
407 just went right into the lake.

408 INTVWR: Now, are those biofiltration ponds an attempt to mitigate runoff?

409 BS: A little bit. I mean, it does a little **00:44:00** bit. Yeah. I mean, I was on the city Environment
410 Committee when they really started tackling the problem. They were going to build a swimming
411 pool there, they were going to do this, and they did some stuff with the drains. They had school
412 kids paint fish next to the drains, which most people had not a clue what it meant and didn't care
413 anyhow.

414 INTVWR: Don't change your oil over this drain.

415 BS: Yeah, right.

416 ES: Well, I think people get that idea.

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417 BS: Some. Most, maybe even. When we go to the other parks, we go to our Frazier for sure.
418 ES: Yeah, do a lot of walks there and Burnaby Lake.
419 BS: And Central Park.
420 INTVWR: You head down the Byrne Creek Ravine as well. That's not too far. **00:45:00**
421 BS: Yeah, they're the main parks we go. Well, we go to parks with playgrounds when our kids
422 are here.
423 ES: We know all the playgrounds.
424 INTVWR: How about the more urban amenities? Do you go to shows? Participate in?
425 ES: We do. Oh, yeah. I take a dance class at Shadbolt.
426 ES: Right, on your website that you were a dancer in Shadbolt.
427 ES: Although this past year I was off because I had a stress fracture in my hip, but I'll be back in
428 the fall.
429 BS: We go to entertainment at Shadbolt.
430 ES: Yeah, and Burnaby Art Gallery regularly. Yeah, we go to shows at Shadbolt. What we used
431 to do for our anniversary every year was go to dinner at the Pear Tree on Hastings Street but it's
432 closed. They closed during the pandemic. **00:46:00**
433 BS: Well, they closed during the pandemic and the landlord, I guess, upped their rent quite a bit.
434 One of our daughters knew the owners and chef, and so we got to know them.
435 INTVWR: Just remind me. I know of the Pear Tree but I can't remember why I know of the...
436 ES: Well, it was a great restaurant.
437 BS: It was the best fine restaurant dining.
438 ES: Yeah, and we go to Hart House.
439 BS: And then a variety of...
440 ES: Sushi and whatnot, stuff like that. Yeah, it's a shame about the Pear Tree, though.
441 INTVWR: Are there things from your past that you miss here in Burnaby or growing up in New
442 York City, are there big city moments?
443 BS: We first moved to Canada or Burnaby. We went to a show at **00:47:00** the Arts Club or
444 something and we were pulled by the acting bug, which has since got a lot better.
445 ES: Yeah, and we've become less snobbish also.
446 BS: Well, it was awful.
447 ES: It was.

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448 BS: When you grow up and you went to Broadway shows, and then you came here.

449 ES: The other thing that we love here is the Blues and Roots Festival. That's something we look
450 forward to every year. But there's wonderful dance comes to, not so much Burnaby, but the
451 Lower Mainland and classical music, jazz, blues, theater, and art. I mean, there's plenty to do.

452 BS: Sometimes, we shop at Metrotown, the mall that at Burnaby. I **00:48:00** don't know where
453 else we actually go.

454 ES:

455 Well, another place we love, our doctor's office is on Hastings Street and it's right across the
456 street, basically from Chez Christophe, which is a great chocolate and coffee shop. That's a bit of
457 a hangout whenever we go to the doctors. The other thing, I mean, this is for an unfortunate
458 reason but when I had my stress fracture, I couldn't walk for exercise and I'm used to walking a
459 vigorous hour a day. I swam instead, so I got to know all the swimming pools in Burnaby. And
460 boy, am I grateful for the facilities we have here. I was able to keep physically active because of
461 that. Thank God for that.

462 BS: Yeah, we go to Edmonds **00:49:00** Community Center.

463 ES: Of course, the playground.

464 BS: The playground, yes. We know all the playgrounds.

465 ES: We come to Burnaby Village for the Christmas lights. I mean, even though we're Jewish, we
466 bring our kids, our grandkids, and one my niece lives on Bowen Island and has three kids. They
467 come over to come down to the village, walk around, and we come here with the kids during the
468 summer.

469 BS: We used to go to sporting events like the Harry Jerome track meet. I used to go when the
470 white cops taps occasionally went to the ones where Empire Stadium. I do miss the professional
471 sports that we could access back east.

472 ES: We went to the Vancouver Giants for quite a few **00:50:00** years.

473 BS: Yeah, and we went to the Canucks. I used to take my kids to Canucks, and a couple of times
474 I coached teams that played during periods of the Canucks in between periods. Every night, one
475 period, they select teams to go out in the ice and play. A couple of times, my teams were selected
476 and we'd sit in the locker room toward the end of the first period, then we'd go out and wait while
477 the Canucks came out. That was nice.

478 ES: Kids were thrilled.

479 BS: The Canucks became not enough value for the money they were charging. I used to take the
480 girls because they played ice sports and Ellen liked hockey.

481 INTVWR: Is **00:51:00** there much of a Jewish community in Burnaby at all? And does that
482 matter to you?

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483 ES: There isn't much. For example, when we moved here and our kids started going to school at
484 Morley, I think there was one other Jewish kid in each of their classes. I don't know if there still
485 is, but there was at the time, a Jewish community association called 'Burquest', Shirley has
486 probably talked about that. We joined that and our older daughter chose to be bat mitzvah when
487 she turned 13. The rabbi who used to come to teach Sunday school for Burquest was actually
488 based at a synagogue in West Van and our daughter studied with him and had her bat mitzvah
489 **00:52:00** at that synagogue. Our younger daughter didn't have abutments, but she was the rebel -
490 and that was fine. I was involved with Burquest for a number of years, but then after our kids
491 outgrew that age, I lapsed. I really don't even know if it still exists, I suspect it does.

492 INTVWR: I think it does. I think it's headquartered in Port Coquitlam or Coquitlam.

493 ES: Yeah, it was in Coquitlam. But as far as Jewish activities, were not involved in any.

494 BS: Yeah. Our niece who teaches at UBC, she teaches basically biblical studies, much more
495 religious than we are.

496 INTVWR: Are there any events or occasions that you still recognizes?

497 ES: To **00:53:00** be honest, we half-heartedly observed some of the Jewish holidays for our
498 grandchildren. Our grandchildren all have a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father. Christmas is
499 overwhelming. Our daughters want their children to have at least a knowledge of their Jewish
500 part, so we light Hanukkah candles with the kids or that type of thing. But other than that, really,
501 no. I can't think of any particular Jewish activities we take part in other than through our family.
502 For example, my niece's son - one of her sons is being is bar mitzvah this year, the family's
503 coming from back east, **00:54:00** and the bar mitzvah is taking place in a synagogue in East Van.
504 We'll be doing that.

505 INTVWR: That's not Orr Shalom, is it?

506 ES: Yeah.

507 INTVWR: My wife happens to know a few people who attend that, so we just recently came...

508 ES: Yeah. My niece and her family belong to that, but we've never actually belonged to a
509 synagogue.

510 BS: Yeah. I mean, I feel my Jewish heritage but I'm pretty secular.

511 ES: Okay, there's another thing. I guess, it's a Jewish connection. There was a children's author
512 named 'Joan Stuchner' who was from England, originally, and lived in Vancouver, active in the
513 Jewish community in Vancouver. She died very, very young of cancer about maybe 10 years
514 ago. Her family donated money to establish a prize in her honor in her memory, and I'm on the
515 committee that administers the award and it's called the **00:55:00** 'Joan Betty Stuchner - Oy Vey!
516 Funniest Children's Book Award. It's a Canadian Book Award. It considers children's books
517 from across Canada by Canadian authors, illustrators, and publishers. They don't have to be
518 Jewish, they have to be funny. We give this award every 2 years. In fact, we just had the last

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519 award ceremony this past Saturday on zoom and we give an award for the funniest picture book
520 and the funniest chapter book, and publishers submit their books for consideration. I'm in charge
521 of the judging process. I work with a couple of other volunteers who judge. We read all the
522 books, we choose a short list, and the winner. I mean, it's a Jewish connection even though it's
523 not explicitly, the **00:56:00** award doesn't have anything to do with Judaism.

524 BS: She's appeared a number of times at the Jewish Book Festival.

525 ES: Yeah. When I have a new book, I generally asked to read. Oh, yeah.

526 BS: She's won or been nominated.

527 ES: My next to last book, The Princess Dolls, won the Western Canada Jewish Book Award.

528 INTVWR: Oh, very good.

529 ES: Which was a total surprise and a delight.

530 INTVWR: Of course. I'm just doing some quick math in my head and I'm thinking, "Well,
531 you've been in Burnaby for 35 years now." How have you seen it change for better or for worse?

532 BS: Little houses turned into big houses.

533 ES: Yeah, on our street.

534 BS: Big ugly houses, in our opinion.

535 ES: For the most part, big ugly houses. The thing that's heartbreaking **00:57:00** about that is that
536 the trees get cut down, and I just hate to see the trees get cut down.

537 BS: There doesn't seem to be any. The city has bylaws, but there's many loopholes through those
538 bylaws that a lot of trees get cut down and are not replaced.

539 ES: On the other hand, Fraser Foreshore Park was established since we've been here and that's
540 really wonderful to see.

541 BS: Metrotown wasn't there when we moved here.

542 ES: Yeah, it was just beginning to get developed. I think the city has done a pretty good job of
543 preserving green space for a city this size. It's done a good job.

544 BS: I think it's done a very good job.

545 INTVWR: Oh, good.

546 ES: Yeah. On the other hand, I'm very troubled to see low-income housing **00:58:00** get torn
547 down in favor of condos and market housing. That's happening all over the place, especially in
548 Edmonds. At least, that's the one we see close up, and Metrotown town.

549 BS: Yeah, and low heat must be must be everywhere.

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550 ES: Yeah, but it's good to see. Even though Edmonds is a weird commercial area, it's still there.
551 It's still exists and that's good to see.

552 BS: In the city's defense, to build those big, high rises or whatever, there's amenities for the cities
553 and certain of the developments and minimum of social housing has to be there. I'm not up to
554 date on that stuff if it's for every new development or **00:59:00** whatever, and people it's never
555 enough but that's going to happen. Other people complain there's too much, but they do have a
556 social housing component now for development.

557 ES: One other thing that's changed and been interesting is that when the pandemic started, I
558 mean, Deer Lake Park was always popular but it was probably mostly used by local residents
559 and Burnaby residents. But when the pandemic started and people were looking for ways to get
560 outside safely, there was been a huge influx of people walking in Deer Lake Park. I think that's
561 great. I mean, the parking lot is always full which is unfortunate but it's an urban park, it should
562 be used by people. One other thing about Deer Lake Park that's an **01:00:00** interesting aside, in
563 2011, from our house, we just walked down the street and enter a woods trail that goes down
564 eventually, goes down, down to the lake. And often, that was the way that we either come down
565 the steps or we go in the trail off of Brantford Street. In the spring of 2011, Bill and I were
566 walking, and at the time, you walk down a little hill and then there was a board that went across a
567 creek to the opposite bank, then you had to climb up the opposite side, and continue on. Bill
568 turned around to say something to me, lost his footing, fell against a rock and seriously
569 dislocated his shoulder. Long **01:01:00** story, months and months of rehab, and surgery later.
570 Because Bill knew people in the parks department and city, he contacted the city to say, "It might
571 be a good idea to do something about that board across the creek."

572 BS: Because I'm not going to see you, but somebody else surely will.

573 ES: And to our astonishment, about a week later, there was a survey crew in there, and there are
574 now steps and a bridge - not only at the top, but also at the bottom where there used to be
575 stepping stones across another creek. The city really responded and improved the trail.

576 BS: On the other hand, we've had two floods. I mean, we live in a hill, but we've had two floods.
577 Actually three, but one of them... Anyhow, two floods, one happened while we were away,
578 **01:02:00** I think, and a city water main broke. I went to talk to the guy who was waiting there for
579 the city, the city takes no responsibility for those things. They call it an Act of God. But the guy
580 did say, "Well, this was scheduled to be replaced a couple of years ago." Okay. Two years later,
581 another flood because the same water main broke.

582 ES: It didn't affect our house.

583 BS: Well, it did, just not that much. That affected another house who happened to be filled
584 with...ES: A new house.

585 BS: Yeah, a brand new house with a number of lawyers who talked to the city. Anyhow, they
586 eventually replaced the water main, but I **01:03:00** didn't like the Act of God - which God? Like,

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587 you're supposed to replace it. It was supposed to be replaced a couple of years ago. Who's God?
588 Anyhow, that was a negative on my part.

589 ES: But back to your question about how we've seen the city change, of course, we've seen a
590 huge increase in the number of high rises. I'm sorry to see many high rises, but on the other hand,
591 because of our environmental involvement, we're well aware of the regional plan that calls for
592 dense development around transportation hubs. It makes sense to be building high rises,
593 particularly in our area, Metrotown and Edmonds. It's environmentally responsible to do that
594 even though, I mean, who needs to look at another high rise? **01:04:00**

595 BS: You can tell Ellen's feeling about progress in the world.

596 ES: No, it's the right thing to do.

597 BS: At one point, we wrote and edited parts of the sustainable development plan for the Metro
598 Vancouver. We were quite familiar with the idea of hubs around transit centers.

599 ES: And Burnaby is...

600 BS: Is one of the few municipalities doing it.

601 ES: One of the few municipalities who's sticking to the regional plan in that regard, which is
602 commendable.

603 BS: Yeah, a lot of municipalities, and this is cynical viewpoint, but a developer will offer the
604 mayor and council of the party in power whatever they offer them - and they build these
605 developments, not even near transit. And **01:05:00** then people move in there and then the next
606 thing that happens is there's a big rallying cry, why isn't there a transit here?

607 ES: And why are the highways close?

608 BS: Why are the highways close? The mayors, they do double talk about, "It's somebody else's
609 fault." I'm old enough to have seen a lot cynical to know. I was on the City council committee,
610 the environment committee, when they were talking about widening the highway. That was
611 really interesting to see everybody on that side of the Fraser wanted it widened. Everybody on
612 this side of the Fraser said, "No way." But it was provincial jurisdiction, it didn't matter what
613 Burnaby wanted. Burnaby was against it. And they had done studies, and the studies showed -
614 and I think it's coming to **01:06:00** fruition, numerous studies across North America shows that
615 when they widen the highway, the traffic initially slows, the land prices further go up because
616 developer can say, "Well, it only takes many minutes to drive in." And then in 5 years, it's just as
617 crowded as it was.

618 INTVWR: Do you think that's happening to our widened freeway?

619 ES: Well, absolutely.

620 BS: It's happening a little slower because of the pandemic, but it's bound to fill up just like it
621 was.

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622 ES: We've been fortunate enough not to have to commute and not to be on highways very often.
623 When we are, we're usually appalled at the amount of traffic which we're contributing to.

624 BS: And for us, you talk about a good thing **01:07:00** for us, we find the transit system quite
625 good in Burnaby.

626 ES: Yeah, it's terrific. A number of years ago, I guess, after our kids grew up and left home, one
627 lives in Montreal and the other is back in the Kootenays. She lived in Vancouver, then worked
628 here for a number of years, and moved back to the Kootenays. Once we didn't have our kids
629 anymore, I was leaning towards selling our house and moving downtown or into kits or some
630 place where it would be a real walking neighborhood. Bill didn't want to. I kind of, "All right,
631 we'll wait and see." I lost my desire to move and very grateful that we stayed where we are. I
632 mean, it's a great neighborhood.

633 BS: Deer Lake is an urban gem.

634 ES: It really is.

635 BS: The lake **01:08:00** is there even though they never did clean it up.

636 ES: We love gardening and we have the space for gardening. And also now that we have
637 grandkids, when they come, we have room for them. We're happy to stay.

638 INTVWR: Well, that's an excellent note maybe to wrap things up. We've had a really good chat
639 and you have a fascinating life story to share with people. You're obviously very involved in
640 your community as well. Unless you think of something you might want to add?

641 BS: No.

642 INTVWR: Here we go. I'll look forward to your memoirs coming out, maybe sometime in the
643 future. Well, thanks very much again.

644 ES: Thanks to you.

645 INTVWR: Bill and Ellen Schwartz. Well, thanks and we'll hope to see you at the museum again
646 soon.