

Laila Razban: So basically, the purpose of this project is to go out there and find people in our community who have stories to share – and the significance of it is, now people take things for granted. We have, you know, the high technologies and everything. People don't really understand where other people come from and what their experiences were and we'd like to know that. So, I want to get to know you and what kind of person you were growing up and things you did. So, when and where you born?

Denis Creighton: It would be Toronto but I spent my childhood in Montreal. And my mother didn't want me to be born in Quebec so she came up to Toronto where she had relatives. And then when I was born, we went back down to Montreal. And then I came up again during the war and was in high school in the Toronto area - not in Toronto but in the area.

LR: So you were born and raised in Toronto but born in Quebec or?

DC: Yes that's the easiest way, otherwise it gets a bit complicated.

LR: So what was it like when you were growing up in Toronto?

DC: That was during the war...

LR: Which war was this?

DC: The second...

LR: Okay, World War II?

DC: Yes, yes...and really, as far as that part was concerned I wasn't affected particularly by the war. But I grew up in the depression but then my father had a very good job – he was a metallurgist so he was never out of work. So, what that means, I have no idea because we were always fine. We had a house, he had a car; when people didn't have cars.

LR: So you guys never really faced any kind of complications during World War II?

DC: No, my father was American and he was on loan to the Canadian government during the war. Which was unusual for a foreigner to be working for the government but that's because of what he did. And then he was also in the Chalk River plant for a bit, where Atomic Energy is...

LR: Is that here in Toronto too?

DC: No, it would be north of Ottawa...

LR: Okay, north of Ottawa. What were your parents like, your mother and your father – what were they like?

DC: How do you mean?

LR: So, like, describe a bit – like you've mentioned your dad but you know, was your mom like the housewife? Or was she...

DC: She was a housewife, she never worked. The day she got married, she never worked after that...

LR: Okay, so she worked before getting married?

DC: Yes...

LR: And, how was your relationship like with your parents? Were you close with them?

DC: No, I lived a bit on my own. I lived in the house – but my father being away so much we never had a relationship until just before he died. So that, it was a case that he didn't get to know me particularly and I didn't get to know him and my mother sort of interfered a bit there too which didn't help. So that things were a bit of turmoil at times...

LR: So then, how was your relationship with your mother since she was always home right? So how was that like for you?

DC: Well, we got along. I wasn't particularly happy about it all – my mother was a domineering sort of person. So that every once in awhile I would disagree and there would be an eruption...so that's it. And to a great extent I lived my own life. I'm an only child...

LR: Okay, so you had no siblings?

DC: No, none.

LR: So, how did that feel? How did that feel, you know, being an only child and...

DC: You can't experience it until you've had siblings, and then you can look back. But never having any, I have nothing to compare it to.

LR: So, didn't you ever feel lonely at times?

DC: No, I did my own thing.

LR: So you're more of an independent person?

DC: Yes...

LR: So would you mind describing what you looked like as you were younger? Do you remember what you looked like?

DC: Well I was thin...I don't know. I had blonde hair, but other than that I guess I was just like the rest of the kids.

LR: Okay, so were you like one of those smart kids at school or?

DC: Yes, I skipped a grade and...

LR: Was that in the high school years?

DC: No, it was just at the end of public school.

LR: Okay, right. So, how would you describe a perfect day when you were young?

DC: Hmm...I hadn't thought about it. I don't know, I don't think I could describe it. I spent a great deal of my time studying.

LR: Okay, what did you want to become?

DC: I wanted to become a doctor or a lawyer. And after awhile I wasn't impressed with lawyers...

LR: Why not?

DC: Well, some of them weren't exactly the most honest of people. They tried to twist things for their own use - and I was a physiotherapist.

LR: That was here also in Canada right?

DC: Yes, in Ontario.

LR: So how come you changed your mind about being a doctor?

DC: I think it was a case of I wasn't getting any support. And by support, some of it would have to be obviously mental support. The money aspect of it because back in those days, jobs weren't that easy for students and it was very very difficult. So that what I did was I worked, saved some money and went in to physiotherapy.

LR: Okay, were you happy with your job? Did you like it?

DC: Oh yes, yes. I did several things but I also had my own practice as well.

LR: Right, and how was that?

DC: Well it was strictly house calls, I didn't have an office as such. I would work with the doctors and treat the people in their homes.

LR: So, did you have any close friends or any best friends that you would talk to or share feelings with or hang around with?

DC: No, there were two or three of us. Then I moved away right at the end of high school, so these people I didn't see...I did one, but I didn't after that because he got married and divorced and there was upheavals there so I didn't...

(8:42)

LR: What did you think your life would be like when you were older – you know how most kids have dreams about becoming something, or they wanna do something, and they have kind of an imagination of what their life would be like in the future. What was yours? What did you think your life would be like when you were older?

DC: I thought it would be very similar to what everybody else was experiencing in those days. And it was, you know, you were sort of working and socializing you didn't really have that much time. At least I didn't so that I was not a social animal like other people might be. I tended to hang out by myself on my own...

LR: So, did you enjoy school?

DC: Parts of it yes and some parts no...it depended on the subjects that you were taking. And in those days there were certain subjects that you had to take, they were mandatory. And, I don't know about today...

LR: Yeah, it's like that today too. Up until a certain grade, so grade nine – there's more mandatory courses and then I think you get more options once you're in grade eleven and twelve. So you have more options because it would help you to become what you want to become right?

DC: Because when I was in high school you didn't have that many options and there were four courses that you had to take...and a couple of others were things that were interchangeable....Well, you had to take French and you had to take math – and a mathematician I am not.

LR: So this was...you guys had five years of high school right? And, during those five years you learned French all throughout right?

DC: Yes, but I already knew French from living in Quebec.

LR: Oh that was good, was that easy for you?

DC: Oh yes...

LR: Okay, what would you say was your favourite subject in school?

DC: The sciences I guess...I liked botany and zoology and physics was quite interesting but I wasn't interested in chemistry and my father was one...which surprised the teachers, they couldn't understand that...because I said "nah, I'm not interested in it..."

LR: Okay, do you have any favourite stories from school?

DC: Not that I can think of offhand...like probably, I'll think of something later on...

LR: Sure, we can get back to that one. Was there any teachers who particularly had a strong influence on your life?

DC: There was one, but that would be in public school because in high school I had to go there by bus and streetcar because where we lived there were no high schools. So it would take me an hour and a half in the morning to go to school and an hour and a half to get back home. So, I wasn't getting home until 6 o'clock at night like working people.

LR: Right, so what time would school finish there?

DC: It finished at ten after four.

LR: And it would take you that long to get home right?

DC: And it would take me that long, an hour and a half or so....

LR: That teacher that influenced you in public school, what happened? What did she say or he say that influenced you?

DC: Well, she was a neighbour, she lived maybe 8-10 houses away. So the relationship was even a little more than it would be as the student-teacher because she was a friend and she was a friend of my family. She had the influence because I would be talking to her – we'd discuss many things growing up – so she had an influence...

LR: Right, what did you like the most about school?

DC: (laughter) Recess. You mean public school or do you mean high school?

LR: Both...

DC: Well public school, I went there to get through as quickly as possible and that sounds as though I didn't like it. Well, it wasn't bad, but it wasn't something that I really enjoyed. It was a necessity of life so you put up with it. And I think today, from what I hear, it's altogether different...

LR: What about high school?

DC: High school, as I said, I took all these various subjects and I didn't have any friends there because I had to leave to get home. So the social life didn't exist...

LR: Right, so were any of the people you were friends with during college or university, are you friends with any of them today?

DC: No, a couple of them have died, a couple of others – I don't know where they are...

LR: You don't know? Do you think if you had the chance to meet one of the people back then that you were best friends with would you?

DC: I suppose so...we're going back 55 years because I am 77. So, that's rather difficult to answer...

LR: You don't have to answer...

DC: No, it's just difficult – I don't know. I know a couple that we were fairly close – ended up divorcing...so then their family's all split up and we never met with them again.

LR: So, I'm going to ask some questions about Vaughan because you said you lived in Maple for 37 years?

DC: No, 47 years...

LR: Oh 47 years, yeah...how has it changed over those years?

DC: Oh, gosh, tremendously. When we came, we – let's see – we had a hand crank telephone and there were two switchboard operators and you would go through to the switchboard and they would pick it up and they would dial the number for you. Now, that didn't last very long after we got there, so we then got a regular telephone and it was long distance...into Toronto. We lived just off Keele St. and it was a narrow two lane road with virtually no traffic on it. And, it got its name very aptly because the maple trees grew over the top of the road and they all intertwined so it was just solid all through the village – because we lived in the village itself.

LR: So with all the development, and there's malls and stores and houses, do you think that has any impact on you?

DC: Oh, I'm sure it must have. There's a lot of noise now with traffic, where before, right across the road it was farm and you'd wake up in the morning and you'd hear the cows. Now you hear tractor-trailers...

LR: Do you miss hearing the cows and looking at the view of the farm?

DC: Yes...Also, there was an airport in Maple.

LR: Okay, it's not here anymore right?

DC: No, it was on the south side, just... Do you know where McNaughton is? Do you know Maple at all?

LR: I'm familiar with some of the places in Maple, McNaughton...I've heard of it...

DC: Okay, there's a Roman Catholic church on the south side of Major Mackenzie and the airport would be just west of that on the south side...and that of course, is all gone...and the streets now that are there, that are on where the airport used to be have the names of airplanes. Like Hudson Drive, that sort of thing...

LR: What do you miss most about the way Maple used to be?

DC: It was very friendly and I...would go shopping and I'd meet people and we'd stand and talk. Now, I can go into the same places and I don't know a soul. And, it's very multicultural now where before it was strictly WASPish...and they were sort of Scots and English and some German...but it was primarily British stock.

LR: So, you don't feel that people are more...you know...

DC: They're not as friendly, they don't have time...They're too busy living, and working and that sort of thing...

LR: Do you have any stories that you would like to share about the town that you live in? Any significant things that have happened in Maple or any stories that you'd like to share?

DC: I suppose, in light of what I heard today, Superior Propane blew up...

LR: It blew up in Maple? And when was this?

DC: 1962...and one man was killed.

LR: Where did this take place in Maple?

DC: Between Keele St. and the railroad tracks that pass over Major Mackenzie...Do you know where that is?

LR: I actually don't know where that is.

DC: Okay, where they're building the new town offices, that was part of Superior Propane and then they had some more on the other side of the road.

LR: So how did it blow up? Did someone do it or did it just happen on its own?

DC: Well, they were never really sure of whether it was the case of a spark that did it...because there was only one person there, it happened at night...I don't recall that they really found out what it was...there were certain things that they had thought about. And also, back in those days we had two policemen and they were village policemen, we didn't have anything else...if they had a problem, they would call in the O.P.P...So, these two police officers knew everybody – because there were only 500-600 people at that time. And they knew all the kids, and if there were some kids that were bad, they would know where to go. And also, if your child was doing something, I as a parent would tell them and they would do the same to us for our children. So we tended to look after each other's child or children...to make sure that everyone was okay.

LR: So there was only two policemen in all of Maple? Wow and now there's so many of them right?

DC: Now of course they got everything. And it was a volunteer fire department...I was asked to be a volunteer fireman but I didn't have time.

LR: Because you were working right?

DC: Yeah...

LR: Back to the questions about your work and your job...what lessons has your work life taught you?

DC: I think it taught me tolerance, accepting other people and I enjoyed people otherwise I wouldn't have been what I was doing. When you are treating people, there's interplay...it's not like some of the surgeons who come in and they barely speak to you. When you're treating somebody, you get to know them, and you're treating them three times a week perhaps. So you, and then when I was doing house calls you get to know people better because you are now a guest in their house. You now have a different perspective...

LR: If you were able to something that you wanted to do right now other than becoming a physiotherapist what would it be?

DC: I don't know...

LR: You don't know, something that you have a passion for or something that you did have a passion for before...

DC: Well, I'm a rose grower and I compete in competition and I'm a rose judge for the Canadian Rose Society. But that's sort of a hobby, sort of thing...But I enjoy the competition.

LR: What is it about?

DC: Well you, when you're growing roses you compete in various classes because there's so many different types of roses. So that they have shows...as a matter of fact, a week Saturday there's a show and it's a big rose show.

(24:34)

LR: What's it like? To see whose roses have grown the most or?

DC: Well, you cut the bloom. You don't come and look at the rose bush, you cut the bloom and then they judge that bloom – let's say it's a hybrid tea red, they will judge that hybrid tea against another red hybrid tea.

LR: And you're the judge for that?

DC: Yes, I am.

LR: And do you like doing that?

DC: Oh yes, yeah. I will be at the Exhibition as well at the end of August.

LR: So what are some of your hobbies now aside from the rose competition, what do you like doing?

DC: I don't have any hobbies, my wife is blind and deaf so I devote a lot of time to her - so I don't have that much time to do other things... occasionally. Because I can't leave her alone, say overnight or that sort of thing, if I can leave her alone for a few hours then I tell my daughter or something. Because I have a daughter that lives in King City. So, if there's a problem – or if Udo...were you talking to Udo...

LR: Udo?

DC: Udo...yesterday? Schonberg? Oh it was somebody else...

LR: This is my first interview by the way, with you...

DC: Oh, oh, okay. Because then his wife was a nurse and she could help if I wasn't there. So I really don't, so as far as hobbies are concerned, it's roses...and it's getting more difficult because there's more and more work to do.

LR: So your daughter is your only child?

DC: No I have two daughters...

LR: Okay, two daughters...what is your relationship like with your daughters?

DC: Oh very good...

LR: That's good, okay, is there anything that, any stories that you can tell us about them growing up or having kids has taught you?

DC: Being typical of teenagers in that sort of thing, they grew up again, in a rural atmosphere. They were called hillbillies, there was no high school, there wasn't one in Vaughan and they had to go by bus over to Richmond Hill over to Bayview Collegiate.

LR: Okay, yeah I know that school...

DC: Okay, and that's where they were going...and they again, they would go on the school bus and they'd come back and they'd get off the school bus. But they didn't drive and there was no place for them to go so they came straight home again...and then they would mingle with some of their friends that were in Maple, which there were probably 6 or 8 kids...

LR: So did you feel like your environment that you lived in was more safe than it is now?

DC: More what?



LR: More safe...

DC: Oh Yes, we didn't worry about the things that go today, my gosh. But still, Maple isn't that bad but there's patches and so on where there's some gangs and that sort of thing...

(28:19)

LR: Are you talking about back then or right now?

DC: No, I'm talking about now. No, back in those days, all the kids were growing up together and they all sort of clicked and they'd look after each other.

LR: Where today, the population has increased so much there's not much of that...right?

DC: Yes, that's right...

LR: What are the changes that have impacted you the most? Like I said, there's been a lot of development and everything and the population is increasing you know...What are some of the changes that have impacted you?

DC: I think the biggest impact would be the traffic – that also pertains to when you go grocery shopping, you have to take your time you can't rush in and rush out because there's so many people. So that would be the biggest impact and the noise...Now, we have a fairly large lot – we don't have one of these little dinky ones. Ours is slightly less than half an acre, so its 103 feet by 160...you see we are in the original village and south of us it was all farm land. And we were the last ones in Maple and then it started to expand after that.

LR: So back to the 47 years ago that you started living in Maple right? Is there any neighbours that lived with you back then that still lives in Maple?

DC: No...

LR: So, you'd say maybe [...]

DC: We're one of the last...There was couple that came a year or so after us but that was in another part of the village. And we knew each other quite well but we never visited back and forth...

LR: Right, so they don't live in Maple anymore right?

DC: No, and quite a number of them have died because they would be in their 80s, 90s...

LR: What was the reason that you moved from Toronto to Maple? Was it because of your job or?

DC: No, this friend of mine married this minister's daughter and he was a Presbyterian minister in Maple, I don't know if you know it, there's a white church on Keele St just south of Major Mackenzie with a tall spire...and he was the minister there. And we were going to have our daughter baptized, and knowing him, we'd known him for quite a number of years and there was a historic celebration I think in the church and I stayed my daughter who was only a matter of 3 months old, 4 months old and my wife went up to go to the service but she got there too soon. And what she decided to do, she was driving around Maple she came across this house and it had a for sale sign on it. So after the service when she came back she said to me about this house. So I said "okay, let's go and take a look" so we went up there and got the

fellow's name and called him and said that we were interested. So, this was on the Sunday and he said "okay, we'll make it for Monday" – so we went on Monday and he met us, we went through the house and we decided we liked it, we decided we'd put in an offer. And it turns out, the people that were selling the house, they were trying to cut him out of another deal, they were buying a house in Richmond Hill that he was looking after. The builder happened to be a friend of his and told him that he better watch these people because "they're trying to cut you out so you're not going to get any money when the house is sold." So he was determined that we were going to get the house, so that worked in our favour. And, one of the things he said to me "now, I don't think they're going to accept this price" so he said "how much more can you give?" Now you'll get a laugh, I said "two hundred dollars, I have to have money for a washing machine and a dryer," so he said "okay, that's fine." So about midnight he called and said "the house is yours." So, that's how we got it...

LR: Right, so do you still live in that same house today?

DC: It's the same house, yeah...

LR: So 47 years...

DC: The house is 53 years old...so that's the way it worked out, just fate I guess. Everything just fell together...

LR: So you were telling me that you were going to baptize your daughter right? So, what is your religion?

DC: I was raised as Presbyterian but I don't agree with a lot of that sort of thing. Basically, I don't have a religion as such...

LR: Have you experienced any miracles or anything?

DC: No, I don't think so, unless it's a miracle that we got the house...but other than that, no.

LR: Do you believe in God?

DC: I did, but I don't anymore...

LR: And what's the reason for that?

DC: I guess I ask too many questions because when I was growing up I went to a Presbyterian church. I went with...well in those days they had teenage programs for studying religion and that sort of thing. I was asked to leave by the minister because I was a disruptive influence. Because I kept asking questions...and I can remember one of the things that I asked him, and I'll always remember it. He was going on about people not going to heaven if they didn't believe in God. And he was going on about people being exposed to all this sort of thing and I said to him "what about the black people in Africa? They're not going to go to hell..." "Oh yes" he said, "if they have had the chance to believe in God and hear about God and they don't accept it, they're going to hell." And I said, "no I don't think so." So I was asked to leave, so I did...But I've always questioned things and argued things, not necessarily always arguing, if you don't ask questions you don't learn anything.

LR: So it was just the curiosity right, you just wanted to know...

DC: Well because there's so many different religions in the world and they all say "oh, we're the ones" and I could see people being Protestant and people being Roman Catholic but you don't have to be

Presbyterian, United Church, to me being a Protestant would be sufficient. But people get really upset over all of this...and my religion is better than yours.

HR: There's always competition with that, seeing who is superior...yeah, definitely. So what do you actually think religion is to you, what does religion mean to you? Not your religion, but just religion in general...

DC: I think at times it's for the better, because some people who are quite religious are pretty good people. So it has a positive influence but do you have to have religion to be good? I don't think so...

HR: Do you think it was maybe something that was created a long time ago to keep people more civilized?

DC: I would say to control, some people like to control other people. And I've encountered ministers and priests that want to control other people and they do it by religion. Because if you don't do it this way, you're going to hell and people say "I don't want to go there..."

HR: There's a lot of fear...

DC: I think so...yeah. At times I've seen people experience terrible pain and many different things but they believed in God and in religion and they came through, it helped them to survive. Yeah, in that respect, if it does that for them, hey, that's fine, it's not wrong.

HR: So, is there anything you would like share about, what you would like people to know about you? Or if there's a message that you can leave to people and let them know about.

DC: Well, be as good as you can and be honest and truthful and accept people for what they are and don't look at their skin because it has no bearing...we all cut ourselves and we all bleed red. There's too much of this and I just don't agree with it...Because, I've got friends that are Indian, I've got friends that are Black and they're all fine people. And I think there's still too much of this today, where they see somebody and the colour comes in and immediately they back off. It's like, I guess to a certain extent, the Muslim religion is such that you hear somebody being Muslim and they think about the Taliban and all this sort of thing and they sort of back off.

HR: Right, so there's a lot of the stereotyping right?

DC: Yeah, sure, it's automatic I think at times. And, I think you have to work to get around it. And, think I have, I hope because of my relationship with many other people that are different. And my mother is what you call a "Maudit Anglais" which means roughly a "Bloody Englishmen" because if you were not white she didn't want any part of you, if you were Roman Catholic she wasn't impressed, you had to be Anglican. And, on one, a couple of occasions, my mother was going on and I said "what would happen if I brought home a Japanese girl?" she said "you needn't bother coming home." So she was against all of this, but then that was her and my father wasn't like that, he never said very much...and there are people who are like that, I've encountered them.

HR: So did you end up bringing...the woman you brought home which is your wife now, so was she the same religion as you were before?

DC: Yes, Scottish.

HR: So your mother was impressed about that?

DC: No, she didn't want me to get married because I was there to look after them and she didn't want me to get married and she kept interfering. And at one point, I did not speak to her for six to nine months.

HR: Wow that long?

DC: Yep, because of this carry on but then that was her.

HR: That was just the way she was right?

DC: Yeah, yeah and I suppose she could have perverted my mind but I just didn't agree with her.

HR: What would you say, when your mother was interfering and you didn't speak with her for those six to nine months, what made you talk with her again?

DC: My wife, she said "you should talk to your mother because she is your mother." And she said "don't like that influence you" and it does in a way because it nags at you. She had to shut up or leave...

HR: So was your wife most of your mental support?

DC: Yeah, and we've been married 53 years.

HR: Wow that's a long time...

DC: Sure is..

HR: So is there anything that you'd like to add on to the interview? Is there anything you'd like to say or share?

DC: I think the one thing that I feel strong about is tolerance...and we should tolerate each other. Don't be intolerant because you're not perfect nor is anybody else. But in certain areas, I have noticed intolerance, quite a bit...

HR: Right, yeah, I think that's something people don't have now because we're all rushing to do things and we're all rushing to do what we want to do...and the tolerance of other people [...]

DC: Well, all you have to do is drive along the road and look at the signs of road rage and people blowing their horns and shaking their fists and all that sort of thing...And, be tolerant, I still think that's one of the important things...

HR: Tolerance, yes definitely...

[...]