

Simone Weinstein: So, my name is Simone Weinstein, I'm 15 years old, the date is August 10, 2009 – I am interviewing Mr. Hirsch and we are at Mr. Hirsch's house.

Lydia (Lidia?) Hirsch: 1985...

Richard Hirsch: 1985...

LH: July 1st....24 years...

SW: Since 1985...wow, and why did you choose to live in Vaughan?

RH: Well at the beginning because we sold our house in the country, Brampton area and we had to move somewhere. The same broker, he says, "I have a house on sale in Woodbridge," so he said "would you like to come and see it?" and I said "in ten minutes" and then we came over and made an offer to buy that house.

SW: Okay so before you lived in Vaughan you lived in Brampton?

RH: In Brampton area, more or less...

SW: For how long did you live in Brampton?

RH: Ten years...

SW: And before that?

RH: Before that we lived in the City of Etobicoke...

SW: And before that?

LH: Mostly Etobicoke...

RH: Mostly in Etobicoke.

SW: Where were you from originally?

RH: Originally we are from Lithuania...

SW: Okay, and what was it like growing up there? How long did you live there?

RH: You know Lithuania is more or less farming community except for a couple of big cities and there are a lot of industry, like Lydia's father had flower mills, my father had a big farm. So, naturally, if you wanted to go to high school you had to go 8-10km away from where we lived. So, they used to, we used to live in a student's boarding house.

LH: We lived together, its a boarding house...

RH: She was nasty (laughter).

LH: He called me "brat."

SW: So, how old were you when you moved to Canada?

LH: 1949, you came first in April...March...

RH: '49 I was 29 years old...

SW: And why did you move to Canada?

RH: Well, one reason is that my sister was already living here and she said there are good possibilities in Canada. Well, at that time, post-war time in Germany was kind of shaky at the beginning so we moved out. There was naturally registration in Germany and they came and asked you questions and this and that. "Why do you want to go there?"

SW: And how would you describe Canada when you first came?

RH: Well, in the beginning I was not extremely happy...

SW: Oh really, why not?

RH: Well, I was starting to study pharmacy and I was doing my practical work before going to college. And when I came in here, naturally, we didn't speak that much English and so what I did, I couldn't get jobs, I got finally a job through a person that we knew to do painting, house painting and I still remember when I was doing paint for twenty five cents an hour at that time. Then I said to that man, he was of polish origin, I said "Mr. [...] now I work for you more than 3 months, I would like to have five cents raise you know..." He says "well, you don't speak perfect English" and all this and that, then one day we had a party at our lawyer's [...] basement recreation room, suddenly there was an old man sitting there. I walked over to my lawyer and I said "Mike, is that gentleman that is sitting there is Mr. [...]" and he says "Yes." And then we talked for awhile and he said that my English not very good then I said "that son of a gun he told me that my English is not very good and he lives here for forty-five years and still can't speak English." So that's the way I started...

SW: Oh Okay, and so..

RH: Because I was in Europe trying to become (a) pharmacist. I had two semesters in Pharmacy and war broke out and they closed the college and that was finished.

SW: And so you started working in the pharmacy a year later after you came to Canada?

RH: No here I didn't work.

SW: So you were in the...so you came and went to school here and then what happened after you left?

RH: Well I was working most of the time later on in the construction field because I started immediately three years after I came here. Already built one little house and that was in North York, Bathurst Street. And then we were going to move to that area but my wife Lydia said "I don't like that area too much," you know it was small street and the house was on 25 foot lot and so I said "we can always sell it." So a man came by and he said "are you selling the house?" And I said "not at the present time," and he said "are you not going to sell at any time?" and I said "depending on the price on the price anybody can have it." So he said "I'll put an offer," and he put an offer of more than I expected so that was very expensive house, \$16000 dollars [...] was classified as a good good area there you know and anyway he says "that's a deal" and he worked for, he was a cutter for men's clothing for some firm downtown. So, we had no choice, we departed it and sold that house and I made on that house, three and a half thousand dollars

and he house was built, I didn't have a car, I used to carry in a streetcar my shovels and everything and when it was finished it was a nice little bungalow on Glen Park.

LH: I like West End Etobicoke...

RH: So that house when I sold it I could buy myself a Pontiac and that naturally, I started to do a little bit more in construction, we built another house and another house.

SW: Okay, what did you think you were going to be when you grew up? When you were first in school?

RH: Public school? Well at that time I was not even sure. I know only that was four grade of school, the first one that I attended and I immediately picked up arithmetic and all that. It was four year and when the teacher was asking questions in arithmetic, mathematics or so, whatever, fourth graders, nobody had an answer to that I used to lift up my hand and have an answer in a second. And then...

LH: But Richard when to University...

RH: After I finished high school which was public school, high school was twelve years at that time, then I was accepted at the University and I wanted to become a pharmacist but the war came and that was finished.

LH: Then you went here to university...

RH: Well here but not pharmacy, in the evening class..

LH: But finished...

RH: I finished a university extension here...

SW: And how long were you involved in construction?

RH: From there on almost until 55 years old...

LH: [...] had no money, he retired. Then he worked for Etobicoke.

RH: I walked on the street and the chief inspector from Etobicoke, building inspector, he said "and what the hell are you doing Richard here?" and I said "I'm not doing nothing but I plan to come work for you?" And he said "you mean it? We are looking for work." So I said, "provide the town with what you pay and all that..." So he said come and see me about the commission and there and then he asked some questions and all this and that and then he says "we would hire you but you will have to start at the beginner's wage" and I said "I am not going to start at the beginners wage, I probably have more experience in building and construction than anyone that you have here." And so he said then, "how about one grade up?" and I said "no I want the one that would be rated as the one that worked for you for ten years or so." So then finally we agreed then I was working there for ten years.

SW: So did your work life teach you any lessons for life? Any lessons that you took from that?

RH: Not really...

SW: So when you, like when you first moved to Canada, what, was Vaughan a big town?

RH: Woodbridge, well I don't know even if it existed but...We used to come to the Humber River to go on picnics and the population was about two and a half thousand.

SW: Wow tiny...

RH: Because at that time, Woodbridge was mainly Anglo Saxon and they said "we want to the little town to keep the way it is." Old fashioned and all of that...but naturally it didn't work that way.

LH: Italians started to build...

SW: So how was it watching the growth from then until now?

RH: I would say Vaughan and Woodbridge at one time not long ago, about five years ago, was the fastest growing city in Canada. But I would say it was fastest growing city, this area, because of Italians. They came in here and they built it and they are good builders naturally.

LH: Hard working people...

SW: And do you think that Woodbridge is better off now with the higher population?

RH: Well it has to go higher like Richmond Hill and Thornhill and all those...Thornhill at one time was two streets.

SW: Right, okay, so what is your background? Ethnic Background

RH: Lithuania...

SW: Oh Lithuania right, do you remember any stories that your relatives would tell you about Lithuania or...

RH: What's the question?

SW: Were there any stories that you remember from your relatives that they used to tell you? Going back to school did you enjoy school?

RH: Oh yeah I enjoyed, I was working all of the time I was attending even University of Toronto here in the evening classes. And in construction you worked from 8-6 everyday. When we had the exams I would, I took a few hours off and drove over to the University of Toronto and wrote the exams. I will tell you one experience, I came home undressed myself put new clothes on and I got in the car and I was going through High Park to go to Lakeshore to go to the University. And suddenly, the police stopped me and he says "What the hell? How fast are you going here? You know you can't go at that speed in High Park." Well I know but I didn't realize that I did go at that speed, so he says "where is your mind?" "I am going to write a test at the University of Toronto and I only have about 25 minutes to get there. And I guess was speeding a little bit I guess and could you give me a ticket and I'll move on?" And he says "in that case, I won't give you a ticket, nothing, just keep on going." He even said "make sure that you pass." Well I said "I was not quite sure now because you disturbed me a little bit." So he said, "oh that won't hurt you if you didn't know anymore than that you don't deserve to pass it." And then I went through Lakeshore down to Spadina to the university grounds.

SW: So how was U of T then? How big was it?

RH: U of T was quite big, but you know, I was doing evening classes so we had to get to the credits to get the bachelor fast we had to go quite a few years in the evening classes. One year I went full and the evening classes and so on...

SW: And, what did you major in?

RH: I just was going to major in Languages and I said I will, at that time they were teaching German in high school, in some high schools not all. So I said hat time German was
not taught anywhere.

SW: So...

RH: But Lithuanian and German are two different languages. Like day and night...

SW: So was it harder for you, because you spoke Lithuanian, to major in German than...I spoke a little bit Russian but not sufficient.

LH: Not to become teacher...

SW: And what made you choose to major in Russian? Or in German sorry...

RH: Because I thought it was the only other language that I could speak except Lithuanian and Lithuanian has no validity here...

SW: So okay, are you still friends with people that you met in school?

RH: With some...

SW: From U of T? or from Lithuania?

RH: Well some of them are from Lithuania, right now I even lost the friends that were from some other countries like I think they came from Hungary. You know Tom Friedlich...(LH: Yeah) He was a friend at the university, he was the one that laughed when you put the jellied sandwich...I put it on the radiator and Tom Friedlich said to me "you have a wonderful life, she puts soup for you to come to class." (laughter)

LH: You eat what you get...

RH: I used to buy lumber from this father, he had a lumber company. Friedlich's...he was from Hungary originally and he was [...] in Hungary. And then he had to escape because of the persecutions, Germans occupied Hungary and all that...

SW: Were there any teachers who had a strong influence on you?

RH: Well I don't know...the strongest influence was the one that I took English classes and he said "you could improve on your English." (laughter) And I never took English in high school or anything...

SW: That must have been hard to come over here...

RH: In high school I took, in Lithuania we had to take two languages, naturally Lithuanian plus two other ones. The second was German plus the third, no fourth, French or Russian and I took Russian.

LH: Russian is very good language huh? You can talk with Putin (laughter)

SW: Did you have any best memories from high school or even university?

RH: From high school yes...

SW: Do you remember some of your favourites?

LH: I'm going to show that picture from high school...

RH: Where we went to school the principal was very strict and...I considered myself, it was a good high school..and that looks like I am going to become a priest...

SW: High collar...

LH: We had uniforms...

RH: That was the uniform that we had to wear and a cap too...if the teacher found you on the street with no cap or different clothing...This one is in 1938, that's the year I graduated...That was 1938...

LH: So you were 19 no?

SW: You were a very good looking guy...

RH: In our high school, if you had longer hair hanging on your ears they would tell you, mostly the director, he used to say "if you don't have the hair cut by tomorrow morning when you come to school, I will have a barber here." See the uniform, it almost looks like I am about to become a Roman Catholic priest.

SW: It does...

RH: We had to wear dark clothes...

SW: You had to...

RH: Because it was more or less controlled by Roman Catholic priests. It was not Roman Catholic school, it was normal school, but still most of the teachers were. We're only twenty in there...about 20 that were not Roman Catholic and about twenty more that were of Jewish origin.

LH: The same building, one side was Jewish school and the other side was public German school. We used to play together, we never had problems. Never...

RH: Well in high school, us we used to play hockey and soccer, you name it...

LH: I thought the world would get better but now look it's worse. Wars all over, we left the country because of the war. Communists moved in took everything over...even I have picture, you don't remember your commissar from the bill. I still keep it...they took everything...

RH: You were not to possess any property...

SW: After the war, in Canada, were people still affected by the war, emotionally, did it show really in Canada?

RH: I don't think so...

LH: I felt very good in Canada, felt free...

SW: That's good. I can understand that...

LH: In Vaughan township it's very nice to live. We have beautiful stores, nice people...

RH: But at the beginning, Woodbridge was a small village and still if you go down to the Woodbridge area it still looks like a small village except for quite a few new apartments that's all. They wanted to keep that naturally progress, nobody can stop that easy. And once the Italian community moved in here, all of...they were in the construction field so they build Woodbridge.

LH: Woodbridge, Vaughan township is really big. My god, you drive to Markham all over no? How far goes really?

RH: Well, Markham is separate...

LH: Stouffville is close...Another 20 years, we won't be here, there will be somebody else building homes...

SW: Is there anything else you would like to add? I am just trying to think what else...um....to add.

RH: Well, we are glad that we are here in Canada. That's for sure...

SW: Thank you for your time, that was a great interview, thank you so much...

RH: You're welcome, it's not much of an interview...

SW: No, it was...