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| **Project: ‘Glasgow’s High streets: An oral history…’**Respondent: Margaret CollettaYear of Birth: 1958Age: Connection to project: Local knowledgeDate of Interview: 21/09/2023Interviewer: Dr Sue MorrisonRecording Agreement: Yes/ NoInformation & Consent: Yes/ NoPhotographic Images: Yes/ No (Number of: )Length of Interview:Location of Interview: The Circle, Blair TumnockRecording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | **Glasgow Story Collective** |
| Time(from: mins/secs) | Description | Transcribed Extract(from- to:mins/secs) |
|  | *Where were you born?* |  |
|  | Easterhouse. |  |
|  | *What are your first memories of Glasgow’s high streets?* |  |
|  | My first memories of Glasgow High streets was when I started working there. I was working in Sarti’s in Bath Street and where I worked before it used to be the Rotunda. I was a Chef and still am a Chef. Where I started off was in Lewis’s in the Italian Restaurant on the fifth floor. |  |
|  | *Can you tell me about Lewis’s?* |  |
|  | When I left school I had a couple of jobs, they didn’t work out, both of them went into liquidation and I got redundant from them, so I wasn’t taking a chance on getting redundant for a third time. So I went into Lewis and started in the Italian Restaurant and that started off my career as a chef.It was a very busy store and they had a cafeteria downstairs and a French Restaurant upstairs and the Italian Restaurant. There were queues right outside the door and it was non stop from start to finish. It was a great store to work for. The Italian Restaurant was open six days a week, Monday to Saturday. I think the store was closed on a Sunday and then a few years later it started to open, so it was open for the seven days, but then you worked six over seven, you got a day off during the week. |  |
|  | *Can you describe your first jobs in Lewis’s?* |  |
|  | Starting off I was mostly preparing the food, like washing the lettuce, cutting veg and filling up the ain Marie with onions, tomatoes, cucumber, that would be for the salad for on the plates and then I would help out with the hot food and then we would put them in the ain Marie, and then the waiting staff came in to ask whatever food we had on, they would tell the customers, come back in with the orders and we would serve the food. Mostly it was preparing the food before we opened and once we opened, we were all ready for service.  |  |
|  | *How did you train to become a Chef?* |  |
|  | You start off with being a Commis Chef so the other Chefs that were there, you would work with them. So when I started I was like a Commis Chef learning when we got bits of meat in, learning how to carve them, then we would do all the preparation first and then when it was time to open you were all set for service. You had to be all set ready for opening. If you were falling behind, you were told, right get a move on, in not so many polite words, but yeh, you had to work on a time-scale.  |  |
|  | *What time did you arrive for work?* |  |
|  | We arrived at 8 o’clock and the store would open I think it would be about 10 o’clock so we had to work and be organised. Some of your preparation you could do the day before and when you started the next morning, all you had to do was put it on. The biggest part is your preparation and if you’ve got that down to a ‘t’ then your day’s easy. You make it as easy as you want or as hard as you want. |  |
|  | *What time did your day finish?* |  |
|  | Our day finished at 6 o’clock, the store in those days closed at 6. The only time it was opened late was a Thursday night and that was until 8 or 9 o’clock. |  |
|  | *What kind of food did you cook?* |  |
|  | We did your mince and potatoes and all that, we did lasagne, all your puddings like sponge cake and custard, steak pie that was the favourite, and casseroles. So it was different things each day. It would be a set menu for a couple of weeks and specials and that would change, so customers wouldn’t get fed up with the same thing all the time, so you would change the specials from time to time. |  |
|  | *What were your busiest periods during the day?* |  |
|  | I think from 11 o’clock onwards. You would get ones coming in in cribs and brads from when we opened but from 11 o’clock until maybe 4 or 5 o’clock it was non stop and queued right round the corridor. It was a busy busy place. |  |
|  | *Do you remember what you were paid?* |  |
|  | It was under £100, it wasn’t very much. Even now in catering, it’s the hardest work and less pay. Even then at that age, you thought that was a lot of money. |  |
|  | *What age were you when you started?* |  |
|  | I was maybe seventeen and a half. That was about 1975. |  |
|  | *Do you remember going into the store the very first day?* |  |
|  | I thought the store was so big. Your eyes were like saucers because it was so big and all these different departments. On the 6th floor was the toy department, that was just heaven especially at Christmas when all the decorations and all that got done. Even outside the building they would put up Christmas lights and they would do Santa’s Grotto and up the building they would put up a ladder for Santa to climb up. All the store windows looking out into the street, they were all done up as well. It was ‘The Building’, that was the main part of the city centre, Lewis’s store. |  |
|  | *How many floors were there in Lewis’s?* |  |
|  | I think the 7th floor was storage. You had the basement and six floors. You had a make-up department, amens and omens clothes, children’s clothes, the basement was all kitchen facilities like your pots and pans and things like that. When anybody asked, your friends and that, where are you working, you’d say I’m working n Lewis’s. Oh you’re working in Lewis’s.I was there for 9 years until it was taken over by Debenhams and then you had to re-apply for your job. I took my redundancy and you had like a cost of living so you got so much money when you were on the boo for so many weeks, so when it was running out I started looking for a job and I think my next job was in The Rotunda at the Exhibition Centre. |  |
|  | *Can you tell me about the Rotunda?* |  |
|  | They had like a cafeteria on the ground floor. Then it was the Italian Restaurant on the first floor then on the next floor it was the French Restaurant. It was the Italian Restaurant I worked in and the Head Chef then was Claudio, obviously Italian and the owners, they were Italian as well. It was Mario Romano and Pallodini and I think they were brothers. I was in there for 9 years and when they were speaking about selling it, Leonardo’s was buying it over and they were only going to sell it on the one condition that they kept all the staff, which they did, but Leonardo’s opened too many chains at the one time and it went into liquidation and we never got any money we were due. We were done out of wages, and holiday money and things like that. Working for Pallodini and Romano, they were good bosses, strict, but they were good.  |  |
|  | *What was the restaurant like?* |  |
|  | They were busy, especially if there was events on at the Exhibition Centre. We worked split shifts, so we would start at 9 in the morning and open at 11. If we had any events on you sort of had to work through your split shift to make sure you were organised because we could do 200 to 300 covers. I was on the pizza section and it was all home-made bread, so I made the bread also. So for to do that amount of pizzas, you had to work through your split shifts. You maybe took about 20 minutes for something to eat but you had to make sure you were all prepped for the doors opening at 5 o’clock, and then we had a pre-theatre menu on and you could get a combination on like a pizza pasta but yeh, it was chock-a-block. We even had ones coming in after the concert so maybe sometimes you didn’t finish till 12 or 1 o’clock in the morning by the time you cleared up and prepped up and all that. By the time you got home you couldn’t switch off, you had to wind down and then you were back up at 7 in the morning to go back in at 9. That was a lot doing that, I couldn’t do that now. Thank goodness I’m not going to be working any more split shifts. |  |
|  | *Do you remember which events attracted more customers?* |  |
|  | I think it was more the concerts that was on at the Exhibition Centre. Any concerts that were on sometimes they would hand in free tickets. I can remember this one time Annie Lennox was playing and there was this table that we had in of ten and two of them never turned up, so they had two spare tickets and they handed them in for the Chefs to see if any of them wanted to go. I remember thinking I want to go, and me and one of the other girls Jeanette that worked in the cafeteria she phoned up and spoke to the Head Chef to ask if I could go to the concert with her. He agreed as long as I came back over after it. So we went to the concert, yes it was standing room, but what a concert. It was so so busy. I didn’t care that it was standing room, we still had a good view. So concerts were held there in the Exhibition Centre or the Armadillo, the Hydro wasn’t there at that time. They were good days, hectic, but really good days. I was in the Rotunda for 9 going on 10 years.  |  |
|  | *What did you do after Leonardo’s?* |  |
|  | I was unemployed for a couple of weeks and then I started in Sarti’s in Bath Street. They had the Bath Street one but they also had the main one looking on to Renfield Street. So if you worked in the main restaurant and upstairs was short staffed then there was a back stair for the staff to go up and work in the one in Bath Street which I helped out in quite a lot at lunchtimes and at night. That was a good restaurant to work for as well.I left there, I got poached actually to work in Piaffe's in Shawlands. It was one of the Chef’s that I worked with, he opened up Piaffe's and he poached me and that’s when I started to look for a flat near where I worked in Shawlands. Then I got poached again to manage Café Roberta. So I didn’t really leave anywhere, I got poached. Not being big headed but they knew I was a good worker and reliable and it’s all been Italian based. |  |
|  | *What are your favourite recipes?* |  |
|  | Obviously you’ve got your pizza and pasta, but my speciality is lasagne and we made Tiramisu and I’ve always remembered the recipe for this and how to do it, so hopefully I’ll be bringing that to the community Café when I start there in the Pantry.  |  |
|  | *What is The Pantry?* |  |
|  | The Pantry is in Ruchazie, it’s like a food bank and it’s all to do with helping the community. You’ve got to be a Member. They have like two prices of shopping, one is £3 and one is £6 and the amount that you get is phenomenal. They do get a lot of donations, even for clothes for kids and toys for kids that’s not got a lot, especially for Christmas we get a lot of donations to make Christmas as special as we can for the kids. Tina who runs The Pantry put in for the two shops that are beside The Pantry that’s been closed for years and she wants to open them up as a Community Café. So she got the go ahead early this year, I think it was round about February or March, so Glasgow City Building, they’ve been in it ever since because by the time they cleared everything out, I think they used to be a Takeaway and a Hairdresser, so by the time they did all that they are working ten weeks behind now. So it’s sort of at a stand still because with it going to be open as a Café there’s different phases of electricity, so the Café has got to be a phase 3 obviously because there will be cookers and heavy equipment so they have to get a more powerful electricity supply in it. So that’s where we’re at just now. Hopefully it will be this side of the year when they eventually give Tina the keys and we can get in, get the plans laid out for the kitchen, get the flooring done, tables and all that which we’re still pushing for funding or donations which are very helpful and grateful for, so hopefully it will be this side of the year.I’ll be working in there two and a half days a week and that will be a whole different mindset from doing cheffing. It won’t be so stressful or hectic but we plan to meet the community’s needs and what we can do for them. I am so excited, I just can’t wait. I’m working on menu prices and what can we do to fit that, and do maybe a kids breakfast so they’ve got something to eat before going to school and there will be a lunch menu as well. We’re also planning a ladies bingo night. It will be all for the community and getting the community together. I think it will be a great meeting place as well.  |  |
|  | *Did you go to the highstreets as a teenager?* |  |
|  | Yes I did. I met up with friends and we used to go to Yates’s when we had a night out. We used to meet up in there for a few drinks and then we’d actually go to Shawlands for the dancing. It was J.J. Booths. So that was the entertainment that we had. Because there wasn’t much in the scheme you had to go into the city centre for the pictures or go for a meal and then we would go on to J.J. Booths in Shawlands.The city centre was ‘The Place’ with all the different shops and all the different bars and cocktail bars and all the different restaurants. Now we’ve got the Fort not far from Easterhouse and again that’s on your doorstep. That is a fantastic shopping area so it is, so I very seldom go into the town now. If I want to go anywhere I’ll go to the Fort because they’ve got loads of restaurants, eating places, basically they’ve got everything there.so I very seldom go into town.  |  |
|  | *When you did go into town what were your favourite shops?* |  |
|  | I liked going into Primark, I still like shopping in Primark. I liked going into Debenhams which took over Lewis’s. Dorothy Perkins, I liked that shop and Wallace that used to be a clothes shop as well. They were good, they were my best shops to shop in. You could pick up a wee bargain now and again. |  |
|  | *When you were a young lady, and working in restaurants, did you eat out in other restaurants?* |  |
|  | Chinese. Because if I went to an Italian restaurant, I would be seeing how it’s done. I would never eat pasta or lasagne in an Italian restaurant because I can do it better myself or the tiramisu. I took that once when I was out with my nephew and we went to Toni Macaroni and my nephew said Auntie Mags will we try the tiramisu? I said, yes but it’ll not be as good as mine. So we tried it, it comes in a coffee cup and the two of us looked at each other and said what is that? It was awful, it was dry as anything so it was. He went Oh Auntie Mags that’s not a patch on yours I’ll not be eating that anywhere else. If I meet a couple of my friends or my nephew, there is an Italian restaurant that we like going to Alfredo’s I think its called, that’s a beautiful restaurant, not that we take the tiramisu in it and the pasta there gets the thumbs up.  |  |
|  | *When you were a wee girl were you ever taken into Glasgow to see Santa?* |  |
|  | Yes, in Lewis’s. It was my Mum or one of my older sisters would take us in and we would wait in the queue of course, actually I think I was scared of Santa. I think I can remember crying because of the big beard. He just spoke to you and sat you on his knee and asking you what you wanted for Christmas. I didn’t play with dolls I played football, so I asked for a football. When you were finished speaking to Santa you got your picture taken and you got a wee selection box or something. You had to wait ages in the queue. It looked like miles at that age. So I think the first time I saw Santa I was scared. The wait was worth it in the end because I got a selection box in the end. |  |
|  | *When you were growing up is there any memories you can recall about the Highstreets?* |  |
|  | Yes, it was a very very busy place and any time we would meet up to go out it was always Yates’s and they had a D.J. on as well and some of the pubs had a karaoke night I think one of the pubs was The Virginian. They were good. Years ago the city centre was The Place to go but with the Fort having everything there, I very seldom go into the town. The only time I go into the town is if I’m visiting my Aunt who stays in Rutherglen. I need to go into the town to get another bus and then sometimes I like a KFC and sometimes I would go in a wee bit early, go for a KFC and then get the bus to go to my Aunt’s. |  |
|  | *What could the city centre retailers and business owners do to entice you back into the highstreets again?* |  |
|  | I think it would need to be a very good restaurant to entice me back. A very good restaurant, yes. |  |
|  | *Thank you very much Margaret* |  |
|  | Thank you for all your time and support. |  |
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