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| **Project: ‘Glasgow’s Highstreets: An oral history…’**  Respondent: Jan Robertson  Year of Birth: 1952  Age:  Connection to project: Local knowledge  Date of Interview: 22/09/2023 Interviewer: Rachel Kelly  Recording Agreement: Yes/ No  Information & Consent: Yes/ No  Photographic Images: Yes/ No (Number of: )  Length of Interview:  Location of Interview: The Marie Trust, Glasgow  Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | | **Glasgow Story Collective** | |
| Time  (from: mins/secs) | Description | | Transcribed Extract  (from- to:  mins/secs) |
|  | *Where were you born?* | |  |
|  | Craigmillar Road in Battlefield in the Southside. I live in East Kilbride now. | |  |
|  | *Can you tell me from which era you remember Glasgow’s highstreets?* | |  |
|  | Probably in the ‘60s because I was born in 1952 and we didn’t really go into town and if we did, it was a big event, not like today where you’re in and out every day so it would be for a special thing or if you were going in for Christmas to what was then Lewis’s in Argyle Street, or maybe going in for clothes for summer for going to Millport but not on a weekly or daily sense. | |  |
|  | *Can you describe the highstreets at Christmas?* | |  |
|  | Lively, busy, busy, busy, it was just an atmosphere with smog, soot and rain and snow, it was just a bustle, people everywhere and excitement and we’d go into Lewis’s and it was a back stair you’d go up and we’d wait in this queue and see Santa at the top. Funnily enough I was left in what was left of Lewis’s at the time before it was closed, and the staircase was there, it just came back. It was kind of a corridor and in the top floor to lure the children, because people didn’t have a lot of money then, I always remember the dolls on the top row, the walkie talkie dolls, because my Brother bought one for me. I was the youngest of eight so money was quite tight. So my Brother got this for me from his wages, he saved up and got me this doll which I still have. | |  |
|  | *Do you remember seeing Santa there?* | |  |
|  | I do, with the beard and the white and the red cloak, yeh. I do remember when you finally got up there it was the big moment to tell him what you wanted and you’d clam up because you were shy. | |  |
|  | *Can you tell me any memories of the shops around where you lived?* | |  |
|  | We moved from Craigmillar Road when I was two and we moved over to Cathcart. It was Corporation houses we were in, so there was the ground, one up and one again and we had the attic, so it was four bedrooms because we were a big family.  The shops I remember, there were two dairies where I later did a milk round for with a crate for £1 week, it was big money. So there were two dairies, Mortons and a butcher shop, a Co-op on the corner, and my brothers and sisters could give the Co-op number. There was a cobblers, my daughters laugh when I say that now, a shoe repair shop, a fruit shop and there was a wee cafe, a fishmongers, a hairdresser’s called Savari’s and at the top end of Holmlea Road there was a tobacconist. On the corner of Brisbane Street and Holmlea Road there was a funeral undertakers but there was a bevel to the window on the door, so it was probably in the ‘60s but all the children knew and if you’d go past and there was a funeral on and there was a guy on the black and white T.V. at the time called Harry Worth and Harry Worth started it and he used to stand outside a similar type of shop and lift one arm and one leg so it looked as if your two arms and legs were going up, like the wee puppets you would pull and their arms and legs would go up, so it looked like that, so we’d do that but always check to make sure there wasn’t a funeral on first, before going on to school. So lots of shops.  So while my Dad was at sea, my Mum helped out in the fruit shop. I always remember about age 3 I was fascinated by the potato scuttle, you’d lift the hatch at the bottom and all these potatoes would run out into holdalls or string bags or paper bags, there was no fancy plastic carrier bags.  I remember that, and the fishmongers which would really distress me now I can’t even think about it now, but when I was younger they would have rabbits outside hanging up. There were two chemist shops and you put your penny or two pennies or sixpence in to get weighed, and a hardware store. I loved the hardware store I was fascinated by tools and bits and pieces. There was a wool shop and chip shop as well.  So that was really it, our world, and we would wander round to Battlefield in back lanes and down by the Mayfair Cinema, there were other wee shops there where I came to work when I was 16 or 17 in the chemist shop. | |  |
|  | *Can you tell me about working in the chemist shop?* | |  |
|  | The school moved over from Battlefield to Toryglen and I just couldn’t settle and I was doing my milk run and there was one wee lady who was completely off route down Old Castle Road, so every Wednesday morning I went down with this half pint of milk, so I’d do that and get back for the school bus that was laid on. My school was a senior secondary school, Queenspark Secondary School in Battlefield Road, it was where the Accident and Emergency bit is in the new Victoria Hospital. So the school relocated to Toryglen, Glenmore Avenue I think it was, so I would miss the bus in the morning and I just kind of went off the rails and I had been in all the top classes. So I left school and I forged a letter to the Teacher from my Dad. I wrote my daughter has chronic bronchitis and won’t be at school, I’m sorry she’s been absent and it didn’t take much for the Head Teacher to know my Dad was at sea, deep sea. So from then on I went into the Chemist in Sinclair Drive. I think I’ve had about 52 jobs, jumped here there and everywhere but long term in other things.  So I started as a Trainee Assistant in the back to make up the prescriptions because I had my O levels then, so I was really nervous. As I mentioned before, there was a giant tin of Babies National Dried Milk, Ostermilk type tin, and it contained 1,000 tiny wee purple somnil sleeping tablets, I always remember the name and when I opened this tin to count them out, there was a wee silver triangle tray that you counted the tablets into, so I lifted it and the entire tin went over the floor. I just stood I didn’t know what to do and you have to remember it was an old old shop with the wooden floors and a sink at the back, underneath they also had the register for poisons from way way back and the wee hatch to serve and Dickensian columns at the front of the store. So anyway I dropped this tin and the Chemist, Mr Florence who came from up the North east, he looked at me from over his glasses and said, well Janice I suppose the mice will be sleeping well tonight, just pick them and I’m going 126, 127…. and then double checked them on the wee triangular tray. They had the Drug Squad as they would call it, come in and because you’re the junior you’re not supposed to know too much, they would have you take the poisons, medicines, drugs and have you count them, take them out the bottle, count them and stand over the old sink where the officers would stand and watch you put them down the sink and have the water running to drain them away and I always remember because I’m quite fastidious I like things neat and tidy so all the boxes they would all have their labels on them, I’d sort them all out. Over at the back sink, people won’t actually remember when they talk about pills, there were wee round roughly coated little liver pills so they had to get flushed out for how many years they’d been there. In the basement they would have the old medicine bottles, the brown bottles, the green bottles, so they had them in stock. So the stock would be downstairs and you would serve at the serving hatch. The Chemist would just check what you’d done to make sure everything was alright. At the back of the shop there were five wooden steps up to a tiny wee space with a table and we would go up there and have our tea and at the time people would smoke, so they would smoke in the place in the back shop. I remember always having this blue felt tipped marker and it was dark, the window had been boxed off for security.  Fifty years later I took a walk back and the guy let me in. It’s now a studio for photographers and all the counters are all stripped back, so he took me in to see the back shop, and you start to re-live all those years ago when I worked there and when I walked up to the wee back area where we used to sit, the sign was still there on a piece of paper Please tidy up after you’ve had something to eat e.g. for example, crumbs. So it was still there, the blue ink, it was still there because there’s no light in there. Someone at some time had painted it grey and they painted round the sign. I was absolutely gob-smacked because that very morning I’d posted off some calendars in the same blue square tipped felt marker. How spooky was that? The guy wouldn’t let me down in the basement, where the bottles had been and the registers are down there | |  |
|  | *Can you tell me about any of the places where you worked in the city centre?* | |  |
|  | I was in The Pavillion, I was in the record shops, I worked in The Royal Stuart Hotel two nights a week. I’ve worked everywhere.  The Pavillion was a great place. I’d worked there later on, much later on. I’d studied illustrations. I think the Pavillion had about 1200 maybe 1500 people and you’re more in contact with the stage in the Pavillion. It was built around 1910. You’d see rising stars and also see people from the ‘50s ‘60s ‘70s ‘80s so they’d had risen up and come back down. There was one man, he revived the Pavillion, so hats off to him, but he was quite tough. He didn’t like Actors or Actresses on the stage getting too big for their boots. I do remember there was an old radiator and it was leaking so it had to be repaired and they found and old programme from the early 1900s, so that was fantastic, but the minute they touched it, it just crumbled.  The Pavillion was fantastic, the atmosphere. You’d maybe have on a Saturday the Matinee and then at night, it was just so uplifting for people and families and all the lights, the merriment, the dancers and singers, you can’t help but just get involved, you’re in another world.  There was a guy I can’t remember his name he ran away with the circus and carnival, but he would do the art work in the Pavillion, especially at the main reception area. A really really talented guy.  The Brendan O’Carroll troupe and Mrs Brown started there in the early 2000s, apparently it didn’t go down well in London. They didn’t take to them. So they came to Glasgow because of the Glasgow humour. They were booked for three weeks. The first week it was two for one to try and get people in the door but by the end of the three weeks, tickets were flying out the door. It had a fantastic impact so that really gave the Pavillion a boost. So they needed the Pavillion and the Pavillion needed Brendan O’Carroll. He did have a run in with Mr Gordon the Manager, and Brendan O’Carroll he just says what he thinks, he doesn’t really care but they had a bit of a tiff on some things. So Brendan O’Carroll took over the sound box so when you’re invited to go back to your seats, you know, three minute call, two minute call, one minute call no-one went back to their seats, so he got into the box and he locked the door and used some choice language like he does on the stage, that was the three minute call, then the second and it just escalated. Meanwhile the Manager’s banging the door until it eventually got to the one minute call, get back to your…… seats, but the show has to go on and they eventually patched things up but it was so funny.  There was the Krankies, it’s well staged and at Christmas they would take all the staff out to ten pin bowling. She’s a great bowler. It was fun.  There was a psychic, so this guy came on so people were desperate to speak to their loved ones who’d passed away, so the usual, is there any McDonalds, or is there any McLarens, so the hands would shoot up and he whittled it down and he’s really got the audience in the palm of his hands but just at the start at the box door facing the stage, the box door flung open, we knew but the audience didn’t, when you went into the box you were supposed to lock the door because it was a faulty door.  There were other stars, too many to mention. | |  |
|  | *Do you remember any processions or carnivals?* | |  |
|  | The only one I can remember was in Cathcart. It was when King Olaf of Norway passed along over the bridge over the River Cart and they were all out with their Norwegian flags, that would’ve been the early ‘60s. | |  |
|  | *As an adult did you go to the shops in town?* | |  |
|  | I would go to Argyle Street and walk all the way up, even with my first daughter I would walk all the way up, all along Sauchiehall Street and back down and then you’d take a notion some Saturday and go along to the Barras. You’d always be nicely dressed to go into town. I do remember either a Tuesday or a Wednesday was a half day everywhere, let’s say the Farmers would have a Wednesday off and they’d go into town and people in Glasgow they’d have a Tuesday afternoon off, so they would go into town. | |  |
|  | *What were your favourite shops?* | |  |
|  | We would go into Littlewoods and C & A, and my Mum came in with me because you didn’t have the money to buy £2, £3, £4 and it was maybe a bit more. We had ‘a line’ for the warehouses, so that was basically like tick to go into Bremners, Telfords and other stores that I didn’t know but these were just off Argyle Street between Glassford Street and Argyle Street. You’d have your ‘line’, go into the store, go into the old lift with the metal grill for whatever it was shoes or clothes for your summer holidays or your winter. You’d always have your summer box or your winter box at home. I can remember a Mr Wright from Clarkston Road, he would come round every Friday or every other Friday and you’d pay, I don’t remember how much it would be. He became a kind of family friend.  So I remember these and I liked the music shops, Gollums at Trongate and my friend worked in Patersons I think it was, at the top of Buchanan Street,they sold sheet music. There were no HMV shops then later on there was J.D. Cuthbertsons on Sauchiehall Street. I worked there for a while.  There was Daileys, Trerons, and all the big stores where the old ladies would come in all nicely dressed with their wee bags, have a tea, look at sheet music. These ladies would have their lipstick on and they’d be about 85 and it would be all over their faces. There was a story I heard, C & A took over Cuthbertsons, or part of it, and apparently there was a guy who stole something and they took him up to the Manager’s room and he jumped out the window trying to escape and died. I don’t know if it’s true or not. Nowadays they just go in and nobody stops them at all.  I’d go along to the Barras sometimes and see the guys with their towels and dishes. I remember there were two girls who were backpacking round the world and they were so caught up with this guy and they bought a bale of towels and I thought what are they going to do with this stuff, they’re backpacking? So it just shows you their talent and their patter. | |  |
|  | *What’s your views of the highstreets today?* | |  |
|  | I would like to see things go back to where they were. I’m ashamed. I had family over from America and they wanted to go into Glasgow, but I was like oh I’ll take you round the sights. I’m just so ashamed, there are no special shops or special occasions that you need to go the stores any more. You can buy anything at any time online. | |  |
|  | *If you had the chance what advice would you give to Glasgow Planning and businesses?* | |  |
|  | I would recreate what was before. Yeh you can create big shopping centres like Buchanan Galleries, a massive one, but where does it stop. You can go abroad, because I travel a lot, and it’s the same. You want something unique. I know it’s all down to money but that’s what people really need and want. It’s all part of socialising. I mean there’s coffee shops, far too many. You want to be able to go and browse, look at things, meet your friends and now cars can’t go in, that’s all part of the chaos, the town was so busy. You don’t want everything crystal clear and big arcades, open, you want it open.  I don’t really go into town any more, I maybe go into Marks or Zara’s and I’ll go in on the train. Is there anything excites me to go in, no. I can’t believe all the shops I used to go around and there was something for everyone are all gone. It was always exciting to go into town but now it’s so changed, I just don’t want to go into town. You just want to go somewhere that’s different and have a bit of variety. | |  |
|  | *Thank you very much Jan* | |  |
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