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| **Project: ‘Glasgow’s Highstreets: An oral history…’**Respondent: Laurence JohnstonYear of Birth: 1961Age: Connection to project: RespondentDate of Interview: 28th of June 2023Interviewer: Rachel KellyRecording Agreement: YesInformation & Consent: YesPhotographic Images: Yes (Number of: 3) Length of Interview: 48 minutes and 1 second.Location of Interview: Lawrence’s home in Muirhead.Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | **Glasgow Story Collective** |
| Time(from: mins/secs) | Description | Transcribed Extract(from- to:mins/secs) |
| 0.55 | Talks about remembering Glasgow’s Highstreets as a wee boy of five or six going in to see the Xmas lights. |  |
|  | “Where we lived in Drumchapel it was…Quite. It was quite a rough area. And Quite…And all the neighbours used to get together and they used to run a bus into Glasgow City Centre at Christmas time. And they used to take us round all the different streets. Sauchiehall Street, Renfield Street, Argyle Street. Just to see the Christmas lights round George Square.”  | 1.18-1.50 |
| 1.51 | Interviewer asks about Xmas displays in shop windows. |  |
| 1.56 | Doesn’t remember when young. Talks about the display at Lewis’s and Frasers. Lewis’s well done. Different theme every year. There were moving displays, model railways, Santas. |  |
| 3.26 | Interviewer asks the respondent if there are any other stores or shops that he remembers from being a child. |  |
| 3.34 | Remembers getting biscuits etc from Littlewoods with his Mum. |  |
| 3.55 | Interviewer asks the respondent when it was he worked at Lewis’s department store. |  |
|  | “I worked in Lewis’s Department Store from 1980 to 1987. I worked in the food hall. I was brought in to train as a trainee carver, which, in Lewis’s Department Store... was very famous for ham on the bone. And I was brought in there to train as a carver of the cooked meats. And I was really good at it. And apart from that I worked the food counters in the food hall.”  | 4.01-4.46 |
| 4.47 | Interviewer asks how the respondent thinks that people perceived Lewis’s Department Store in Glasgow. |  |
|  | “Lewis’s store, to me, wasn’t a place of work it was like an institution. It was…It was a lot of people’s go to shop in Glasgow City Centre. It had everything in it. Everything you could ever think of Lewis’s had it. It’s just a shame that it’s not there anymore.” | 4.53-5.21 |
| 5.23 | Interviewer asks the respondent what his training at Lewis’s entailed. |  |
| 5.28 | Describes what the training entailed. Using machinery and carving knives. Worked in all food departments.  |  |
| 6.12 | Interviewer asks if there were any discounts for staffs |  |
|  | “Oh yes [laughs] that was one of the big perks in Lewis’s at that time. We used to get a book of vouchers. And you were supposed to use it for business wear. For shirt and ties. And it was a fifty percent discount on shoes, shirts and ties. Suits. Which…I never bought a suit. It was really just shirts and ties and shoes and trousers.”  | 6.15-6.54 |
| 6.55 | Interviewer asks the respondent about other aspects of the pay and conditions. |  |
|  | “The pay was awful. To be…To be blunt about it. Why..Why I was there for seven years is…I don’t know. Probably because there wasn’t a lot of jobs at that time. And I liked the people in Lewis’s and I liked the camaraderie of the people. And, it was quite a close bond you had with people that worked in the…the food hall.” | 7.05-7.43 |
| 7.44 | Interviewer asks about any particular characters that the respondent can remember from working in Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
|  | “I remember Stan the lift man. And Stan was a really nice guy. He was disabled. He was a real character in Lewis’s.” | 7.56-8.10 |
| 8.23 | Interviewer asks the respondent what his particular responsibilities as part of the team were. |  |
| 8.27 | Describes duties. Serving, cleaning. Being quick and efficient.  |  |
|  | “There was another department that I worked in. Which Wa…I don’t know if anybody remembers it. Was, the takeaway department. And I remember the prices of…they sold, like chips and fish and chips and salad rolls and things like that. And for fish and chips at that time when I worked there in early ‘80s was sixty four pence for a fish supper. And it was twenty pence for a bag of chips. And it was absolutely packed with people. There was a queue as long as an executioner’s because it was really, really good. And they decided one day that they were going to stop it. Because people were eating their fish and chips and wandering about the store. And going up to the Gents Department or the Ladies Department with their greasy chips and fish..and fish. And touching all the clothes.” | 8.50-10.12 |
| 10.50 | Interviewer asks if they had a staff canteen. |  |
|  | “Yes, we did have a staff canteen [at Lewis’s]. It was located on the sixth floor. It was…It was highly discounted. You could get a three course meal for twenty pence at that time. The food was ok. It wasn’t gourmet but it was ok. It was fine.” | 10.51-11.17 |
| 11.20 | Interviewer asks the respondent if they had a trade union when he worked at Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
| 11.25 | Describes the trade union. Union of shop distributors and allied workers. Not particularly effective. |  |
| 11.48 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he remembers any particular issues raised by the staff to the union. |  |
|  | “I remember one time (at Lewis’s) we threatened to have a strike for one day. It was over pay. And it never got any support. It was a non-starter.”  | 11.54-12.13 |
| 12.16 | Interviewer asks the respondent to walk her through an average day at work in John Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
| 12.20 | Describes an average day. In work for 08.45. His timekeeping was bad then due to youth. Set up displays and counters. Glass at front of counters cleaned every day.  |  |
| 13.14 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he could describe any of the other departments. |  |
| 13.23 | Lists other departments with a wee description. Men’s Department first floor. Good quality in there. Second floor was the Ladies Department. This was also high quality. Third floor the toy department. Fifth floor was TVs and sound equipment. Sixth floor staff canteen and Lewis’s bakery. |  |
| 14.46 | Interviewer asks the respondent why Lewis’s bakery was famous. |  |
| 14.50 | Describes some of the goods. Bread, cakes and biscuits. |  |
| 15.11 | Interviewer asks the respondent if any staff got treated differently from the others. |  |
| 15.24 | Replies no. Everyone all the same. |  |
| 15.41 | Interviewer asks the respondent if his work changed in response to seasonal promotions at all. |  |
|  | Describes some seasonal changes. Christmas. Selection boxes. Easter eggs.  |  |
| 16.20 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he has any more memories of working in the store at Christmas. |  |
|  | “Yes, there was a big, big thing about Santa…Santa Clause coming to the store. And I remember at one time they had Santa Claus…I don’t think it was the real Santa Clause. Climbing up the side of the building. And going in the third floor window. And, there was a lot of fireworks which, in my opinion, was a bad idea. Because it was like something…The fireworks were like something they had at the New Year at Edinburgh Castle. And, with Argyle Street and like Queen Street being so enclosed. There was a lot of loud bangs. And there was a lot of windows vibrating and like a lot of kids really, really scared. And from the fireworks…there was a lot of debris came off the fireworks and came down and landed on the people.” | 16.27-17.54 |
| 17.56 | Interviewer asks the respondent about the customer service in Lewis’s Department Store compared to today. |  |
| 18.04 | Describes the customer service. It was very good. Staff trained to be attentive. Different now. |  |
|  | Interviewer asks the respondent what his favourite thing about working a Lewis’s Department Store was. |  |
|  | “It certainly wasn’t the pay [Best thing about working at Lewis’s]. I think it was the camaraderie with the staff. I had a lot of close friends that I worked beside that I still have contact with. Up to this day. It was…It was really a great place to work. It was a lot of happy memories.” | 18.40-19.19 |
| 19.21 | Interviewer asks the respondent how working at John Lewis’s Department Store compared  |  |
| 19.24 | States there was less pressure than other jobs he has had. |  |
| 20.27 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he remembers any processions, parades or carnivals in Glasgow’s Highstreets growing up. |  |
| 20.44 | Respondent replies no. He remembers Christmases and the highstreets being really busy. |  |
| 21.10 | Interviewer asks the respondent for memories of any other shops in the ‘80s working in Lewis’s. |  |
| 21.26 | He remembers some girlfriends he had. Chelsea Girl. The shoe shop Ravell. Littlewoods. Woolworths. Says shops were busy. |  |
| 22.40 | Interviewer asks if there was a hairdresser in Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
| 22.45 | Says that there was gents and ladies hairdressers in Lewis’s. And that he used to get his haircut by them for free as a model. |  |
| 24.10 | Interviewer asks if there was home delivery at Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
| 24.14 | States that there was home delivery at Lewis’s but not for the food department. |  |
|  | “For the staff… We used to get a fifteen per cent discount. On TVs, carpets and…So, when there was a big sale on my mum used to go in. And with the sale price and my fifteen per cent discount I think our whole house was all furnished by Lewis’s Department Store [laughs].” | 24.29-24.57 |
| 25.00 | Interviewer asks if there was music in Lewis’s Department store. |  |
| 25.02 | Talks about the listening booths in the basement. |  |
| 25.40 | Interviewer asks if they had the chutes which carried cash in Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
| 25.46 | Replies yes but not in the food hall. Describes how they got change in the food department of Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
| 26.33 | Interviewer asks the respondent if they had any control over the displays in the food department of Lewis’s Department Store. |  |
|  | “The display was all, sort of, uniformed. And they told you how to display it. And what cooked meats or what fish…Or what went beside each other and different things…There was a lot of…there was the Liverpool store. There was a store in Birmingham. There was a store in Hanley and Stoke and there was a store in Bristol…We used to get taken to different stores to see how they worked and how their displays were. It was really much the same…” | 26.48-27.55 |
| 28.12 | Interviewer asks the respondent when he first started going out at night in the Highstreets. |  |
| 28.20 | The late ‘70s and early ‘80s. Lists some of the clubs he went to and a club called Spankies, Panama Jax , Joanna’s, and the Penthouse on the top of The Apollo. |  |
| 29.28 | Interviewer asks the respondent how he felt when walking the highstreets at night. |  |
| 29.33 | Replies that he felt a lot safer then than he would do now. Even although Glasgow had a lot of issues at that time. Thinks City centre has taken a downturn. |  |
| 30.18 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he went to the cinema. |  |
| 30.28 | Lists the cinemas that he went to. The Rio in Bearsden. ABC minors in Clydebank. |  |
| 30.56 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he went as an adult. |  |
| 30.59 | States that he went to the Odeon, Renfield Street on his first date with his wife. Went to see ‘Who Framed Rodger Rabbit?’ |  |
| 31.23 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he went to the theatre. |  |
| 31.28 | Not a big theatre fan. He liked music and the cinema. |  |
| 31.40 | Interviewer asks the respondent if there are any particular bands that he can remember going to see.  |  |
|  | “Oh yes! I went to The Apollo quite a lot. I saw The Sensational Alex Harvey Band. I saw Bob Marley in The Apollo. I saw The Police in The Apollo. Nils Lofgren. There was a whole load of different bands I’ve seen in the Apollo.” | 31.46-32.21 |
| 32.38 | Interviewer asks the respondent about restaurants. |  |
| 32.45 | Trained as a grill chef in a restaurant called The Fifty First State on Sauchiehall Street. Went to The Gandhi in Sauchiehall Street. |  |
| 33.28 | Interviewer asks the respondent when he worked in Fifty First State in Sauchiehall Street.  |  |
| 33.33 | Worked there from 1976 until 1978. |  |
| 33.47 | Interviewer asks the respondent what his training entailed there. |  |
|  | “I started as a grill chef [at Fifty First State on Sauchiehall Street in 1976}. It was an American themed sort of diner. And it was like burgers and steaks and chilli and milkshakes and different things like that. It was quite new to Glasgow. And it was…at that time. And it was a really busy restaurant. And the girls used to go around on roller skates.” | 33.52-34.24 |
| 34.27 | Interviewer asks the respondent what the pay and conditions were like there. |  |
| 35.27 | He states that the pay and conditions were awful. Working from 4pm to 1.00am. No trade union. Taxis home.  |  |
| 35.06 | Interviewer asks the respondent what his particular responsibilities as part of the team there were. |  |
| 35.16 | Food preparation. Making burgers, serving. Had takeaway too. |  |
| 35.39 | Interviewer asks what sort of age group went there. |  |
| 35.43 | Mainly young trendy people. Restaurant concept new to Glasgow. |  |
| 36.55 | Interviewer asks the respondent if there were any products at Fifty First State that particularly stood out. |  |
|  | “The cheese burgers were great. [At Fifty First State on Sauchiehall Street]. And the corn on the cob which was…We had never seen corn on the cob before. Being brought up in Glasgow that was new. And, chilli con carne.”  | 37.00-37.21 |
| 37.28 | Interviewer asks if there was any difference at Christmas at Fifty First State. |  |
| 37.34 | Respondent replies that there wasn’t as the restaurant and takeaway were always busy. |  |
| 37.50 | Interviewer asks what the respondents favourite thing about working in 51st state. |  |
| 37.55 | States that his favourite thing was the people. Working conditions terrible for being 18. Pay was awful. |  |
|  | “Just all the young people and going into all the different bars and night clubs. It was quite a place Glasgow at that time [late ‘70’s early ‘80s] being…being that age and going to all these different nightclubs. And all these new, different nightclubs opening up like the Ultra Theque. It was very, very fancy. With the lasers. And , it was quite a…quite a place to be at that time. When you were growing up and being that age in Glasgow.”  | 38.45-39.36 |
| 39.40 | Interviewer asks the respondent if there were any shops nearby where he lived in Drumchapel. |  |
| 39.44 | There was a shopping area. Lots of good shops. Arnotts, Woolworths, John Menzies. Independent shops. Was busy. |  |
| 40.29 | Inteviewer asks the respondent if he thinks that the highstreets have changed over time. |  |
|  | “Yes, very much so. I think Glasgow’s a really poor place to go…to shop in. Most of the main stores are all gone now. It’s looking very, very shabby. A lot of litter. The only really…place that I would shop now in Glasgow is probably Buchanan Street. Or, John Lewis. Or Buchanan Galleries.  | 40.41-41.20 |
| 41.25 | Interviewer asks the respondent when he thinks that things started to change. |  |
|  | “Probably with the closure of Debenhams. And the closing of British Home Stores on Sauchiehall Street. It seemed to go downhill form then. It’s quite a poor place to go into. I don’t really like going into Glasgow City Centre. I would probably go to Braehead to tell you the truth. Or, I’d probably go to Silverburn to do my shopping now.” | 41.40-42.22 |
| 42.23 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he goes to out of town shopping malls or does he shop online. |  |
| 42.30 | He doesn’t do much shopping online as he likes to see things. |  |
| 42.53 | Interviewer asks the respondent what changes he would like to see to Glasgow City Centre. |  |
| 43.00 | Department stores to open up again. Would go back and work in Lewis’s. For Glasgow to become a nicer cleaner place.  |  |
| 43.19 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he had the chance what advice would he give to Glasgow’s current planners and businesses. |  |
|  | “Make Glasgow a better place to shop. To…To make things easier for…for people to go into Glasgow City Centre. Like the parking when you go into Glasgow City Centre is very, very expensive. And to make public transport cheaper for going in Glasgow City Centre.”  | 43.30-43.58 |
| 44.00 | Interviewer asks the respondent how he imagines the future of Glasgow’s Highstreets to be. |  |
| 44.06 | Thinks it will go downhill. Thinks everyone will move out to the suburbs and they will build malls out in the suburbs. Makes him really sad as it was a great place to shop. |  |
|  | “Yeah, I wanted to tell you about a wee shop lifting incident that happened. When we worked in Lewis’s Department Store we had a thing that was called a bounty. And you would get a five…Five or ten pounds. I can’t remember what it was. For catching a shop lifter. You never really caught them but you pointed them out to the store detectives. And one day I was working behind the cooked meat counter. And one of the ladies from the grocery department came running round to see me. And she said-‘I’m just after seeing a guy putting tins of ham in a plastic bag. And he’s walking out the store.’ I said-‘Right, point him out to me.’ So, she pointed him out to me. So, I said-‘Right, I’m going out door five. Call the security. And I’ll follow him.’ So, I followed him round the corner and down towards The St Enoch’s Centre. And, just as I was going round the corner the guy was waiting for me. And he hit me over the head with the plastic bag with the two tins of Beresford Ham. To my dismay I got a cut head. All for the sake of five or ten pounds. I don’t think it was worth it...I was back at my work the next day with a plaster over my head.” | 45.25-47.27 |
| 47.28 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he got sick pay from Lewis’s. |  |
| 47.30 | He did. Full pay sick pay. |  |
|  | Interviewer thanks the respondent for his contribution to the project. |  |
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