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| **Project: ‘Glasgow’s Highstreets: An oral history…’**Respondent: Matt LairdYear of Birth: 1946Age: Connection to project: Local knowledgeDate of Interview: 22/09/2023Interviewer: Rachel KellyRecording Agreement: Yes/ NoInformation & Consent: Yes/ NoPhotographic Images: Yes/ No (Number of: )Length of Interview:Location of Interview: Marie Trust, Albion StreetRecording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | **Glasgow Story Collective** |
| Time(from: mins/secs) | Description | Transcribed Extract(from- to:mins/secs) |
|  | *Where were you born?* |  |
|  | In Springburn, Glasgow. I now live in Rutherglen. |  |
|  | *Can you tell me your earliest memories of the high streets?* |  |
|  | In Springburn we had a high street and it was a great shopping area. My Mother used to take me up when I was 3 years old and I can remember it. Going into the butcher’s shop, going into the shoe shop. We had five of a family, I was the second youngest so there was three above me, so my Mum as always buying things for them. My Dad was always in work, he was a bricklayer, so there was always money to buy things. That would be coming into 1950s and we still had rationing at that time. They call it austerity now. The politicians change the names to suit themselves, but it was just the same thing. You had things like butter and eggs and fancy foods. It was great, I loved being pushed in the pram down the street because my Mum would always take me into Woolworths and buy me a toy soldier, or a toy giraffe or an elephant or something like that. I was the apple of her eye actually, I was spoiled rotten when I think about it, you know. I had a squint in my eye and she spent years taking me down to the Eye Infirmary in Sandyford Street in Charring Cross to get that squint checked and rather than have an operation they had an alternative that I do exercises. So I did exercises until I was 12 until that squint was straightened and I always think of my Mum, the dedication she put in was fantastic, but that was the type of women that were in our street in Blackthorn Street in Springburn. They all looked after each other and they always looked after the kids. In the tenement I stayed in, all the neighbours the McManus’s, the Storie’s, the Joss’s, I’m still friendly with them till this day. Although I’m 77, I still remember the families the Storie’s, the Joss’s. Jim Storie, my best friend, he’s a taxi driver in London but I still visit him and keep in touch with him.It was a great life actually for a child growing up because there were so many good friends in the street and my Mother sent me to the Lifeboys and the Boys’ Brigade and to the Church of Scotland for Sunday School until I got to the age of 14 and started to rebel against orthodox religion. Walking down the high street and going into all these shops and they all knew my Mother and it was a very friendly atmosphere. Going down the high street the Co-operative was a big store that ran all the way down to Springburn Road. My Brother actually worked there when he was 15 in the grocers and my Sister actually became the Manager in the shoe shop. To me it was fantastic because it had a great big window with all the toys in it, toys that I couldn’t afford like train sets and things like that but it was wonderful to see the high street, particularly on a Saturday morning when everyone was out shopping. It was just something everyone did. They were out every day shopping because they didn’t have refrigerators so they had to get their milk every day or else it went sour. Newspapers were very important, there were newspapers in our house every day, about three different newspapers and comics. I had all the comics, the Beano, the Dandy, the Topper, the Rover. We had a paper every day. So the high street was very important to the people in those days.  |  |
|  | *What was your tenement in Springburn?* |  |
|  | I lived at 7 Blackthorn Street. It’s not there any more, the tenement’s been pulled down and it’s now lovely bungalow type houses, marvellous actually, and across the road from us was a big cowp, well we called it a cowp, it was a big wild area and we used to go there and play, build houses, build huts and there was a big lake, it’s probably filthy actually but we still made rafts and sailed rafts in there. In the summertime, the six week holiday that we had, my school was about 200 yards up the road, Elmvale Primary School, and most of the street either went there or to the Catholic school, St Aloysius just round the corner from that but the kids didn’t take anything to do with that actually. They were all friendly the only thing is we couldn’t understand why they didn’t get the extra holiday that we got. We got an extra week’s holiday but they went back for days of obligation I think and it was constantly a puzzlement to me why they were different. That was a great area to grow up in Springburn actually.Sadly its fallen. Because in those days it was the railway capital of the world. They turned out the Caley and the M.D. local. There were so many yards that were working in engineering there was constant work and when we were at school somebody would say oh there’s a train going over to South Africa today and we would run up to Springburn Road and we’d see the train coming out one of the Caley or M.D. local, like the Royal Scotsman, and they’d be going down to Finnieston and then put on a boat and sent to South Africa. The kids loved it, it would be like a party time, all cheering and all that and there’d be kids out from all different schools like Petershill, Coulston, and they’d be lining the streets for this big event. It was fantastic. |  |
|  | *Did you go into the centre of the town at all?* |  |
|  | That was a big treat. There’d probably be about six of us for protection, because when you went into the town you met people from different areas from maybe the Govan area or the Gorbals, so it was for protection in the fact that there were six of you. There wasn’t really fights when we were young, we were only about 7 or 8 anyway but it was protection having some of the older ones with you. Lewis’s would be the store we’d go to on Argyle Street because that was the land of milk and honey actually. The toy department was on the third floor but you’d go up there and see the trains and the newest toys. They seemed to have quite a liberal policy, they would allow kids to wander about. They always had security guards on every door and every door but I never remember getting into trouble with them, they would just let you go about, but we were quite well behaved anyway we didn’t pick up toys and there was none of us were tea-leaves and stealing the stuff, we’d look at the toys and just imagine having a gun like that or an outfit like that, or a cowboy outfit like that. Davie Crockett was popular at that time and eventually I did get my David Crockett hat which I used to wear when I got my toy rifle at Christmas. We used to share the toys in the street as well. We weren’t very guarded with our toys, the boys would let you use the bikes, if they weren’t using their bikes they’d let you use it. Unfortunately I crashed one of my pal’s bikes, ran down a hill and the brakes weren’t too good so I crashed it. His parents were very good with me actually I was still his pal after that because it was an accident.The high street as you got older became more popular because of the hairdressers. I used to go to the hairdressers at the top of the road, on Springburn Road. At that time the hairstyles Tony Curtis or semi-crew or the Perry Como, were all popular in the late 50s. My sisters were good to me and when I was 10 they treated me like a human doll and they would buy me things and the style for young guys in the late 50s were light blue jeans and a white tee-shirt and a black bomber jacket, very much influenced by America and my older sister she eventually went to America, she was into American movies and American records and she eventually married an American sailor from the Locarno. Anyway my sister she would say you’ll need to get a Tony Curtis haircut. I used to have jet black hair. So I went up to the hairdressers in Springburn Road and got a Tony Curtis and the guy said oh there’s a better hairdressers in the town, Fusco’s it’s the same price. It was two and six for a friction, friction is when they curled the front bit to make it a Tony Curtis, so I used to go to Fusco’s. So I became one of the elite then, smartly dressed and when I was at secondary school the girls used to say oh you love your hair and all that. After the first year I went into a mixed class and became very popular because my sisters dressed me in the latest style and I was always fashionable and by that time my mates were all the same and we used to go to the dancing at the Dennistoun Pallais when we were about 12. On a Monday night it was for youngsters, well there was youngsters allowed in and it was only two shillings. That was quite cheap actually for the dancing, but when I think about it now getting the bus from Springburn down to Parliamentary Road, down to Duke Street and then along to Dennistoun it was quite a journey and then coming back at night after the dancing, particularly if you got a lumber, because there was young girls there as well at 12, because it was the only chance you got of hearing pop records unless you had Radio Luxembourg which came on after 10 o’clock and the Light programme on the BBC they only played how much is that doggy in the window and Max Jaffa violin music and we wanted to hear Rock and Roll. This was about 1957, we wanted to hear Karl Perkins and we wanted to hear Little Richard in our street. Our street was quite advanced actually in its music because it didn’t want the British music, we wanted the American music and we wanted Elvis and Chuck Berry and people like that. The people in the street used to have parties and open up the window, put the record player there and we’d all dance in the street. Great people lived in that street when I think of it, you know.We used to go in to look at shops as well in the town. Sellyn’s was a good place to buy a suit. You’d look at the expensive suit shops, but you couldn’t buy any out of Frasers or Watt Brothers and all that, these shops were expensive so we used to go to Granite House. The Granite House used to sit down the road actually at Stockwell Street and it was cheap suits, but it was Italian suits. The grey suit with a pinstripe was very popular and you wore a tie and hanky that matched and you were the bees-knees if you had that kind of style. The shoes were very important at that time because there was winkle-pickers had just came out with pointed toes and my sisters used to say don’t get the ordinary winkle-pickers, get gun metal or get the bronze shoes because they’re different you’ll stand out, you’ll look different then, snazzy. My sister worked in a shoe shop then, she was the Manager in the Co-operative in Bishopbriggs and we always thought that was fantastic in the family, my sister’s a Manager, she’s going up in the world. I used to go up to the shop and she’d get me these shoes. I was totally well dressed, I totally fitted in. |  |
|  | *What dancing did you go to in your teens?* |  |
|  | Well, the Locarno was the dance hall to go to. There was other dance halls as well, The Barrowland, Geordie’s Byre that was the place. Geordie’s Byre was beneath the ordinary dance hall, that’s where you got the groups. When it came to the 60s round about ‘63, guys in my school were musicians and Graham Knight, he later went on to be in Marmalade which became a very big group, but Graham was playing in the Scout Hall on Springburn Road and Ronnie Lee, he went on to be in The Pathfinders and then he went on to Stone The Crows with Maggie Bell. He was a best friend of mine at school. He was an only child and he got piano lessons from a very young age and he was a great musician. At Elmvale Primary School Ronnie would play the piano at Christmas time r the whole school and he was just fantastic. He would be doing classical music but he would also be doing B. Bumble and the Stingers, who were big at the time with a number one hit record. Norrie Holton he was a great guitarist at Elmvale Primary School, he stayed round in the railway blocks, there were lots of railway houses in Springburn as well. He played in a group along with Graham Knight, The Ventures they were called and the drummer Adam Ross he was fantastic, he had his half hour, he would play the drums and run round the drums, he reminded me of what Ringo Starr did with Ronnie Storm & The Hurricanes in Liverpool. There seemed to be many musicians in Springburn. Karl Denver he had a number one hit in 1962 with Wimoweh it later came out as The Lion Sleeps Tonight in the 80s or something like that. Jeremy MacGregor, the folk musician stayed round in the railway blocks beside Norrie Holton and he went on to form a group and they were on the Tonight Show with Cliff Michelmore. They were very popular doing a lot of Scottish songs. All these guys used to gather in the Scout Hall and Onnie McIntyre, he came down from Kirkintilloch, he became a member of The Average White Band. He’s one of the ones who’s still in the Average White Band actually along with Malcolm Duncan. Hamish Stuart was in the Average White Band too.We graduated to the town to the Picasso Club on Buchanan Street and on a Wednesday night you’d get all the musicians from Marmalade, Studio Six and The Pathfinders and they all used to come in and listen and I met Hamish Stuart at that time and I met him after it. Paul McCartney’s Lady Madonna didn’t come out until the Friday but Hamish Stuart played it before that with The Dream Police on the Wednesday and they just knocked everybody out. He played this big double bass like Paul McCartney.The Picasso Club was just fantastic like Geordie’s Byre, all the musicians used to gather there. The latest records were played there. At that time records were quite expensive, round about ‘68 they were six and eightpence to buy a record. So you actually went to parties and they used to play kissing games, they would play a record and the girl would move round all the guys and the lights would go off when the record came on and there would be a kissing game and you would play that for as long as the record lasted. There were lots of parties at secondary school and of course the annual Christmas Dance was always a big thing, everybody would get dressed up for that and the girls would say who are you going to lumber at the end of the night and things like that. It was always very special and you’d always get some guy that would buy a quarter bottle of vodka, it had to be Smirnoff, we were quite snobbish about what type of vodka it was, and it would be shared amongst 20 people. You’d get a sip each and all pretend that you were drunk, that’s as wild as the drunkenness got at the school, you couldn’t afford to buy drink. |  |
|  | *Can you tell me about the Locarno?* |  |
|  | The Locarno at that time was quite a dangerous place because you got gangs from all over Glasgow going in. You wore suits at that time and you got some gang members that if you buttoned up two buttons and the button at the bottom was open, they’d be from a certain gang, maybe from the Calton Toy or something ore The Billie Boys from Bridgeton. So you had to be careful, you had to be focused on what was going on around you.The American sailors used to go there at that time because the Holy Loch had the nuclear submarines in there at that time, they used to come on a Saturday night. You’d always get trouble, you’d always get some fight on a Saturday night. You’d always get a guy from one of the gangs who’d challenge an American sailor and you’d have a fisticuffs.It used to be big band music and Maggie Bell who became a big singer with the Taggart theme, she sang with a big band at that time. There was quite a lot of musicians who later went into bands. Frankie Miller at that time actually played in a band before he formed The Stoics and before he made The Frankie Miller Band. There were a lot of great musicians at that time trying to make a living and a few of them did make it. It was great the music scene.The Elizabethan was another club which was down in the Broomielaw which was a trendy place to go to because it was quite important you know, where were you on Saturday night?, Oh I was at the Locarno how where were you? Oh I was at The Picasso. That was a more upper class because you got a more hippie type or more the ‘in-set’, before hippies came right enough. It was a trendier place to go to.You’d other clubs as well over in Paisley Road West there was a great place to go to as well, I can’t remember the name.The Barrowland, Geordie’s Byre was the place to go. By that time, at 17, you started to go into pubs and the Sarry Heid was the place to go to. They sold exotic drinks like Electric Soup, these concoctions. It became a very trendy place as well. Billie Connelly talks about it a lot. He used to go in there with a plastic mac on so he wouldn’t get drinks spilled on him before he went to the Barrowland.The Majestic was another great dance hall on Hope Street. That was a kind of upper class or middle class place. The girls that would go there would be working in Lawyer’s offices, they wouldn’t be working in factories. You always assumed that. It’s a generalisation I know, but The Barrowland lassies they worked in factories as machinists and things like that. That’s probably wrong but that’s what we always used to say that at The Majestic you got a better class of woman up there.You had Albert Dancing as well which was in Bath Street, quite a trendy place, that later became Joanna’s Discoteque. The word discoteque came in around 1967 and that became a discoteque. It was one of the first Discoteques. Again the scene changed because you were wearing flares and boys hair went away from the Tony Curtis to longer hair. I forgot to mention one of the dance halls I used to go to quite a lot was The Maryland. Ronnie Lee said to me one Saturday night I want you to come with me to The Maryland up in Scott Street, there’s a group up from Liverpool playing called The Escorts. I said Liverpool, what’s so great about that? He said have you not heard of the Mersey Beat? All these Brian Epstein groups were starting to become big. The Beatles have got Love Me Do out and Gerry & The Pacemakers have got How Do You Do It? So we went up to see this group and the atmosphere was fantastic, something I’d never seen before. The place was mobbed. I’d never been in The Maryland before, but it was absolutely mobbed and the water was running down the windows and this group was totally different because we had the Tony Curtis but they had flat hair, black tee-shirts, black flares and Cuban heeled boots. It was totally a great look and it was hard heavy drum music, heavy beat music which became the fashion, it was fantastic, forget about Cliff Richard or Adam Faith, this is the new beat music. We went back to school and told everybody this is the new music, the new beat music from Liverpool and then we started going to The Maryland regularly and you get groups like John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers they would come and Screaming Lord Such was a great entertainer because he used to throw the microphone at you and it would just miss your nose and he’d catch it and Roger Daltry from the Who, he used to this to, throw the microphone and catch it. Screaming Lord Such he would come out a coffin, he would leap out a coffin and he would be dressed with make-up on. He was one of the first musicians I’d seen with make-up on, kind of scary make-up, Halloween type stuff but he was a great entertainer and he was a great Politician as well, Screaming Lord Such and The Monster Raving Loony Party. They were about for years. They brought a bit of light to the Ted Heath and Harold Wilson’s governments.  |  |
|  | *Can I ask what you think about the future for Glasgow’s highstreets?* |  |
|  | I hope it goes well because my works in Marks & Spencers, just round the corner in fact, she’s a Manager in there. So I’m hoping it’s got a great future. It needs a big turn around to get people back into the city because I’ve already heard people getting mail through the post that’s not arriving on time and it’s damaged or they’ve sent the wrong things. This is the fashion getting clothes by sending away for it. I don’t think it’s going to change, but I hope it’s going to change and people start going back into the stores. They’ve already went away from the city centre to Braehead, the Fort, to outlining districts because they’re easy to get to and parking is so difficult with this emission zones and you can’t take your car into the city centre the way you used to. They used to have Sunday parking. Sunday parking was a great thing for people to go shopping. As I said earlier on, people loved to go shopping and I think people still would love to go with their friends shopping then go for a coffee and have a good bit of banter going but all this online shopping stopped all that and it’s making people more isolated I think.I’m just hoping that shopping in the town, because Sauchiehall Street is a disgrace now. Buchanan Street used to be the best centre for shopping in Glasgow. I believe Edinburgh has taken over that mantle now because they’ve got different rules there for parking and things but Glasgow City Council, I don’t know what they’re up to. I’s love to see them coming back in, the shops getting revamped. There would have to be some gimmicks to bring them back into Buchanan Street but it’s up to the retailers to come up with the ideas. |  |
|  | *Thank you very much Matt* |  |
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