

057 Karen Raxlen Fejer

Please note that any items that were difficult to transcribe are marked with an [indiscernible] tag.

[0:00:00]

**Interviewer:** The date is the 14th of May. I'm sitting with Karen Fejer, the daughter of Alexander Raxlen, who was one of the brothers who founded Doctor's Hospital.

**Respondent:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** And I'm going to hand it over to Karen...

**Respondent:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** ...because she has wonderful information for us.

**Respondent:** I hope so. By the way, it's the 14th of May, 2012.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Respondent:** Because I've done that too, without the year. [Laughter]

**Interviewer:** [0:00:30] Thank you.

**Respondent:** Anyway, okay, so I'll start at the beginning. My family name is Raxlen, that was the name of my father and his brothers and their family, and that is – that name was Anglicized when they came to Canada. It was Reichlan, which is, you know, Reichels son, which is, you know – so I happen to know that name, where the name comes from, but I won't give you all those details. But anyway, they came here [0:01:00] very, you know – obviously people left Europe because things were very bad.

**Interviewer:** Approximately what years are you talking about?

**Respondent:** Just after the turn of the century, so I don't know. I've looked for it, I don't know if it's 1902 or 1903, but it's in that general vicinity when

they came to Canada. And they settled in Cabbagetown, which was not a Jewish neighbourhood. There were only maybe about ten of the Jewish families there, but that's where they [0:01:30] ended up – I don't know. My grandfather had what you would call a convenience store, and he had, you know, groceries and a few little deli items, and some vegetables and things. But the family grew, and it became eight children ultimately, and they had – my grandfather lived with them, and a blind aunt. And so with my grandparents, it was like twelve people. Very, very poor. [0:02:00] So they – my grandfather really believed in education. He had been like a Talmudic scholar and making a living was very difficult, you know, because of the times, and large family, and he wasn't exactly an experienced businessman. But anyway, so the school was the main thing. You know, he had to excel in school, and the person that they held up as sort of somebody they should [0:02:30] emulate was my grandmother's brother who had become a doctor – it's Belarus actually, not Russia. It was Belarus. And he had become a doctor, and he was held up to all of the sons. I guess the daughters, they weren't considering them for an education. But to the sons, he was held up as, as my uncle put it, the Oracle of Delphi. The doctor wouldn't do this, the doctor wouldn't do it that way, so this is how they were, [0:03:00] you know, brought up. And so they all – except for my oldest uncle who became a lawyer, they all went into a medical profession. My Uncle Sam became a dentist, my father a surgeon, my Uncle Ben an anesthetist, and my Uncle Sol, a family doctor. So that's – so that was their orientation. It was well, of course, I guess to escape this area, [0:03:30] otherwise they lived in Cabbagetown where they were beaten up and they were – you know, it was all people, you know, Anglo-Saxons, very poor, but people from England, and Scotland, and places like that who resented, you know. They were the newcomers and they were resented, and they were Jewish and all that. So my uncle says in the – you know, the tape that I did with him, he says, "You know, I never thought I was going to stay in this area to practice." He said, [0:04:00] "You know, we were really – you know, had to fight for our lives here, and I really, you know, had other opportunities to practice outside of this area, but I graduated in 1931," and he became – my Uncle Samuel Raxlen really became – he was the leader. He was the natural leader of his brothers. And my other uncle, the one that was a lawyer, sort of didn't fill that role, but Sam

became the leader and it was the [0:04:30] Depression. He had to set up a practice. There was very little money, and this – apparently a dentist died in that area, in the Cabbagetown area, so he had this opportunity to set-up, I guess, set-up practice without spending as much, you know, to establish his practice. So he set up his practice there. Eventually they bought a house, it was a mayor's house. It was a house that every mayor in Toronto lived in and it was his office, and that was at [0:05:00] Dundas and Parliament, so they had a clinic. It was called the Raxlen Clinic, and they all – once they graduated from medicine, they all came to practice together in this building, and then from there when it became crowded, they built another facility at 500 Parliament, a modern building with, you know, X-ray, and labs, and physio, and you know, so that was one of the first clinics...

**Interviewer:** Oh my gosh.

**Respondent:** ...and that was in the early '50s. [0:05:30] And shortly after that, I remember my father talking about this too. My father had been educated in Edinburgh. He had a fellowship from Edinburgh. He had his Canadian fellowship, and yet when he came to Toronto, back to Toronto from training in England in Scotland and Wales...

**Interviewer:** And that would have been approximately...

**Respondent:** He came back in 1950.

**Interviewer:** Thank you.

**Respondent:** The new clinic was about 1952, I'm estimating. Anyway, so when [0:06:00] he came back and tried to get hospital privileges, he couldn't because all the – you know, all the teaching hospitals were by and large, with a few exceptions, Jews were not able to practice there in all the downtown hospitals, and so he had to – and Mount Sinai was just getting established, but there was a very [0:06:30] political situation there because there was a man by the name of Ben Sedowski, who – I also had a tape that I listened to by a man called Harold Sandler, who was a contemporary. He wasn't a doctor, but he filled me in on what the political situation was at that time. Now...

**Interviewer:** Political medical situation?

**Respondent:** Political – the political situation in the Jewish community.

**Interviewer:** [0:07:00] Got it.

**Respondent:** With regard to Mount Sinai. You see, you know, the immigrants had come, a lot of them had come just in the same period in 1900, 1910, and they had raised families, and then these – the children of these immigrants, Jewish immigrants, had either become professionals or set up businesses, and then by the – into the '40s, you know, there were a lot of – and a lot of women, Jewish women did [0:07:30] this, worked on the communal, you know, organizations, and one of the things was they built a small hospital on Yorkville, which was the original Mount Sinai hospital. And if you go to Yorkville today, you'll see that the front is still there. And I actually was born in that hospital. So that – it was quite a small hospital at the time.

**Interviewer:** That was the original Mount Sinai?

**Respondent:** That was the original. I don't know if there was one before that, but that was, I think, either the first one or maybe they would have had something prior to [0:08:00] that, but anyway. So this – these group of – well there were a lot of men that were, you know, I guess they were collecting money. There was a lot of communal support for a – you know, the community had grown. This – we're talking about, you know, the early '50s, and there was a need for a Jewish hospital. Anyway, they did – so there was – this man's name was Ben Sedowski, and he – it was pretty well – [0:08:30] he was behind it. He had money himself, and everybody in the community contributed, including my family. They did contribute. Everybody did, but he pretty well controlled things, this Ben Sedowski, and I remember my father talking about how he'd gone to talk to – and Uncle Sam says in the tape he went to talk to him. Wouldn't let my father practice there, or at least I think maybe all he would get was what they called the courtesy appointment, [0:09:00] which was not a, you know – my father was very well qualified. But there were other doctors who had trained in the post-war years, maybe in the

States or whatever. Anyway, he couldn't get an appointment, and Uncle – so there was – and so I remember my father saying, "We went to see Rabbi Feinberg at Holy Blossom." They really tried – so I think part of it was [0:09:30] that they were – because that's what this Harold Sandler says in this tape. They were really kind of outsiders because they had – they grew up in Cabbagetown. They weren't where the rest of the Jewish community grew up, which was more, you know, more, I guess, around this area maybe. It was this area.

**Interviewer:** I think so.

**Respondent:** It was around Harbord, and you know, and they were considered outsiders. They were also – I don't know exactly, but I do know that there was all this [0:10:00] resistance. My father operated in a small hospital called St. Mary's, a Catholic hospital on Jarvis Street, and in those days, Humber Memorial, which was like so – miles and miles and miles away in those – I mean it was in neverland. Anyways, so Sam, who was really a very, very substantial person, very, very intelligent, not just in medical matters but, you know, he had a dream, and he had a dream [0:10:30] that he would build this hospital. He says it's a dream on the tape. He said, "I had a dream." He said, "That I'd have built a hospital where my brothers could practice." And he also emphasized that, you know, when we set up this clinic in Cabbagetown, whatever people could pay, we took. You know, we didn't turn people away, we never did. So part of the problem, as he explains it, is that these people were very poor. They didn't have a hospital. You know, they didn't have access to other hospitals in the [0:11:00] downtown area, like Wellesley Hospital. I asked him about Wellesley Hospital. Well that started out as a privately owned hospital, and then apparently it was not open to these very poor people that lived in Cabbagetown. So anyway, Uncle Sam got this idea that he was going to build a hospital, and this facility on Brunswick became available. It had been run by the [0:11:30] sisters of St. John the Divine. So it was Catholic, and they ultimately moved, I think, out to John Street or something, and they have a – it's St. John's Convalescence Hospital. I think that's what it is.

**Interviewer:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

- Respondent:** But they moved, and they sold the hospital. They sold the facility to my uncle, and my father, and his brothers. And then my uncle tells the story [0:12:00] about how...
- Interviewer:** When would that have been?
- Respondent:** That was in the early '50s.
- Interviewer:** Thank you.
- Respondent:** That was like maybe '53, I don't know. I can check my dates. I might be able to get you exact dates. So that was – and then he had to get a hospital license, and he said he engaged the services of Roland Michener, you know, who was a very prominent non-Jewish lawyer. And he says, [0:12:30] "Mr. Michener was sent to me by God."
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** That's what he says. "He was sent to me by God," because he really opened the doors for him where, you know, he said even when they took out a seven hundred dollar loan to renovate the mayor's house to make it into a clinic, they had to get a note from their father that it wasn't considered that they had enough, you know – it was not secure enough they said. And he said, "Well my father, you know, I don't know what they thought they were going to get from [0:13:00] my father," but anyway. So he describes in this tape about how he went with Mr. Michener to the Hospital Commission to get this license. And they were very suspicious of him. And he said he was never so badly treated in his life. They accused...
- Interviewer:** Michener?
- Respondent:** No, no. Michener went with him to the Hospital Commission...
- Interviewer:** Oh, your uncle was treated poorly.

**Respondent:** He said he was treated so badly, they accused him of wanting to do abortions, and wanting [0:13:30] to do all kinds of, you know, things that were not right in this hospital, and they really gave him a very hard time, and Mr. Michener was there with him. And after an entire day's hearing, he finally was granted the license. So it took a lot. You know, I mean my uncle was a very substantial personality. I mean he really was. He was a very strong, strong [0:14:00] man, and he was not a pushover. But anyway...

**Interviewer:** And it sounds that he was articulate too.

**Respondent:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And so he credits, he credits Roland Michener for really – and being really there for him, and he says Roland Michener said to him, "I'm really proud of you, Sam." [Laughter] So that was it. So they took over this facility, which was actually – that was on Major. [0:14:30] That was on Major Street. It was just on the other side of where they ultimately built, so it was quite an old building. They modernized it, and there were – he says six sisters, very elderly sisters, that continued to live there until each one passed away, and they were sort of given responsibility because, I guess, they were too old to move north.

**Interviewer:** When you're saying sisters, are you talking about nuns?

**Respondent:** Nuns. Oh, this was...

**Interviewer:** [0:15:00] Okay.

**Respondent:** ...the Sisters of St. John the Divine. They were nuns. They ran this hospital.

**Interviewer:** I wanted to be sure about that. Yeah.

**Respondent:** They ran this hospital, so...

**Interviewer:** Oh, so they stayed and worked there.

**Respondent:** ...they stayed and worked. They stayed – no, they didn't work.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** They were invalids and they stayed and they took care of them until each one passed away.

**Interviewer:** Oh, how very generous.

**Respondent:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Very kind.

**Respondent:** Yeah, so they did that. And then there was also very interestingly – so I told you about the sisters who lived out their lives **[0:15:30]** there.

**Interviewer:** So kind. Most institutions...

**Respondent:** Well I don't know how that happened, but anyway. So then – and there was another very interesting thing, person that was associated with the sisters, was a man whose name was Harry Edwards. And I remember that I – I remember being told that he was a foundling, and he – but I think he was an orphan who – actually an **[0:16:00]** orphan, and the sisters had taken care of him since he was a young boy. And so he stayed on. He stayed on at the hospital, and he was eventually – I think he used to sort of repair things, but then he became the receiver, and I remember him being a very – you know, like a cheerful person. He always wore a bowtie. And he stayed on with the hospital, and he was a legacy, you know. His job came from the **[0:16:30]** sisters too. So anyway, so they – so what was happening was that Mount Sinai was built, the building on University was built about the same time. And this Harold Sandler that I taped in 1992 talked about the fact that there was a fishing club **[0:17:00]** in north of North Bay where all – there are fifty prominent Jewish men, belonged to this fishing club, and they used to go, they used to go up and spend time fishing. I don't know how often. And so the subject of the Doctor's Hospital and the Raxlens came up. And I think that Ben Sedowski – and my uncle, I recently talked to him about it – did not appreciate that there was this **[0:17:30]** other hospital. Although it wasn't – they didn't have Jewish patients, that was the thing, because their practice had been centered in the, you know, in the east. They didn't have

Jewish patients, but there were Jewish doctors that started to come also to the – and a lot of, of course, ethnic doctors after the war, when there were, you know, many Europeans coming to Toronto. This was a place where all these, you know, these doctors [0:18:00] from Europe who, I guess, had to retrain to some extent here, and so it was kind of like – I think that from my – what I gathered from this Harold Sandler, that this was sort of like they resent it. That these Jewish doctors had set up this hospital, and you know, and they – and so there was this kind of a negative, a very negative kind of tension. [0:18:30] You know, I don't know. But that's what I gather from this reviewing of this tape that I made with Harold Sandler, who was one of the members of the fishing club. So anyway, so then very shortly after they opened this, you know, this old facility, they built another wing coming towards – and they acquired the land, you know, [0:19:00] on Brunswick. So it spanned, you know, from Brunswick to Major. They acquired the land there, and they put up another addition. I don't know how many beds it had. But then that wasn't sufficient, and then they put up a ten-storey addition, which was fronted on Brunswick. Oh yeah, and I forgot to say that there was an old chapel in the facility that had been run by the nuns of the, [0:19:30] you know, St. John the Divine, and this chapel was used as a, you know, as a lecture hall, one of the things they did. And the other thing, because my Uncle Sam was very interested in art, all of the brothers subsequently, except my Uncle Sol who died very prematurely at forty-seven, he used to – they used to have shows there, and the artists, let the artists show, and then they would get some kind of commission for putting that up. So that was another thing that [0:20:00] my uncle talked about on the tape. And how – I vaguely remember that. I remember going to that – it was a very lovely little chapel, and they – you know, they kept that. And anyway, so that was another thing they...

**Interviewer:** That's so interesting.

**Respondent:** ...a little innovative.

**Interviewer:** They kept the nuns, they kept this other man who worked for them.

**Respondent:** Oh he was a very excellent employee.

**Interviewer:** And then the chapel for art exhibits.

**Respondent:** Yeah, yeah. No, it was...

**Interviewer:** It was much more than just a hospital.

**Respondent:** Well it was – well it was. It was interesting [0:20:30] because originally the very first year they were a private hospital, and then after that they became a non-profit hospital, so they had a very intermediary status in between public hospitals, and then there were a few private hospitals like Shouldice. You know, the Shouldice was private...

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Respondent:** ...and then there were – and they were non-profit. And I know it was very, [0:21:00] very difficult that their negotiations with the – you know, they were funded by the government. At that time, I think there was – there was hospital – you got hospital – you could get hospital coverage. I mean I don't remember exactly when hospital coverage came in, but I do know that it was very, very difficult, and my father, I remember my father saying to me, "This is like a tiger that you get on. It's easy to get on it, but you can't get off." And so it was not easy because [0:21:30] they were – there was just a sort of a different – they had a different kind of relationship with the – you know, the government that granted, you know, the money, and I know it was complicated and it was not easy. Now one other thing that I'll tell you that is quite charming is about my grandfather. My grandfather had been a very, very – he was a big walker. [0:22:00] He used to walk for miles and miles and miles. Anyway, when they opened up the hospital, he took it upon himself to go, and he would – as my uncle describes it – he would come to the hospital early in the morning and have breakfast. And then he would – I don't know if he started at the bottom or the top, but he would visit every single patient every – every single patient. And they all thought he was – it was rumoured he was the owner. [Laughter] And they would make their complaints, they didn't like [0:22:30] the food, or they didn't like this or that. And then he would go and report to my uncle, who would – he said – my uncle uses the example that this woman said

she's getting chopped fish every day, and she doesn't like the taste, and then it turned out she had a gallbladder problem, and that's what she had to eat. [Laughter] And so, you know, he described it. I remember my grandfather making these rounds, and my uncle says he even inspected the kitchen. But he – this is what he did.

**[0:23:00]** He was already in his eighties, and he – and this was – so this was the thing. The people said he was the owner. I remember hearing that myself.

**Interviewer:** So he was treated with respect.

**Respondent:** Yes. Oh yes, yes. But he was also – they also felt free to make, you know, complaints to him about what was wrong. Anyway, so...

**Interviewer:** So he had a good time doing this.

**Respondent:** Yeah, he did. He liked it. He was very friendly.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** He was very friendly, and people responded to him, and anyway, and he would take these complaints back to – **[0:23:30]** Uncle Sam gave up dentistry, and he was the hospital administrator. He worked as the hospital administrator, and my father was head of surgery. Uncle Ben – but there were many other doctors. I mean it became quite a lot of doctors. I don't know exactly how many. I think Uncle Sam says two hundred or something.

**Interviewer:** Oh.

**Respondent:** But I – you know what? I can't – it's not totally – he was about eighty-four. You know, I wasn't sure whether – when he did this, you know, when he did this interview.

**Interviewer:** Oh and how many were full-time and how many had practiced...

**Respondent:** **[0:24:00]** Well no, no. No, no, no. Like you know, they were on staff.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

**Respondent:** Let's put it this way. They were on staff. They weren't working there full-time. So that was – you know, this thing with my grandfather was interesting. I do remember this is quite engraved in my memory, but I do remember when they were putting up the ten-storey addition, my father went down to look at it. They were building it, you know, and I remember – I don't know how we got up there, but we were up on about **[0:24:30]** not right on the ground floor, but up higher. I don't know, maybe four stories, I don't know, and there were no walls. We were just standing up there. He took us up there to look. So I don't know. That was sort of my first memory of the – you know, of the hospital as it was going up.

**Interviewer:** As it was just being built.

**Respondent:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** What year was that?

**Respondent:** Oh jeez. Okay. What year? I think it was '57, but I can verify. I can get you those dates. **[0:25:00]** I think it might be around '57. Not sure. And then of course I remember the openings, you know. They would have the Minister of Health come, and you know, open the hospital and make speeches and whatever. I remember that. And I have some pictures of that. I have some – well I actually have given them to the Jewish Archives, but I can get copies of them.

**Interviewer:** Please.

**Respondent:** And I actually used to work there on my holidays...

**Interviewer:** **[0:25:30]** At the hospital?

**Respondent:** Yes, I did.

**Interviewer:** What did you do?

**Respondent:** I did – well I was once in the gift shop. Yeah, they had a gift shop. They had a Women's Auxiliary, and they had a gift shop, and they, you know, raised money for the hospital. And then I was at one

point I was on the information desk. [Laughter] Not by myself. I don't think I was there – but I was on the information desk. And then one time I even did ECG tests. They taught me how to do – I was in university, I guess, by then. So I did, [0:26:00] you know, so I did work there. And so it was – I'm trying to think about what else.

**Interviewer:** Did any of you ever live in this neighbourhood?

**Respondent:** No.

**Interviewer:** Or the hospitals...

**Respondent:** No, no. We never lived in this neighbourhood, no.

**Interviewer:** And what was it like for the brothers to be working together year after year?

**Respondent:** Oh, well they were, as a matter of fact, this Harold Sandler is very critical of them, but they were very much a clan. They weren't a family. They had grown up literally sharing beds, they were so – they were [0:26:30] really so poor and there was no time. All there – growing up, they all had – you know, they all had jobs, you know, packing ice, selling newspapers, selling vegetables, selling eggs. They really – their only playmates were each other. And so – and then when they grew up, they were just the four of them, and then afterwards when Sol died, the three of them. [0:27:00] So they very much – this was their whole life, was just being together, really being together, and so it was no – it wasn't a difficult thing. They all got along. They were like a clan. I've always said that. They were like a clan. Not like a family. So – and that's how they were – outsiders perceived, like this – in this tape that I was reviewing...

**Interviewer:** Of the close...

**Respondent:** Yeah. Who were they? They came from out east, and they were always together, [0:27:30] and they didn't – they had some other friends. My parents had – but essentially, they worked with each other, they were best friends with each other, and it was all – I think it came from this living in this neighbourhood where, you know, they

had to sort of fight to – you know, that they were attacked, you know, for being Jewish and for being immigrants, or whatever.

**Interviewer:** Both.

**Respondent:** Both. And then – and sort of like Sam says, that he never would [0:28:00] have considered going off and practicing somewhere else without his brothers. He had to – you know, they all had to stick together, and they did for all their lifetimes. You know, they did.

**Interviewer:** And Sam was clearly the leader.

**Respondent:** Oh, Sam was very much the...

**Interviewer:** The negotiator.

**Respondent:** He was very much the leader. He had the ideas, the vision...

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.

**Respondent:** ...the vision, and he was kind of – he had a brother-in-law that lived in New York who was a doctor, and he used to go back very often. He and my Aunt Rose [0:28:30] used to go, and I think he was – you know, I think that's where he got interested in art, and where he learned about, you know, hospitals. I can't say for sure, but I do know that he had quite a bit of sophistication. It's where – well he was highly intelligent, and my father used to say, like, he says, "I don't know where Sam gets these ideas. I think he's up in the middle of the night." Yeah. He had a lot of – you know, he was able to come up with these – how to do things. Oh yeah. Then he says [0:29:00] he – for the financing for the hospital, I think the bank didn't want to, you know, wasn't keen to lend him money, and I don't know how, but somebody from Edmonton, some financier from Edmonton financed the – you know, the big hospital? The big – the big ten-storey building and he somehow got this guy just to have trust in him. I mean he was a very persuasive man. He was a very, very – [0:29:30] quite an amazing person. I mean I wouldn't want to be on the other side of him, [laughter] but he was a very – you know, he had a tremendous – he had charisma, he had force, he had – you know? And he was the one that dreamed this up and

made it happen. And so it was – and then ultimately the hospital was designated as a place like for – I remember there were Mexican doctors that came to train, you know, [0:30:00] train to get their – you know, more – I guess more extended experience. They were sort of the house staff. You know, the residents. So they had that. You know, they were given that. There were asked...

**Interviewer:** Status as a teaching hospital.

**Respondent:** Yeah, yeah. They taught. Yeah. But they didn't have – I don't think they had, like, the regular – they didn't have the regular interns.

**Interviewer:** So they didn't have residents and interns at U of T.

**Respondent:** No, but they did have – they had these people from – yeah, that were coming from other places, so they did that.

**Interviewer:** [0:30:30] Was it always called...

**Respondent:** It was always called the Doctor's Hospital.

**Interviewer:** It was always called.

**Respondent:** Except when it was St. John's, you know, the St. John's. Now I don't know – what's it called? It was called St. John's Hospital, but I don't know – maybe I haven't got the title exact when it was run by the nuns. And that was, you know, the first – so essentially three. The first building was very old. It was – and I can try and find out when it was built, but that was the one run [0:31:00] by the Sisters of St. John the Divine. And then they built another smaller addition attached to that, and then they ultimately built this ten-storey building. So it was quite a – and then next door they built a building for doctors, an office building. They had an office building there next door. A separate building.

**Interviewer:** So that would have been for...

**Respondent:** Private – for doctors, you know, to have their offices.

**Interviewer:** So they could rent that out to other doctors.

**Respondent:** [0:31:30] Yeah. So doctors had all their offices there, and then they, you know, could use the – oh yeah. And this is what he said they had. The first – he said they had the first, or I guess Sick Kids had the same thing, but you could bring a sick baby there, you know? Like they had sort of an outpatient for babies, for children, for children. For pediatric thing. They did that, and I'm trying to think what else. I can't recall right now, but that's, [0:32:00] you know, so it was kind of an audacious thing to do. You know, really.

**Interviewer:** Very courageous. Gutsy.

**Respondent:** Yeah, yeah. It was. It was. And there wasn't – you know, there was this – like I say, you know, they – there was this thing that went on with, you know – I guess my uncle maybe – maybe he – one of the reasons he started the hospital was because my father, who was so qualified, who had a [0:32:30] fellowship from Edinburgh and had a Canadian fellowship, and he couldn't get a – you know, a substantial hospital going. Well part of it was that, you know, Jewish doctors couldn't work.

**Interviewer:** Oh yeah.

**Respondent:** Yeah. So he wanted his brothers to have a place to practice, and that's what he did. So it was quite an accomplishment.

**Interviewer:** And when – did they all stop working around the same time? What was...

**Respondent:** [0:33:00] Well he says on the tape that when he was sixty he was required to step down. That's what he says in the tape. My father died that same year, and then...

**Interviewer:** What year was that?

**Respondent:** That was 1969.

**Interviewer:** So one brother was sixty and had to retire. Your father...

**Respondent:** Died.

**Interviewer:** ...died in '69.

**Respondent:** My father died, and Ben retired. And Sol had died at forty-seven, very young. So – and then I think it [0:33:30] was – it was sold to Extencicare, but then they – I think the government – anyway, it became a public hospital. And ultimately, it became a public hospital, and they had owned the land. They had owned the land, not the hospital. They had owned the land, so that's what they sold was the land. So that's how it happened. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:** Did your father talk much about [0:34:00] practicing medicine here and the difficulties?

**Respondent:** Well he talked about – he certainly talked about how difficult it was to run the hospital. He definitely talked about that. He talked about, you know, all these negotiations with the government, and how they, you know, had a lot of difficulty. I think they – it wasn't very – it wasn't easy. But my father was – [0:34:30] you know, my father was not like – Uncle Sam was more involved in the administration.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

**Respondent:** Whereas my father was a surgeon and, you know, and he was pretty well engrossed in that.

**Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

**Respondent:** But it was – I think they had, you know, they really had a sense of, you know, achieving something. I mean after all, they had come from really – I mean were virtually in their home in Cabbagetown, they didn't have heat and they didn't have hot water. It was...

**Interviewer:** [0:35:00] Now this generation you're talking about, your father...

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** ...were they born in Europe or were they born here?

**Respondent:** No, no. They were born here.

- Interviewer:** They were born here, but your...
- Respondent:** But my grandparents, my grandparents and some of my great-grandparents came.
- Interviewer:** Uh-huh.
- Respondent:** But you know, they...
- Interviewer:** But it was real poverty, and then they...
- Respondent:** Oh, real poverty. And then they really by – they worked very, very hard to – you know, to – well to build, to have the clinic, and then ultimately to build the hospital, but I think Sam was – he was **[0:35:30]** very unusual in having that kind of drive, I think. You know, that drive and that energy, and that vision. You know? So he – I'm trying to think what else there was about it. Anything else.
- Interviewer:** Now of course it was a very generational thing. You said that there were eight children, four boys and four girls?
- Respondent:** There were five boys and three girls.
- Interviewer:** And three girls.
- Respondent:** And the girls **[0:36:00]** did not get education.
- Interviewer:** An education. Well that's – that was that generation.
- Respondent:** Yeah, yeah.
- Interviewer:** And what about your generation? Did any of the fathers promote medicine for their children, male or female?
- Respondent:** Yeah. Well one – okay, Sam's son is a doctor. A psychiatrist in the States. My brother, I think my father wanted him to be a doctor, but he was not inclined. And it didn't end – some of the next, **[0:36:30]** next generation are doctors. But in that – my generation, I guess only my cousin Bernard. Oh yeah, and my cousin – my aunt's son,

Edward, is a doctor. So I guess there are a few. Yeah, yeah. But anyway...

**Interviewer:** It's really a very remarkable...

**Respondent:** It is remarkable. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** It's a remarkable story.

**Respondent:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Not that they had so much education because that was – those were the values, [0:37:00] but what they built.

**Respondent:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** That was above and beyond.

**Respondent:** Yeah, well I think they really – I think it was – I guess the fact that there wasn't just one. You know what I mean? They were a team.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.

**Respondent:** They were a team, so they had a lot more, you know, maybe more than – it was easier maybe than for somebody that was an individual.

**Interviewer:** Right. So it was kind of power in numbers, but also your – that one uncle was [0:37:30] so clear and he was a leader, and he was...

**Respondent:** He was the leader. Yeah. He was quite a remarkable, remarkable person. I mean you could have an argument and he – an argument with him, and he would take any side and he would win. [Laughter] You know, he was very forceful.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** He was forceful. I'm not saying he was easy. He wasn't. He wasn't. But he was a force.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** He was a force. And I think maybe the fact that they had been, you know, that they had put targets in this, [0:38:00] you know, on this neighbourhood. I don't know. And part of it was that my father, you know, came back with his qualifications, and you know, and they – I guess they were perceived as outsiders and they couldn't – you know, they went to see this Mr. Sedowski, and you know, and tried all this. Tried for my father to get, you know, get an appointment where he could – and it was also – Sam said that, you know, that these [0:38:30] people where they were practicing were really so poor. They didn't have the means to go to, you know, hospitals. They didn't have – they couldn't even pay their doctors. It was a very tough time for people, you know, to pay for before – you know, we had socialized medicine. It was very difficult for poor people to access the system, you know. They had a really hard time. So it was, you know, a combination of things. And I guess, you know, [0:39:00] they really were quite amazing. But I think it was the team thing, the family thing, and then other people sort of didn't understand or thought it was difficult, or thought it was unusual. Like this Mr. Sandler in the interview, he says, "Well, I used to see them at Oakdale and they were always together. They didn't play golf with anybody else." [Laughs] He says.

**Interviewer:** Very tight family.

**Respondent:** Very tight. He says, "They always play golf together, [0:39:30] and they were three different shapes." [Laughter] I don't know. I don't think he liked them that much. [Laughter] He says, "Well there was the tall one, who was thin, then there was the medium one, and there was the short stubby one." That was my father. [Laughter] So he says, "I didn't understand. They didn't – and maybe it was," he says, "because they got off the same." You know, they had to take time off together. "But they didn't understand, they didn't play with anybody. Even their brother-in-law played by himself. They didn't even play with him." [0:40:00] So I think they were viewed with – you know, there was this perception of them as maybe different or clannish or whatever it was, but it brought them together, but it made them stronger. It made them stronger.

- Interviewer:** Yeah. And who was Mr. Sandler. How did you come to him?
- Respondent:** Oh, well Mr. Sandler – okay. Mr. Sandler – because he was my – after my father died, my father died in 1969.
- Interviewer:** How old was your father at the time?
- Respondent:** He was just – he was sixty. Only sixty.
- Interviewer:** So he was young.
- Respondent:** **[0:40:30]** Yeah. Anyway, so my mother remarried a number of years later, and she and her husband used to go to Florida and they used to be friends with this Mr. Sandler and his wife for, you know, many, many years. And so I don't know – when I was visiting my mother, and I – I don't know how it came up that I found out that he had been an observer. He was an observer, and he – you know, so it was really good to get his **[0:41:00]** point of view because he'd been the member of this fishing club, and he had – you know, he knew what the doctors said, and what this Ben Sedowski said, and he – you know, and he – well he really put down the hospital. He says, "Oh." You know, it was just this little house. He says it was a little house on Brunswick. Well it was never a house. It was maybe this old facility from, you know, the nuns' hospital. But it had never been – well, and they **[0:41:30]** didn't – they did acquire houses, and I remember one was a – where the interns and residents lived, you know. These foreign students from Mexico. And I don't know, maybe there were other places. So there was a tension, there was a tension there that – even when I was speaking to my uncle who was ninety-seven, my Uncle Ben who's still alive, he said, "You know, it was sort of a thorn in their side because, you know, there was another place **[0:42:00]** where Jewish doctors could go." You see? So there was a lot of under the surface, or maybe above the surface things that were going on. But I never quite understood because my father said he went to see the Rabbi, and he went to see Rabbi Feinberg, and he went to see Ben Sedowski, and he could never get this appointment. So in a way, this Harold Sandler gave me another perspective because he said, you know, **[0:42:30]** "They were like outsiders and they were always together." And so maybe they didn't have ties, you know, in the broader community.

You know? Maybe that was it. And then as outsiders they had to – you know, had to make a place for themselves. So anyway.

**Interviewer:** Did you have any feelings when you, as the next generation, but Doctor's Hospital was major in your life...

**Respondent:** It was.

**Interviewer:** ...what was it like for you when that hospital was razed?

**Respondent:** Oh, [0:43:00] you know, I felt bad.

**Interviewer:** Did you have some feelings? Yeah.

**Respondent:** I felt badly that, you know, that they had built this and it was, you know, gone.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.

**Respondent:** And it became very much a community. You know, I'm sure you remember it was a community hospital, and it was very important in serving all the ethnic groups of people. And you know, they spoke different languages, and they really were very accessible. Well at one point there was a fight to save it. Remember they were going to – I don't know if you remember. They were going to tear it down. So it had become integral in the community in serving [0:43:30] the community.

**Interviewer:** And it really was a community hospital.

**Respondent:** Yeah. It was a community.

**Interviewer:** For all the different ethnic groups.

**Respondent:** Yes. Right. So I felt badly. I felt badly, you know, that it was gone, and you know, I was kind of sad.

**Interviewer:** Well it was a huge part of your life.

**Respondent:** Yeah, it was. I felt very badly. I felt very proud that my family had done this. I thought, you know, how remarkable. You know, when you consider, you know, what their origins were, and how they – how hard, you know, and when my uncle describes how hard – like how – he says, **[0:44:00]** "As children we worked all the time," and they didn't really have time for friends between studying, and working while – you know, when they had the – they worked in the store, they worked – you know, they gathered. He said they gathered coke to burn in the – you know, he and my father installed a furnace, he got a second-hand furnace. They weren't plumbers, and a water heater, and that was when they got heat and hot water in the house. He **[0:44:30]** says they used to go to three – I actually have a video of my uncle. But anyway, three-penny bathhouse where they used to have – that's where they used to get clean. So you know, when you think about the contrast and how – what a remarkable, remarkable kind of accomplishment, it is very – you know, and I always felt very proud that that was my family, and they had done this, you know, amazing thing.

**Interviewer:** **[0:45:00]** Well, they started with nothing, they worked hard all their lives.

**Respondent:** They did. They did.

**Interviewer:** And they created this community hospital because...

**Respondent:** Right.

**Interviewer:** I do remember. I didn't grow up here, but by the time I got here...

**Respondent:** Yeah, you remember.

**Interviewer:** ...I was very aware of that.

**Respondent:** Yeah, it was. So, you know, it served – I mean it didn't serve just the Jewish community. I mean they had...

**Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

**Respondent:** It served a broader community. There was some – you know, some – there were doctors, a lot of different doctors, and some of them were Jewish, and they had patients. They didn't all [0:45:30] have – I think Mount Sinai eventually became – you know, it's a general hospital, it doesn't just cater to Jewish patients.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** But it – so it catered to, you know, to the community in the area, and a place where these doctors who had, you know, who had come from Europe and, you know, retrained, and where they could practice and bring their patients. And you know, so it was quite a – yeah.

**Interviewer:** And this – bringing young doctors [0:46:00] from Mexico to train them too. That was an interesting...

**Respondent:** Yeah. Well I don't know whether – I don't know how that happened. I don't know whether it was the government that did that, but I do know – and I don't know whether there were other countries too. I just – you know, my uncle mentions in the tape, he mentions the Mexicans, and I recall them. But I don't remember whether there were – I could ask my uncle if they were from, you know, if they came from any other places too to train.

**Interviewer:** But just that alone is unique.

**Respondent:** Yeah, yeah. That they were, you know, helped them. [0:46:30] I guess they went back. I think they went back. They weren't staying here. They were, you know...

**Interviewer:** Training?

**Respondent:** ...just training, getting extra experience or whatever it was, and you know, that's what happened. So you know, so anyway. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:** I would definitely appreciate whatever pictures you can come up with.

**Respondent:** Oh yeah. I do have – well I'll see if they'll copy them for me, they should, at the archives. I do have – I have quite a few pictures. I gave them, you know, like I gave them – I have a [0:47:00] big newspaper article. I have – I mean there. I mean I decided, you know, if you leave them and then, you know, when something, you go, I go, my children wouldn't keep them. They would throw them away. So all those kinds of things I've given...

**Interviewer:** You might as well.

**Respondent:** ...away. You know, I gave them away a few years ago, you know, to the archives. Although I found a few more, and I have – so I can – I don't know whether they'll release them or I could maybe get copies. [0:47:30] They might do copies for me. I think that they would probably do that.

**Interviewer:** Well a few of them, that would really show the street, or just...

**Respondent:** Yeah. I have some. There were actually some publicity shots that they had done at the time of the big addition.

**Interviewer:** And pictures of, of course, the brothers.

**Respondent:** Right.

**Interviewer:** Your father and his brothers.

**Respondent:** Well I don't know what – I have a manila envelope with some of the pictures that I found after I'd made the donation, so I haven't given those yet, so I don't know. I'll look in there, and then I'm [0:48:00] sure they would be, you know, probably agreeable to letting me...

**Interviewer:** And you know, I don't need a lot of them.

**Respondent:** No, no. How many would you like.

**Interviewer:** But just some that are sort of representative.

**Respondent:** How many would you like?

- Interviewer:** Oh, I'd say maybe eight.
- Respondent:** Eight? Okay.
- Interviewer:** Does that sound reasonable?
- Respondent:** Okay. I'll see if I can get them.
- Interviewer:** So that if you can choose them for us, and then our history committee could decide which we would...
- Respondent:** Right. Well I'll see...
- Interviewer:** ...might use for the display.
- Respondent:** ...if they're going to charge, what they're going to charge, if they're going to charge to make them. Or...
- Interviewer:** I could go make some copies.
- Respondent:** Yeah. Well let me [0:48:30] see. Let me speak to them and I'll see, because...
- Interviewer:** Okay.
- Respondent:** ...I signed a release and everything, so...
- Interviewer:** So they belong to them now.
- Respondent:** Yeah. They belong to them, so I have to really check with them. Although I say – like I say, I do have some that I found subsequently that I can definitely, you know, let you have those to copy. Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Oh, very, very rich history.
- Respondent:** Yeah, it was. It is. It is.
- Interviewer:** It's your family, your family going from not quite rags to riches...

- Respondent:** Well it was...
- Interviewer:** ...but they did belong to the golf club.
- Respondent:** Oh, it was rags – it was rags.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, for sure.
- Respondent:** **[0:49:00]** It was rags because I think literally the clothing was made out of sugar sacks. I mean it was like – and my uncle of course, and everybody in the family talked so – with such admiration about my grandmother, who was this selfless woman who, you know, raised on nothing. You know, there was really no food, and then in those days, the – apparently there were a lot of things that the butcher **[0:49:30]** didn't sell, and that's what they lived on. Liver wasn't sold, intestines, spleen.
- Interviewer:** So that's what they ate.
- Respondent:** They ate. And oh yeah, I have the most incredible description from my aunt, because I also have my aunt talking about how my grandmother served eight children, and the blind aunt, and the grandfather, and themselves on one chicken. And how – and I have the most marvelous, marvelous description **[0:50:00]** of her talking about it. So the heroine...
- Interviewer:** Oh.
- Respondent:** ...the heroine was my grandmother. I mean she used to pack lunches for each of them, and they all got to say – got to have their choice of what they wanted, and she would wrap it with different colour string. I mean – not, she was very selfless, and she really asked for nothing for herself.
- Interviewer:** How long did she live?
- Respondent:** She was – I think she was about seventy-six.
- Interviewer:** Mm-hm.

**Respondent:** [0:50:30] And on her – I got her death certificate a number of years ago and it said there was a question, my father filled out, you know, the death – it's his handwriting. So it said, "What was her occupation?" And so my father wrote, "Housewife." "For how long?" He writes, "Forever." [Laughter] And my uncle said that, in this tape that I was listening to, he said, [0:51:00] "She was such a selfless person. I decided that I would do whatever I needed to to make sure that she got – that she had something." And indeed, you know, they bought a lovely house for them, and they, you know, took care of them. She didn't live that – she didn't live that long because she developed – my grandfather lived longer, but – and my father told me the story about how they had a hospital bed at [0:51:30] home, and you know, and she had a nurse at home. And she was like, you know, I guess had heart failure.

**Interviewer:** So she could be at home.

**Respondent:** Yeah, yeah. Heart failure and everything, and she had some, I guess another heart attack, and he was putting in some IV or whatever he was. And she said to him, she said, "Can't you see I've had enough?" And she tore out, she tore out the IV. She said, "Can't you see I've had enough?"

**Interviewer:** Well.

**Respondent:** So, you know, so really in [0:52:00] this whole story, you know, they do talk about my grandfather, but you know, when they really – what they really – they really admired her in such a tremendous way that she was. She was very smart. She was very, very smart.

**Interviewer:** Well and she had twelve people under that roof.

**Respondent:** Can you imagine? Can you imagine that she was – and she was feeding and caring for...

**Interviewer:** And one bathroom, I'm sure.

**Respondent:** I don't know how many bathrooms. [Laughter] And a blind aunt that she couldn't – who had glaucoma and she had gone [0:52:30] blind

from glaucoma and had – and she had to lead her around. I mean it was – monumental what she had to do.

**Interviewer:** Have you heard the expression "Aishet Chayil"?

**Respondent:** No, what's that?

**Interviewer:** It's "a woman of valour."

**Respondent:** And she really was. She really was.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** So anyway, it's quite, quite remarkable. Unfortunately she mostly spoke Yiddish and I really couldn't converse with her.

**Interviewer:** Oh.

**Respondent:** I remember her, but she always would say Yiddish things to me, and my parents used Yiddish as their secret language, and so I never knew, I never [0:53:00] understood it. They just...

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And they kept it that way.

**Respondent:** They kept it that way, and so I have – I know no Yiddish except a couple of expressions.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** But that's – so I really couldn't talk to her.

**Interviewer:** But you still learned her value.

**Respondent:** Oh.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Respondent:** Very, very much. Very, very, very much. Yes. Definitely.

**Interviewer:** I'm going to turn this off.

**Respondent:** Okay. Fine.

**Interviewer:** I just want to say thank you.

**Respondent:** Okay. Okay.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very, very much.

**Respondent:** Oh, I hope it's been enough.

**Interviewer:** Interesting and full of information.

**Respondent:** Oh, I hopes so. Well I did, I did some work. I did listen to the tapes, you know, the **[0:53:30]** CDs that I had made, so I had more to say than I would have.

**Interviewer:** Thank you.

**Respondent:** Anyway, I'm glad that you were able to get the story down, and if you want ...

**[00:53:40]**

[End of recording]