

Interviewed: Gail Freeman

Oral History Clip Title: Like a Little Kibbutz

Theme: Arriving in Canada

Interviewer: Naomi Raichyk

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(Gail)

So again, it's all through the connections. Because my brother, who had gone to medical school with somebody who was already working over here as an anaesthetist, put me in touch with him. And so they were fantastic to us, you know. Of course with the connection, you know, it's, "How can we help you?" And his wife said, "Let me take you these townhouses at Don Mills and Steeles because I think that's where all the South Africans are going. So we arranged it, took a look around, and said, "Oh perfect. This is lovely."

(Interviewer)

[laughs]

(Gail)

It's a townhouse. It's got a backyard. And it was close to the Associated Hebrew Schools, where I knew that we wanted to send our kids to.

(Interviewer)

Right.

(Gail)

And we said, "Okay. That's it." We applied for the, you know, rental and Ed's aunt over here signed security for us for the property and we came. And we literally came with the clothes on our backs and a couple of suitcases and moved in.

(Interviewer)

Did the community reach out to you?

(Gail)

The community was fantastic.

(Interviewer)

The South Africa—



(Gail)

The South African community were out of this world. Out of this world. I happened to go out to the park on the day that we arrived after this long, trying trip. And I sat outside. I was watching my children play. And there was a man by the name of Johnny Lowenstein who was sitting on the bench. I didn't know his name at the time. And, of course, the minute we speak, right?

(Interviewer)

Of course.

(Gail)

"Oh my goodness, you're South African." And he had just arrived. His family had just arrived two or three months before us—maybe not even months. Maybe it was weeks. And he said, "Do you have anything over here?" And I said, "No. It's just us, but I'm sure we'll put it all together." Our lift is arriving, you know. Everything is arriving in a couple of weeks. (inaudible) we have sleeping bags. We'll be fine. And he went and he called his wife out and he said, "Joan, these new people have just arrived." And she said, "What do you mean? Of course, I've got blankets. I've got this. You'll come and have dinner with us." And they are our very dear friends to this day. And then many we learned, of course, through the play and through our children. There were many South African families living there. And we supported each other emotionally and in all kinds of ways, you know. "I can't get the kids today. Will you pick up the kids today?" It was really like a little ghetto, but incredibly warm. It was like a little kibbutz for us, or Moshav. Call it whatever you want.

(Interviewer)

Right.

(Gail)

Call it Delancey Street, you know what I'm saying? It was just—it was wonderful. The kids were all the same ages. 'Cause we were part of that wave of immigration that came. And we all got to know each other. And they're our friends to this day.

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