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JS: We moved to Jasper Place in 1965 from Devon, Alberta. I went one year to Hillcrest Junior High, and then to Jasper Place Composite High School the following year. The first thing that we learned, moving into the city, was that the city was a dangerous place. We were all told that – it was a dangerous place. Compared to Devon, there's no doubt about that. Jasper Place Composite had pretty much double the number of people in it that the entire town of Devon had when I lived there. We were told to be cautious.

I have to say that none of that was applicable once we settled in. I remember my brother and I walking down the street saying, who said this was dangerous? This is just like any other street in any other place. I suppose that when you talk about Jasper Place being a working-class town, that's exactly what it was, and that's where I came from. Devon was an oil town at that point in time. The major employer in town was Imperial Oil, followed by a whole bunch of oil service companies. Devon was actually built by Imperial Oil. There was no town, and when the Leduc-Woodbend field came in, the town of Leduc bumped its property taxes, looking forward to all the new businesses and citizens. So Imperial Oil went and bought some farmland and laid out Alberta's model town. They built a swimming pool, water purification plant, sewage plant, the town hall. It was lock, stock and barrel, a little corporate town. When the Royal Visit came through, they forced out all the people living in Shacktown, which was the 'skid shacks' that the working-class poor lived in in Devon. They closed it all down and hauled them away so that they wouldn't be on site for the royal eyes.

As I said, coming from a small working-class town into Jasper Place Composite was no cultural shift whatsoever. I remember going to Jasper Place Composite and thinking it was intimidating, because it was so big. But there was an interesting culture there. The heroes, the sort of mythological heroes that high school students get; there was a whole collection that were street fighters. It was a big thing - Bob beat up on a cop. This was big news, and it went everywhere. There was a very working-class environment. When I say that, I say that in the best sense of the term. People watched out for each other. As I said, we felt completely safe walking down the

streets. It was probably more peaceful than Devon. When we moved in, we were on 163rd Street. There was St. Francis Xavier and then there was a farmer's field right beside it and farms all the way to the west. When you ask about Aboriginal students, that's true. I only ran into one during a Phys Ed class, one of the Aboriginal kids that was in my Phys Ed class. There was no interaction. Mind you, I was just under five feet tall when I graduated from high school, and weighed 85 pounds. The only place I might've run into him is the wrestling class, and he was much too big.

Q: So, the group we see camped outside of the Jasper Place Hotel, that's not something that you saw in Jasper Place in those days?

JS: No. You talked about the streaming in schools. I was in the academic stream, but I really wanted to take Automotives and Carpentry, and wanted to take some Shop. I wasn't allowed to. They wouldn't let you put it on, so I had to take Art, which I wasn't very good at. In fact, I got suspended from school for a day for backtalking to the Art teacher, but that's another story altogether. There was this divide that you couldn't get across, even if you wanted to. That was the problem. It was almost like there was an effort to stigmatize the Shop kids as being not as smart as the rest of us. It was bullshit. I had lots of friends in the Shop program. Outside of the pretentions of academic streaming, there was no difference. It was nonsense. All it did, as far as I was concerned, is it created an artificial barrier and it prevented a lot of us from getting the kind of education that would've done us a lot of good. That's it on the streaming end. You talked about ethnicity. There were a lot of separate ethnic groups. But I think my mom was right in that they were largely European at that point in time. I had good friends who were Ukrainian; I had some friends who were Jewish. But they were in separate little enclaves. They were all in classes with us, and in fact you could tell, because they got special holidays that we didn't get, which I found quite unfair. In fact, I took Ukrainian Christmas and Ukrainian New Year, and then I took one of the Jewish holidays. Then they went to my mom, who was a guidance counselor, and said, I didn't know you were Jewish. So that put an end to the extra holidays. You asked about transportation. I did take the bus downtown, because I had a job selling shoes part-time at a place called Agnew-Surpass.

I worked for Agnew-Surpass part-time selling shoes on Thursday nights, Friday nights, and all day Saturday, either at the Westmount store or at the downtown store. I took the bus

downtown and back. I guess you could say that it – the #1 bus – took awhile because it was a trolley bus that ran straight down Stony Plain Road and onto Jasper Avenue and down Jasper Avenue. It had a stop every block or so. So it could take a while. But it got you there. The J buses – J9 and the rest of them – they were really efficient. They ran their routes; they used to run one route going one way, and another bus going the other on the same route. J3 and J9 did mirror images. So you could always catch a bus really easily within J.P. and get to the J.P. hub, which was just off Stony Plain Road. That was easy. I didn't have a car, and I thought the public transit system was quite good. Bus rides are more interesting than driving, anyway. There are people around you; there's stuff going on. So that's on transit. My final observation is that a lot of kids I went to school with worked part-time jobs, a lot of it in retail, or you got a gas station, or you got something. But it was the 1960s, and everyone assumed that their life was going to get better. The unemployment rates were very low. The economy wasn't inflating badly until you start to hit the 1970s. In the '60s, there was a real feeling of optimism amongst all of us working-class kids that thought that they were going to go to university; there was going to be no problem. When I was in first year university the tuition was $420. You could make that in one month - save it. Four months working, you could pay for your next year's room and board if you were smart enough to be in a co-op house.

Q: What does it mean to call something a working-class neighbourhood?

JS: I guess it's families who are exchanging their labour for money. I don't follow the sort of sociological breakdown that says you're working class or you're lower middle or upper middle or middle middle. I don't see that. It depends upon how controlled you are by your employer. When people talk about professionals, well yes they're self-employed in that sense. Doctors are their own corporations. But what I'm talking about is people who trade their labour for money and that's the way they make their living. There's a certain sense of morals and ethics that sort of permeate that kind of neighbourhood and those kind of families. The '60s were misleading in that sense, because we all thought everything was going to go well. When the bottom drops out, all of a sudden you realize - wait a minute! This class thing that we thought maybe didn't make a difference suddenly reared its ugly head. Once you start getting high unemployment and you read the response from everyone around saying, well if you just combed your hair better, or if you just had a nicer smile, or if you just presented yourself better at a job interview, you'd get

a job. You could look at the help wanted indexes and see that there were across the country 70,000 openings, and a million people out of work. Well I guess they just didn't comb their hair well enough.

Q: Did you notice outsiders coming into Jasper Place?

JS: Actually I'd say it was the reverse. There were some really quite well-to-do areas in the Jasper Place area. I'm thinking of the area around Hillcrest Country Club. But here's the interesting thing. Most of those people sent their kids to Ross Sheppard High School. The well-to-do shipped their kids across to Ross Sheppard because that's where the better class of people went. Jasper Place, there were kids well off, but it was the same thing. In my lifetime I've been economically stressed at times. When my parents were paying off their farm debt, we didn't have a whole hell of a lot of money to spend on anything. But you don't notice it if you're in a community where everybody's in the same boat. Yes, somebody's slightly better off and somebody's slightly worse off, but nobody cared. There wasn't that kind of disparity of wealth that you found if you went into the city and found the Hillcrest Country Club people. They really were a different animal than us. But Jasper Place was not that kind of school. It was the kind of school that catered to people like me.

Q: Did you find that people from the different neighbourhoods mixed together?

JS: That's a tricky question. I didn't move into the city until I was in grade 9. I went to Hillcrest for one year, and the friends at Hillcrest had their own little groups, and Stratford Junior High had their own little groups, and these different junior highs. I'm assuming the same thing happened at elementary schools, as you were morphed into a junior high. In the first year or so in high school, those previous groups existed, but they melted away. Every class you went into, you had different people in it. You had a homeroom, but the only time I saw a lot of the kids in my homeroom was when we took attendance in the morning and when we had to gather at the end of the day. But that was it. So I think those little groups broke down really quickly. Bear in mind, you're talking about teenagers. There's a lot of endocrine-driven behaviours going on, and that sort of thing doesn't discriminate about which neighbourhood you're from.

Q: You mentioned that many kids had part-time jobs. Did they have to do it to support their families, or was it just for their own personal benefit?

JS: That's not an either/or kind of question. I got my very first job when I was 12, working in an autobody shop in Devon. It paid me 52 cents an hour, and cigarettes were 42 cents a package. That's when I started smoking, although my parents didn't discover that until about five or six years later. But what I'm getting at is that for a lot of us, if there was enough food to eat and you had clothes to wear, then what you did with the money was, you bought cigarettes, or you saved up and got that pair of running shoes that was the thing to have at that point in time. For me it was cigarettes and beer. But it was a combination of that. For kids from families that were having a little harder time, then their money went to their own clothes or stuff that, if you were slightly better off, your parents would probably provide for you.

Q: You went to Hillcrest?

JS: I was only there for a year. I thought it was like a spaceship, to tell you the truth. It was a round building with no windows, none! The gym was in the centre in a circular gym, which is not really conducive to a lot of sports when you get right down to it. You had these basketball courts and stuff that are rectangles, trying to fit into a circle. My marks were always good, even when I was a lazy turd, which was much of the time. When I went to Hillcrest they put me into the honours class. But then, it turned out that everybody in the honours class played in the band, and I didn't play a musical instrument. So I sat and read books for a couple of weeks during band practise, the band schedule. They said, "No, you won't fit here." So I got moved to a regular classroom where I made a lot of good friends who led me into all kinds of trouble.

Hillcrest was a fascinating school. The dividers between the classrooms were movable. So you could have a classroom that was this narrow slice or you could have it twice as big or three times as big. It was pretty good. Outside of the usual fun of a guy like me, trying to find someplace to smoke, it was good. At the time, I think we were just inside the area where I wouldn't get a bus pass to go to Hillcrest; so it was a 15 block walk. If we'd been three houses further along I would've got a bus pass and gotten a free bus ride back and forth to school.

[….]

Q: At that time, were people buying chunks of land and developing them into suburbs?

JS: Oh yes. In fact, the house we rented and the neighbourhood we lived in had two house styles; it had a bungalow and a split level. The bungalows? Sometimes they'd switch them this way or that way, the doorways and windows. But it was two blocks long and about four or five blocks deep all the same, all exactly the same, which made it very egalitarian as far as I'm concerned. You knew what their house was like inside, because it was just like yours. I think ours was called Meadowlark, or was it North Meadowlark or West Meadowlark? West Meadowlark, maybe. Anyway, there were a lot of neighbourhoods like that.

Q: Some people identify with their area (Meadowlark, Mayfair, etc.) rather than Jasper Place.

JS: I've seen that; it's bizarre.

Q: Can you talk about this thing that the developers would give their neighbourhoods a name?

JS: It's something that you see that's commonplace now. But you're right. The developers would build a neighbourhood. They'd construct it, they'd give it a name, and you were supposed to have an identity that was attached to your neighbourhood, as separate from being attached to this imaginary dividing line that was sort of 95th Avenue. The other side of 95th Avenue? Well that's a different community. It's absurd when you think about it, but it's marketing. So much of the foolishness that goes on around us has got to do with marketing. Yes, you're free. What are we free to do? You're free to have Cornflakes, or you're free to have Rice Krispies.

Q: It also may have to do with people not wanting to identify with the negative stereotype of Jasper Place.

JS: Oh yes. I hadn't thought of it that way, but you're quite right. There were especially the more upscale neighbourhoods, which ours wasn't. But the slightly more upscale ones? You go that way towards Stony Plain Road; it gets tougher. In the main, not true. Older houses, smaller, but…

[….]

Q: Did your part-time job put more stress on you in terms of your academic career?

JS: No, it was just normal; a few hours Thursday and Friday. and one day on Saturday. I was never the kind of guy that was going to be swatting at homework. What I liked in my spare time was reading. I was a reader, and outside of that, hockey - playing hockey at the local outdoor rink.

Q: Where was the rink?

JS: It was right beside Meadowlark Elementary School. It was Meadowlark Community League, and then there was the rink. And then, there was a baseball field and then the school. Typical.

Q: What happened when the bar on top of the trolley bus came off the wires?

JS: Needless to say, the bus stopped instantly. When you're riding an electric trolley bus, if it disconnects from the wires – because it had two little prongs that ran on the wires up top – if it disconnected, the bus just stopped. It's an electric motor; so it just went dead. Everybody on the bus knew what that meant. You just stopped, and you sit there and the bus driver would get out. He had a hook and he'd be going like this - trying to get things back on. You just sat there and waited it out. If the driver was good at it, they could have you wired up and back again in two minutes. But then again, it could take a lot longer than that. I have to say, they didn't come off that often; they really didn't.

Q: Were there certain corners where it was more likely?

JS: There were tough corners, you're right. When you came up Stony Plain Road and that right at 124th Street, it was a hard right, and then two blocks, and a hard left. Any time where there were several lines coming together so that a bus could come in this way and up, or this way and up, those kinds of junctions were problematic. But the other thing is, trolley buses never polluted the air. They were efficient and they were quiet, and they didn't burn gas or diesel. I read a book back in the early '70s about the efforts that the oil companies and auto manufacturers went through to try to get rid of the electrical trolley systems in every city in North America. It was a concerted campaign because they wanted them to be buying their new internal combustion engines and burning lots of oil and gas.

Q: Was there a minimum age for buying cigarettes?

JS: No. In theory. Starting in Devon, as long as I bought the same kinds of cigarettes that my parents smoked, the local confectionary store just assumed I was buying them for my parents. When I was 12, I probably looked like I was 7; I was very small for my age. I never had a problem. They were selling cigarettes everywhere and everybody smoked everywhere. Even if they said, are these for you? I'd say, no; they're for my dad. Okay, off you went. I never had any problems buying cigarettes. [….]

Q: What about buying liquor?

JS: The ALCB. Unlike corporations that own almost all of the liquor stores now, the ALCB was very strict on I.D. A guy like me would never have been able to buy a case of beer or anything; just not possible. No note saying you're buying it for your dad is going to work. As you said, there were the guys who looked old – they could grow a mustache; they could grow a beard. They could do it, but you had to know one of them. Other than that, starting in grade 10, we made a relationship with a bootlegger. It was a guy that all you had to do was buy him a bottle of Branvin Sherry, and he would go in and get the Branvin Sherry and two cases of beer. What was that wine we used to all drink? Mateus! He'd bring them out and we'd divvy it up, and he'd go away happy. There were lots of guys who would…. really, what you were looking at was guys who were problem drinkers, and we were helping them out. That's a very selfish way to look at it.

Q: When did you become aware of unions?

JS: I'd say in high school I developed an early romance with the notion of radical political thought, starting with, I suspect, having read… I think it was Orwell, or *The Spanish Cockpit* - one of those. I became quite taken with anarcho-syndicalism, in Spain in particular. But when I ended up at university working on *The Gateway*, that's when ideologically I started to see the connection between the way the working class organized itself and the possibilities for social change. I've always seen unions that way, as instrumental rather than worthy of praise in and of themselves. The best thing about them is that it was working people organizing themselves. The worst thing about them is the way that the leadership can be coopted and incorporated into a society that's inimical to their own interests. So unions, probably starting at 17 or 18 at the U. of A., specifically because of their entry into working-class discourse.

Q: Were you still living in Jasper Place when you attended U. of A.?

JS: Oh no. I left home June 30th, the day I finished grade 12, and hitchhiked up to Prince George and worked there. But the next year, I went to university and lived in a co-op house, the infamous Poundmaker Co-op house. My room had actually been a sewing closet; there was room for a single mattress on the floor, and a trunk.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

JS: No, I think we're good on J.P. Just to reiterate that Jasper Place did have a different character than some of the more well-to-do areas of the city. There's no doubt about it. But it also had a great feeling to it. I would say there was more a sense of equality. It was the time and place – it was the '60s, where everything looked positive.

Q: Did you work at the Starlite?

JS: You asked if I worked at the Starlite Drive-in? Yes I did. It was a great summer job, I have to say. There were three of us; two of my friends and me, and we got jobs guiding the cars in at the start and taking the fares. The cars would all be lined up and we'd take their money and give them their tickets and let them go in. So that was all well and good, and you had to do that all the way until almost the first intermission. Then, at the first intermission, we had to run inside and serve hotdogs and popcorn. To this day, the smell of boiled hotdogs doesn't do anything for me. But we also got freebie wieners! After it was over, we could have hotdogs and stuff. We would go and sit out and watch the second feature on a set of bleachers that were just outside. We'd watch the second feature, and then just before it broke up, we'd race with our flashlights to the exits. You had to guide cars out, because otherwise everybody would be running into each other. That was the work day; so it was great, except that the feature stayed for a couple of weeks. I saw *Bullet* I think 15 times, so that I could repeat word for word every piece of dialogue in it. Great car scene though. Great car chase! And a decent job. I drive by where it used to be, right just kitty corner to where Meadowlark Mall is. It's all big apartments in there now. I say, ah what a shame. It was a great landscape feature, and it was fun.

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