**Michael Rotman** [00:00:00] Okay. It is June 18, 2011, my name is Michael Rotman, and we are at Coventry Library. So could you please tell me your name and where and when you were born?

**Violet Frayne** [00:00:12] My name is Violet Frayne and I was born in New York City in 1942.

**Michael Rotman** [00:00:21] Okay. And how did you first... What is your earliest memory of Coventry?

**Violet Frayne** [00:00:29] My husband and I and our two children moved to an apartment on the corner of Mayfield and Belmar Roads, which is two blocks up from Coventry pretty much, when my children were 1 and 2, I believe, and this was 1966 and then in nineteen... And so I did all my shopping and walked up and down the street and bought chickens at the chicken market.

**Michael Rotman** [00:01:00] Live chickens, right?

**Violet Frayne** [00:01:01] Well my husband convinced me that going to Pick-N-Pay was very American even though he was American and that I was hopelessly suburban and that only fresh chicken was fresh. So I took my children to the chicken market and their first reaction was, oh, it smells funny. And I just said, well wait outside. And there were all these poor little chickens in cages. And the guy says, Which one lady? And I couldn't look them in the eye. I was like, I'm against the death penalty. And I went, finally, that one! And he wrapped it up and handed it to me. And I was appalled that the package was warm. And, oh, I prayed that he wouldn't kill the chicken in front of me, which thankfully he didn't. And then I took it and held it by the string because I didn't touch the warm paper and kept it in the refrigerator for five days, and when I opened it and found that there were chicken feet, which I was not used to. And then finally cooked the chicken, I said to my husband and very smugly, See, it doesn't taste any different. He's said, But it's five days old. But in 1968, we bought the house that I live in now on Washington and Cottage Grove, and I took a job working for Bill Jones, who was one of the pioneers on the street. He had a leather shop and he made sandals. He started a dress store above the leather shop. And the woman who was managing its name was Susan Malone. And Bill was making the sandals down the basement. Susan hired me to help her sell dresses. And I did it part-time. And then I did that for a couple of... for a short while, a couple of years. But somewhere during that time a storefront store became available two or three stores down, and then Bill moved his whole operation upstairs and we moved down a couple of doors. So at that time, as I recall, the only true hippies on the street were Bill Jones. We were the first dress store to sell miniskirts at that time. Higbee's didn't sell them. And Larry Lockhart started the Coven Tree, which was on the opposite side of the street, and he started it with his wife, Linda. And it was also just north of where the kosher chicken market was. And during this time, then other... Tommy of Tommy's fame was still working for Fozzie in Ace Drug, which was up just south of Bill Jones. Since the fire, and then CoventrYard was rebuilt, it's hard to imagine it exactly as it was, but Tommy was there. But he did not own the place at that time. I think he was in the process of buying it, and I think he may have bought it out from someone in nineteen, the most recent owner, in 1970ish. Something interesting about Tommy. You're interviewing him, I'm sure.

**Michael Rotman** [00:04:42] I don't know if we've arranged that, but I'm sure will want to.

**Violet Frayne** [00:04:44] He started... When we lived in the apartment, we would walk our children down to Coventry and across at night just for something to do, my husband and I, and we would go to a drug, which is where Tommy, all of age 13 or 14, worked behind the soda counter. And we would sit down, have a Coke and talk to him. And when the first owner had made enough money or decided to move to Solon, whatever it is, the next donor came in and he kept on Tommy. And I think Tommy might have had two or three different owners, and I believe they could have all been Middle Eastern Lebanese. And Tommy told me that they all taught him something. He said, you know, Fozzie's wife taught me how to make this spinach pie and all that. And then when, Tommy might have been only 20, when finally somebody was leaving and he was able to buy the operation, and I think he bought it while I was still working at Dress Me. So there was Tommy. There was Larry Lockhart, Bill Jones, there's Malone, me. Ron Eisenberg owned Carroll Drug at that time. And he was very supportive, even though, of all these newer merchants, even though he did not he himself was not a hippie, he was a pharmacist, but very, very nice guy, And it's possible he grew up in University Heights or was a local guy. During that time, I do remember Peter Schleiwin moving in and starting Record Revolution. I do remember them starting the jean store on the corner, The Gap, and both of those people kind of fit our mold. And Larry Lockhart broke up with his wife Linda and then made plans to open Cargo, which was a big, almost like a Pier One-type store. And other than that, there was a bike stores. There was the same hardware store that's been down there forever, and one day Bill Jones said someone had approached him to do public relations for the street and he asked if I would go represent the street and I went, or I went to a meeting, or maybe it was held in the store, and all that I really recall is, I mean, we weren't dope-smoking hippies, but we were not totally establishment. So we were wearing more fashionable clothes. This woman came in wearing makeup and that was sort of non-authentic. And she said that if we all as merchants paid her a certain amount of money every month, she would have lunch with different columnists for the local papers and she would mention our name and get us some publicity. And there was something about her that it just wasn't us. And I said to Bill later, we can do it ourselves. So I said, let's form the Coventry Merchants Association. And Bill was more of an artist than an entrepreneur. I mean, as a sandal maker, he had anyone who's a sandal maker is not a banker. And so I got... made up a list of merchants on the street. And we started with the ones that would be friendly to us. And we started holding meetings once a month at my house on Washington Boulevard. And we talked about the fact that the city council did not like hippies and they therefore didn't like the merchants that drew the hippies there. And they were trying every way they could to make life difficult, because as one councilman who we invited to a meeting to address our group, one said, why can't you be like Cedar and Lee? And we were appalled. So, after we had built up a war chest and talked about what we wanted to do, and I actually invited everyone on the street, I think during that time that's when the kosher chicken market closed down because I would not have neglected them. They would have gotten an invitation even though they said no. And I know I invited the hardware store guy and he never came. And I would go down and say, well, this is what happened at the meeting. There was Pick-N-Pay was where Marc's Drug is. So our strategy initially was they think we're hippies. A lot of people think about hippies and they think they're dirty. So we bought a street sweeper and there was a girl that shopped in our store whose father owned a big sign company, Buddy Simon and he used to put signs on Carnegie Avenue that changed once a week, and they were little kind of ditties and either funny or witty sayings or philosophical. And it always ended up with Simon's Signs and...maybe it was Simon Says. I didn't drive down to work every day, so I don't remember seeing it. Well, Shelley, his little cute Jewish daughter, wore the shortest skirts that anybody had ever seen. So we got Shelley to run the street sweeper at public times. And my husband took pictures of her. And I mean, Larry and Bill, everybody knew what we were doing. And I went home and wrote press releases, "Hippies Clean Up Act." And keep in mind, these are men with hundred thousand, two hundred thousand in inventory and in leases. And that was real money in 1969. And so I delivered the press releases with the photos of the girl with the long, long legs and the short skirt to the Plain Dealer, the Cleveland Press, and the Sun Press. And I believe the Sun Press ran a big picture. Hippies Clean Up Act. And I think the Cleveland Press ran something, but I don't think the Plain Dealer did. And then we through the efforts of Larry Lockhart and Ron Eisenberg, there was a light that they acquired that they got installed. And then, after having our organization for a year, we decided that we were not going to be anything unless we had the homeowners behind us. So we formed the Coventry Homeowners Association and started invite... And this might have been the spring of '71, started inviting people like me who really didn't have a business but lived in the neighborhood. And we raised the money to plant the first trees on Coventry. The city said that its name was Alex Szabo, was the city forester at that time. They would plant them free if we would... I think it was a twenty-five dollars a tree. And then my children were a little older. My family had a house on Long Island. So went away for the summer, and then I decided I wanted to do some other things. And Coventry Neighbors, what had been Coventry Homeowners Association, morphed into Coventry Neighbors and they took over what was going on. And, you know, more and more shops came. And I still had a relationship with some many of the people there, but I was not as actively involved after 1972.

**Michael Rotman** [00:13:28] Well that's a fascinating, fascinating story there. So it sounds like though eventually you kind of won over... or maybe you didn't... you won over the other merchants who disagreed with you at the start?

**Violet Frayne** [00:13:46] I don't know if the other merchants were against anybody. I mean, they... Business people are business people. You know, it's kind of like, the you don't bother me, girly, I don't bother you. You know, it wasn't like the people who own the Heights Art Theater said, how dare you have a store? And certainly the Mitchells wouldn't care. Mitchell's were outraged when they were forced out of their place and Bill.... You should talk to Bill. You know Mitchell's Candy, right?

**Michael Rotman** [00:14:22] Yes.

**Violet Frayne** [00:14:22] At that point they went and bought their building up on Lee Road because his mother never wanted to be in that position again. But I don't think anyone overtly ever said anything derogatory. But I think the city... the city fathers and maybe some righteous neighborhood people who said, how dare those women go braless and Dear Mayor, you know, this is what I think. I believe that I drove down the street and I saw them smoking dope. But I don't think there was antagonism from other merchants. And if there were, it probably would have directed been directed specifically towards another merchant who lived there. Nobody would... Even the most traditional merchant, Leo's Delicatessen, which was a creepy one. And then there was... What was the one on the corner that was always being raided by the Board of Health where the... across from the Hunan that was... Irv's. Oh! With the rats! I mean, they didn't care if you're a hippie, if you came in and spent money. I mean, everybody... All merchants like it when people spend money. But I think there was the perception of antiwar... How dare they question our President? How dare they dress that way? And so those who were very, very establishment, but perhaps not living and working on the street. They made their wishes known to city council who felt that to have a neat and tidy community, you should look like the men go to Brooks Brothers and women go to Talbots. And. But I don't remember any ill will.

**Michael Rotman** [00:16:31] So. So. I guess I'm wondering, how did that that hip... Because everybody who I've talked to today so far said, oh, you know, Coventry used to be like the Haight-Ashbury there. There were all those hippies. So, when did that... how did that era die out, or what was responsible for that?

**Violet Frayne** [00:16:47] Well, first of all, my brothers and sister were in California living in the Haight-Ashbury,.

**Michael Rotman** [00:16:54] Okay.

**Violet Frayne** [00:16:55] And I've still a brother in the Castro district. It was not it wasn't like that, but it made you feel good 'cause... I mean, if you... If you're insecure enough that you could only identify with something in Time magazine, Time magazine highlighted Haight-Ashbury. They didn't highlight Coventry. But to the extent that Cleveland people also agreed with "Make love, not war" or I want to dress the way I want or I want to have long hair, and I like this kind of music, I like Jefferson Airplane or I like whoever it was then, the Moody Blues. These people liked the fact that there were a couple of merchants that sold, you know, goofy kind of hippie beads and short skirts. So people from all over Cleveland gravitated because it was something that they... It was a national movement that resonated with them, and the only way to kind of support it would have been to go to Coventry. I mean, mothers and fathers dropped... came and dropped their kids off on the corner and said, I'll be... Out of their fancy cars. You know, if I had a Volkswagen, they had a big Cadillac with fins. And they said to the kids, oh, we'll be back to pick you up at six and out tumble kids and talk and jeans and looking dirty, the hippies! And then Mom's going to take you back to Shaker when when she's done what she's... ever she's doing. So it was, I mean, we were proud that we were taking a contrary view. And I think your question was, when did it end? Or...

**Michael Rotman** [00:19:04] Yeah, sure.

**Violet Frayne** [00:19:05] It didn't end, though. You know, it's still... It's not Cedar and Lee, and it only ends to the extent that, you know, the day that Crate and Barrel wants to be there, I'm sure, or West Elm sets up shop. It still has to... It's still a little edgy. It's not the most expensive street in the world. And Tommy's is still there. And I... I don't know.

**Michael Rotman** [00:19:39] Yeah, you're right. Well, boy, we're at about 20 minutes. So I don't want take too much of your time. Is there anything else, I guess briefly, you'd want to share or you say, I'm sure you have lots to share, before we wrap up if there's anything else you've...

**Violet Frayne** [00:19:57] Well, I'm definitely pleased to see so much interest in the street, and my daughter was home from college at one time in 10, 15, no 20 years ago, and there were benches out there and it was nighttime and I don't know whether we'd been to some Chinese restaurant or where we'd been. And I feel very proud that I was lucky enough to live in the neighborhood during that time, and I feel that I was very lucky to have been offered a job and being able to participate. And it really was a time in which people believed they could make a difference. And we did. And after a while, the city fathers saw how much money was coming in and tax revenue and nobody was getting shot. Someone told me there was a time when there were motorcycle people there. That was prior to me because I don't remember motorcycle people. But that certainly might have been a frightening experience but... So I think it's nice. It's real kind of neighborhood democracy. People getting together and let's make it the way we want. And that's one business I think needs to be mentioned, it's... Arabica had its beginning. So if you can track Carl down at Phoenix Coffee. You know who he is.

**Michael Rotman** [00:21:30] Yes.

**Violet Frayne** [00:21:30] Okay, good. Okay, 'cause I thought that was a great story how he started a little building behind...

**Michael Rotman** [00:21:40] Yes.

**Violet Frayne** [00:21:40] Anyway, so that's about it.

**Michael Rotman** [00:21:41] All right, great. Well, thank you for talking to us today.