*Begin transcript:*

ALEX: So, you came here with your children?

RONNIE: Yeah – so, I have two sons and we lived at Bleecker Street, which is now called Diane Frankling Co-op. This farm was our hang out, ‘cuz, I was a single mum, I work at a non-profit, so we didn’t have tons of money, so this would kind of be the way we would go. Um – do you need help when we’re at crosswalks or intersections, like let you know we are crossing now, or you’re good with your stick – what’s good with you?

ALEX: If you could let me know if there is a step up or step down, that's really helpful.

RONNIE: Absolutely. Ok.

ALEX: I am sort of, I’m just slightly behind you when I am holding your arm like this, so I feel pretty good, and my cane is doing some of the work.

RONNIE: Alright. Ok so, we’re gonna be in a little uneven ground now going through a little bit of a tree.

ALEX: Where is this? Where are we now?

RONNIE: We’re at Parliament and Winchester.

ALEX: Parliament and Winchester!

RONNIE: Yeah - by Timmies.

ALEX: Ok. Gosh, was Tim Hortons here all this time?

RONNIE: No, it used to be the Winchester Hotel – I used to actually drink in here as well as my mom when they used to have $3 beer and the country music.

ALEX: So, if you used to drink here and your mom, was this where you grew up as well?

RONNIE: Actually, no, this is where I matured up. I grew up near Gerrard Square – in public housing over there, TCHC, used to call it Metro Toronto Housing? Yeah, so that was where I grew up when I first came to Toronto ‘cause we came from NS when I was little – my dad needed to, he was in the army and nothing was happening in Nova Scotia, so he said “I’m just going to take my kids to Toronto,” and we ended up in Toronto.

ALEX: Do you have any memories of Winchester Hotel (*laughter*) being there with your drink in hand, listening to the country music?

RONNIE: I think that was the jist of it – going in and finding country music. I think most stories are just my mum and her boyfriend – they’d always be, they were the funniest because he would just say like “Babes! Let's go and have a couple of beers at the Winchester” and that would be the extent of my fun just watching those two having a good time.

ALEX: Your mum and her boyfriend?

RONNIE: Yes. See, my mom and dad split up? It’s weird – they split up for 10 years and then got back. It’s a really weird story, and it’s a beautiful story – I know –

ALEX: That’s unusual –

RONNIE: It’s so true.

ALEX: So how did that happen? What happened?

RONNIE: Um. My dad - we decided to throw a surprise party for my dad who was turning 55, and um, we brung my uncle from Nova Scogtia as a surprise, when he came and he ended up talking to them, and saying “You know, you guys have been together for a really long time and you know, this divorce is almost ready to sign…” – and they talked them into hanging out. My mum went to my dad’s house that weekend, for the weekend, and she came back on the Monday and said “I’m getting back with your dad – I’m moving out” – and 7 months later they moved to Nova Scotia and they built their dream house – that whole Cinderella story…Mum and Dad - you do always want to get them back together – and so, for me it was just unbelievable. It was almost like a miracle. It was like a beautiful little –

ALEX: So, you were happy about it?

RONNIE: Oh my God! Yeah, yeah for sure. We had a big party before they left – friends came, and they sang and we drank, and we just had a really good time.

ALEX: Oh, that’s so great.

RONNIE: Yeah it is – and the house is still there, and I just want to keep it for my children and their children and hope that they can go back, and see their roots ‘cause as Black Canadians, that was one of first settlements, and I want them to be able to identify with that culturally and to be able to go back there.

ALEX: And did you raise your two – did you say two boys?

RONNIE: Yeah

ALEX: Two boys on your own?

RONNIE: I’d like to say I did, but Bleecker Street was my saving grace – and it is a community of beautiful, beautiful people, and I don't think they would be where they were, if we weren’t there. They've always been there from Diane who passed, as well as my cousin Anna that lived down the hallway, his godmother Tony that lived at Fieldstone, my sister Nikki that lived on the eighth floor, and all the other neighbours that were in the building, you know. My boys learnt how to be gentlemen and gentle people from that co-op, and they gave them so many opportunities, you know? We could go to pumpkin farms, we could go cut down trees, we could hang out at Halloween parties, we could celebrate so much there together, and they learned so much about diversity and being yourself, that we would never have got that if it wasn’t for that co-op, and so, I loved it.

ALEX: Yeah, so that’s really wonderful that it really created a family unit.

RONNIE: Absolutely – it was the village that raised my children – it was that village – it was beautiful.

ALEX: So, pretty much this neighbourhood is – carries the sort of ghosts of everyone who’s close to you.

RONNIE: Oh, for sure. Absolutely.

*End of transcript.*