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Harold – living life to the full

Harold Rubin, born in 1927 in New York City, lives in Shoreditch and remains an active cook, host, writer and entrepreneur

Childhood

My family – my father had been a clothing manufacturer, really successful, although he'd been an immigrant to the States. Unfortunately, in my early childhood his health went and he became an invalid, but fortunately there was enough money to support us.

We lived at the top of the Bronx in an area that wasn't very welcoming to Jews when we first moved in there. I experienced some pretty awful things as a child, which is unfortunately what one is seeing here now – with attacking people and being abusive and insulting.

I was not a very happy child and when I was an infant my parents got a wonderful housekeeper who raised me. I was tied to Margaret's apron strings – she was a black lady from the American South and she was a wonderful cook and she pampered me, so I never ate a hamburger until I was 20 years old! She taught me how to cook and I never stopped.

Adulthood

I came to London to live in September of 1970. I had left New York two years before to live on the island of Madeira. It did not work out, parted with the lady I lived with and did not wish to return to the States.

I had started working for myself at 17. I have had several careers – as an interior and architectural designer, then an art gallery owner and director, part-time journalist, then back to designer. I am a born entrepreneur. I got fortunately involved in the arts from a very early age. I got to know some very well-known people which was a great step up to doing the work I did. And I probably had more courage than brains in doing exactly what I wanted whenever I wanted. I've also quit when I was bored. I have always done cooking and in London it became a career as a restaurateur and then another art gallery. You can do quite a lot if you start at 17 and reach 92.

Changes

The changes are incredible and they go on from week to week. This has become such a fashionable trendy neighbourhood, but where have the people gone that used to live here – that used to pay cheap rents? I can imagine since this building has existed for nearly 200 years, what it used to cost to live here compared to what it costs now. Where are those people? Where are they driven to and what are they doing? Think of the enormous number of people who live in London and are homeless.

The big buildings, you wonder if anybody actually lives in them, you never see anybody. Living here and seeing changes in personality – mostly there are young working people, you don't see family life, you don't see children. Most of these buildings aren't even suitable to raise children in.

Smithfield's disappeared. The supermarkets have taken all that away. Thanks to supermarkets all these individuals that used to be so good at

serving people have been driven out of business. Every individual butcher I've used apart from Porterford's near Saint Paul's have just gone and fishmongers went before that.

I have never liked pizza – I think it's an inferior horrible food! I've never eaten in McDonald's, I've never eaten Kentucky Fried Chicken. I admit to being a terrible snob, but I will work very hard, I will spend four hours making a meal, I will spend three days preparing for a party!

Rio Cinema – A beloved Hackney institution by Leon Boujo

“*Today the Rio is an integral part of the rich, multicultural Hackney community, showing a wide variety of films, both art house and blockbusters, as well as housing film festivals.*”

The Rio Cinema, a beloved Hackney institution, has a fascinating past. Initially an auctioneer house owned by Clara Ludski, a progressive businesswoman, Ludski soon saw potential to convert it into a picture house. In 1909, the Kingsland Place for Animated Pictures, one of London's first picture houses, was opened. It proved so popular that innovative Ludski decided to expand and six years later the more impressive Kingsland Empire was opened.

Changing ownership in the 1930s (a time which also saw the advent of sound) the Empire underwent an art deco makeover and became a veritable rival to any other fancy London cinema. What was remarkable about this refurbishment was that it was configured in such a way that, through a secret door in the roof, you can still see untouched remnants

of the original 1915 auditorium, allowing you a delightful glimpse into the past.

And it is, in fact, this art deco refurbishment that is the essence of the interior style of the cinema today.

Since 1937, the cinema has gone through various, but less dramatic face-lifts, showing cartoons in the late 50s and 60s, followed by art house films and then, for a racy period in the 70s, adult films and burlesque.

Today the Rio is an integral part of the rich, multicultural Hackney community, showing a wide variety of films, both art house and blockbusters, as well as housing film festivals. Run as a not-for-profit organisation, it relies on the financial support and love of the local community, customers and members for its survival. It is a truly wonderful institution that will, let's hope, continue to remain an important London arts hub for years to come.

