

# Lunch at the Rideau

A Kublacom Pictures Documentary Film



## Tag Line

A nostalgic look at Ottawa's beloved Rideau Bakery lunch counter.

## Short Synopsis

The film captures a moment in time in the life of Ottawa's beloved Rideau Bakery lunch counter. Opened in 1965, its simple offerings of kosher soups and sandwiches fueled the bodies and souls of customers for decades, building community along the way, but now forever gone.

## Long Synopsis

*Lunch at the Rideau* tells the story of Ottawa's Rideau Bakery lunch counter, one of the last kosher lunch counters to have existed in Canada, and lovingly maintained by the Kardish family.

The beginning of the film sets the scene for the lunch counter operation within the Rideau Bakery and its long history, starting with Rivka, the great grandmother of current owners, Louis and David Kardish, and their sister, Debbie Baylin. And to the renowned quality of the bakery's rye bread made with Rivka's special recipe.

David Kardish recounts that the bakery was first opened in 1930 on Clarence Street and that now a fourth generation of the family have dedicated their lives to keeping it going. Along with their staff, the team cares about the quality of baked goods produced every day and that quality is reflected in the customers who come from far and wide, even internationally, especially for the rye bread.

The lunch counter itself was opened in 1965 within the Rideau Street outlet of the bakery. There we meet Rabbi Cohen who supervises the kosher status of the lunch counter and attests to the rarity of such places for kosher-observing members of the Jewish community. With its chrome stools and I-shaped arborite surface, "trapped in time" is an expression that easily comes to mind.

It is evident that part of the lunch counter's success is largely due to Gloria Edmonds. The counter is Gloria's domain, she runs it, serving soups and sandwiches from a large pot, kept warm on a hot plate. A large mirror on the wall allows her to see and chat with customers while filling their orders. We meet some of the 'regulars' as they attest to the fresh quality of the food and to Gloria's warmth, charm, and efficiency, all of which draw them to return, time and time again.

Customers often return to the same seat, like homing pigeons, seeking the feeling of comfort in the food, the routine, the camaraderie and connection with Gloria and other diners. In a bit of fun, one customer, Nathan Smith, challenges Gloria to make a sandwich blindfolded, and her mastery of the space and task are revealed.

Regular customers Moe and Rose Litwack note how important the kosher supervision of the lunch counter has become, allowing them to enjoy sharing a meal outside of their

home and connecting with the community. With the help of Moe, Rabbi Cohen, David Kardish and Gloria, we learn about what kosher supervision means, and the meticulous food preparation practices and blessings that are adhered to in the bakery.

For one customer in particular, Brenda Firestone, the lunch counter offers a profound connection to her childhood, to her mother, and to a Jewish heritage that her parents chose to disconnect from, in the aftermath of the second world war. Through Brenda's reminiscences and family photos, we learn about the deep meaning that a seemingly ordinary place like the Rideau Bakery and its simple lunch counter, can hold in a person's life.

The Kardish family reflect on the pride and hard work that have brought them to this moment in time, but they also signal that the future is uncertain, they wonder whether a fifth generation of the family will choose to carry it forward. Running a bakery is a challenging lifestyle, many long hours and much devotion are required and there are so many other opportunities out there for the younger generation. With the help of Brenda and Gloria too, they ponder what would be lost if the lunch counter and bakery were to close. And Rabbi Cohen chimes in that it would be a horrible loss, one that he would work to stop from happening.

At the end of the film, we learn that the Rideau Bakery and lunch counter were closed in 2019, a beloved part of the community was lost forever.

## Quotes from the Film

"They did a story on the Hundred Best Things in Canada. I don't know if you recall that or not, but one of the hundred best things in Canada was Rideau Bakery rye bread."

**Moe Litwack**

"And that we can thank our great grandmother Rivka for because it's her recipe that still endures today." **Louis Kardish**

"As far as kosher counters are concerned. I'm not familiar with too many in Canada if there are any others at all. I know in New York there's a couple. I've had a couple, but it's pretty unique." **Rabbi Cohen**

"The look on the counter today is the same as it was when we first opened in 1965. It's trapped in time. And I like it like that, personally. And a lot of people like the tradition."

**David Kardish**

"... coming here for me and sitting in the Rideau Bakery and eating the salmon sandwich and chatting with Gloria and being around the people from the community, I'm kind of seeking that connection in a strange kind of way, or not so strange with my mom." **Brenda Firestone**



“I think lunch counters are kind of disappearing with the advent of coffeehouses, and I think that's sad. But I really think that you lose something from a social point of view, a contact.” **David Kardish**

## Background

*Lunch at the Rideau* was filmed and written in 2002 by a team of aspiring documentary filmmakers, Jane Gurr, Kent Newson and Noha Fuad. The three met at the introductory documentary course at the Summer Institute of Film and Television (SIFT), held in summer at Heritage College in Gatineau, Quebec. Along with other Ottawa-based people in the SIFT course they formed a small group called Documentary Works, with the goal of supporting each other in becoming filmmakers. They came up with the idea of making a film called *Counter Culture*, to tell the stories of lunch counters in the Ottawa area that were slowly disappearing with the advent of coffee shops and chain restaurants. The Rideau Bakery lunch counter was one of three lunch counters chosen to be featured and Jane, Kent and Noha, were assigned to work on it.

Although filming of the Rideau Bakery lunch counter was completed in 2002 and the production reached the fine-cut editing stage, the film was never finished.

Fast-forward nearly twenty years and Ed Kucerak, mentor to Documentary Works and founder of Kublacom Pictures, happened to screen the documentary, *The Automat*. The film takes a nostalgic look at a unique style of restaurant that became a staple for many New Yorkers and Philadelphians during the early 20th century and that no longer exists. The commonalities and emotional resonance with *Lunch at the Rideau* inspired Ed to ‘dust off’ the *Lunch at the Rideau* fine cut. And with Jane Gurr, one of the original team members on the *Counter Culture* project, began working to finish the lunch counter story.

There were many technical challenges to overcome. *Lunch at the Rideau* was filmed on mini-dv tapes, though current at time, now old technology, and was edited using outdated software. But the story remained compelling, and its ending, while only imagined by characters in the film, a poignant twist.

There is much delight in bringing *Lunch at the Rideau* to viewers after so many years. The passage of time has made it an archival treasure, a chance to go back to the Rideau Bakery, to savour what made it special and much-loved by so many in Ottawa and beyond.

## Filmmakers Quote

“The research for this film was a revelation, uncovering layers of rich history and profound meaning way beyond what, on the surface, seemed like a simple lunch counter. We knew it would be a wonderful story.” **Jane Gurr, Kent Newson**

## Review

“The personal accounts of the regular customers added a deeply emotional layer to the film, making me feel like I want to be a part of that camaraderie and conversation.”

**Siddhi Shukal, film613 review: <https://film613.ca/review-lunch-at-the-rideau/>**

## Technical Information

25 minutes | English | 2022

## Credits

### Directors

Kent Newson, Jane Gurr

### Producer

Ed Kucerak

### Writer/Researchers

Jane Gurr, Noha Fuad

### Editor

Kent Newson

### Camera/Sound

Kent Newson, Noha Fuad

### Music

Audiio

Lemon Jelly

Kent Newson

### Archival photos

The Firestone family

The Kardish family

### Special Thanks

The Kardish family

The staff and customers of the Rideau Bakery

Catherine Fortin

Celeste Mackenzie

Paul McKenna

Joan Savage

David Stambrook

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## Main Subjects in the Film

(In order of appearance)

### Rabbi Cohen

Supervisor, lunch counter kashrut status

### Moe Litwack

Regular lunch counter customer

### David Kardish

Rideau Bakery owner

### Louis Kardish

Rideau Bakery owner

### Brenda Firestone

Regular lunch counter customer

### Gloria Edmonds

Rideau Bakery staff in charge of the lunch counter

### Debbie Baylin

Rideau Bakery, Kardish Family

## Screening

Ottawa Canadian Film Festival | 7:00 p.m., Thursday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, Bytowne Cinema. 1<sup>st</sup> film on the opening night of the festival

## About the Ottawa Canadian Film Festival

The [Ottawa Canadian Film Festival](#) (OCanFilmFest) is a cultural, not-for-profit organization that celebrates Canadian film. Our mission is grounded in the belief that Canadian film and filmmakers are distinctive and vital to our country's culture and the development of the local economy. The 2023 OCanFilmFest runs November 2-4 at the Bytowne Cinema.

## About the Filmmakers

### Jane Gurr, Director

Jane is an Ottawa-based producer, writer, and director of documentary films, and is an associate with Kublacom Pictures. Her work focusses on human rights issues, gender justice, and violence against women, and is inspired by the power of documentary film to inform and spark action for positive social change. Her documentary credits include, *Partners for Peace*, *How Can a Boy*, *This is My Witness*, *One of the Last*, and *Lunch at the Rideau*. She is currently in post-production on a feature documentary set in Australia, *Bridge to Uluru*.

**Kent Newson, Director, Editor**

Kent's career in the entertainment industry spans 25 years and includes programming for radio, producing/directing/editing documentaries, music videos and corporate advertising for television, and producing large-scale musical events. Kent wrote, directed, and edited *A Fistful of Pasta*, a Spaghetti Western parody and *Unearthed*, a short mystery drama. And he edited two projects about Ottawa's Rideau Bakery, *One of the Last* and *Lunch at the Rideau*.

**Ed Kucerak, Producer**

Ed's career in film and video production spans more than two decades. He brings considerable creativity and dedication to his work as an executive producer, producer, writer, and director of documentaries and has established a reputation as an innovative and hardworking professional. He is the recipient of the Rob Thompson Award for Mentorship from the Ottawa Independent Video Awards and the Award for Excellence in Local Media from the Federation of Citizens' Associations. Ed is a member of the Documentary Organization of Canada, co-founder of the Ottawa Canadian Film Festival and an avid photographer. His photos have been published in magazines and community newspapers. His film credits include *Blue Roses*, *You Are Not Alone*, *How Can a Boy*, *Partners for Peace*, *This is My Witness* and *One of the Last*.

**Film Trailer**

Click on image to view trailer.

**Media Requests**

*Lunch at the Rideau* is available for screenings along with promotional support materials. To request an online screener, interviews with filmmakers or subjects, high resolution photos, and promotional materials, please contact us at [tv@kublacom.ca](mailto:tv@kublacom.ca).

**Contact Information**

- Ed Kucerak, Producer / 613-899-9014 / [ed@kublacom.ca](mailto:ed@kublacom.ca)
- Jane Gurr, Co-Director / 613-296-5025 / [jane.gurr@sympatico.ca](mailto:jane.gurr@sympatico.ca)