



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

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**Interview with Dorothy K. Garris**

**Interview Date:** November 11, 2002

**Interviewer:** Elizabeth Stein

**Transcriber:** Rachel Mears

TAPE 1 /SIDE 1

**STEIN:** An interview of Dorothy Garris at her home on Capitol Hill. So Dorothy why don't you tell us exactly where you live on the Hill and your full name, which I didn't give.

**GARRIS:** I am Dorothy Kernodle Garris. Many times I use Dorothy K and the K stands for Kernodle. I live at 1016 C Street SE in Washington, DC.

**STEIN:** Dorothy, where were you born originally?

**GARRIS:** I was born in Reidsville, North Carolina.

**STEIN:** And about when was that?

**GARRIS:** I was born February the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1926. [Note: Her birth certificate says Feb. 25, 1926, and says the place of birth was Ruffin Township, Rockingham County, NC. Reidsville is also in Rockingham County.]

**STEIN:** A good year [laughs]. And at what point did you move to Washington?

**GARRIS:** I came to Washington at the young tender age of five and I've been here ever since.

**STEIN:** Did you originally move to Capitol Hill or some other part of the area?

**GARRIS:** No. I grew up in Southwest, Washington DC. In fact I taught at Syphax Elementary School which is at Half and N Southwest. And I lived only three blocks from there.

**STEIN:** So you moved here with your family?

**GARRIS:** I moved here with my husband and two children.

**STEIN:** No, I meant your original, when you were a little girl. [interviewer and interviewee both talking].

**GARRIS:** Oh, yes I did. Yes, I came with my family.

**STEIN:** Do you know why it was that they decided to move to Washington?

**GARRIS:** Well, they migrated from the south, as many of us did at that time. But they've never given me any other reason.

**STEIN:** What did they do, while they were here?

**GARRIS:** What did they do?

**STEIN:** [responds affirmatively]. For a living.

**GARRIS:** My mother worked in a private family and my father did a lot of traveling. He went to Philadelphia and other places. And so that's what they did.

**STEIN:** And did you have other siblings?

**GARRIS:** Yes, I had a brother. I had two brothers. They're both deceased now though.

**STEIN:** So you lived in Southwest [interviewee responds affirmatively] and where did you go to school?

**GARRIS:** I went to school in Southwest. I went to Ambush Elementary School which was on . . . it was near the waterfront between 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. I can't think of the name of the other street. I haven't looked at my report cards in so many years [interviewer laughs] I can't remember, but it was within walking distance. I was living 486 L Street, and Ambush was no more than a block and a half from where I lived at that time.

**STEIN:** Perfect. Do you remember what the school was like?

**GARRIS:** Yes, I enjoyed the school. I did not go to the Kindergarten, they put me in the first grade at five and I stayed there until I finished. I was 11 and then I was graduated to Junior High School and I went to Randall Junior High School in Southwest.

**STEIN:** Was that a pretty good school?

**GARRIS:** Yes, excellent school.

**STEIN:** And you also went to high school in Southwest?

**GARRIS:** No, I went to Dunbar. [Dunbar was located at First and N Streets NW.]

**STEIN:** Oh, you went to Dunbar.

**GARRIS:** I'm trying to think, Dunbar is... oh I can't even think. I didn't know I'd have to give all that.

**STEIN:** Well that's all right, that's all right. How did you like Dunbar?

**GARRIS:** I loved Dunbar. Very much. Many of us who were graduating from Dunbar also matriculated at Miner Teachers College. Of the 240 of us who were graduated from Dunbar, at least 90 some of us went to Miner Teachers College from Dunbar.

**STEIN:** [responds affirmatively]. I think I've heard somewhere that you were really good at spelling, among other things. Tell us about that.

**GARRIS:** I won the [Washington Metropolitan Areas] Senior Spelling Championship, April [12] of 1991. I was told at that time...

**STEIN:** 1991?

**GARRIS:** [responds affirmatively], '91. I was told at that time that they would have this national, I would be part of the national the next year. *They haven't had it yet* [interviewee's emphasis].

**STEIN:** Oh.

**GARRIS:** So evidently, they're waiting for me to be 100 [interviewer laughs] before they have it.

**STEIN:** Oh that's great. So I thought that was something you had done back when you were in high school...

**GARRIS:** No, no.

**STEIN:** But in fact that's a recent event.

**GARRIS:** Right.

**STEIN:** Oh. Well, that's delightful. Were the students at Dunbar from all over the city?

**GARRIS:** Yes they were [interviewer responds affirmatively] they were from all over the city.

**STEIN:** It was just a pretty good high school and that was why people went there.

**GARRIS:** Yes, it was the academic one. Those of us as—Negroes we were called at that time—if we wanted to go to college, most of us went to Dunbar.

**STEIN:** I see. And did a large percent of the graduating class go onto college?

**GARRIS:** Yes. I don't remember the exact percentage, but it was a lot.

**STEIN:** And you said that many people became teachers.

**GARRIS:** Yes.

**STEIN:** What were some of the other occupations you think that people who went there felt were open to them?

**GARRIS:** [long pause] I don't know.

**STEIN:** Uh, huh. At what point did you meet your husband?

**GARRIS:** My husband came past my house, I was living at 309 McLean Avenue SW, and my husband came by selling ice cream. I came out and I said to my next door neighbor, “Lend me a nickel so I can buy a Chockow. Now you know this wasn’t yesterday [interviewer laughs], it was only 10 cents and I had a nickel. So, he pressed on his change carrier and said “Here kid. Have a nickel on me.” And that is how I met my husband. Now we didn’t exchange names. He went home and told his landlord that he met this cute little girl that he was going to marry.

**STEIN:** Really.

**GARRIS:** And the landlord said, “What’s her name?” He said “I don’t know, we didn’t exchange names.” But...

**STEIN:** How old were you at the time?

**GARRIS:** I had just completed Miner Teachers College. I was 21.

**STEIN:** So you had just completed and you were ready to start a teaching career.

**GARRIS:** Yes I was, but I didn’t start teaching right away.

**STEIN:** So then what happened? Did he...

**GARRIS:** Well after he told his landlord that and told him that we didn’t exchange names my mother and I moved. And so the next door neighbor said he would come every day and ring his bell and ring his bell and ring his bell. And she’d come out and say, “That little girl and her mother moved.” And he would reply, “I’m not looking for any little girl, I’m just selling my ice cream.” But he kept on looking, he wondered where we had moved. She didn’t know where we had moved. So, he kept going in the area where we had been and one day, I guess about five or six months had passed, I came out of where we had moved to purchase ice cream and *he was so thrilled t* [interviewee’s emphasis]. He said, “I found you.” I said, “I wasn’t lost.” [Interviewer laughs].

But that’s the story about us and then after he found out where I was, naturally he sold ice cream there every day. Every day he came by selling ice cream. So a few months passed and then we started dating. We didn’t date an extremely long time—I don’t remember exactly how long it was, but it was not an extremely long time. Because by the time I turned 23 we married.

**STEIN:** Really. So he was at that point selling ice cream, but he had ideas of doing some other things.

**GARRIS:** Yes.

**STEIN:** Tell me a little bit about his background and how he came to be a pastor.

**GARRIS:** Oh, okay. Okay. Because I attended church so dutifully he started attending the church where I was. He didn't belong to a church here, he had belonged to a church in Norfolk, that's where he grew up. [Interviewer responds affirmatively.] And so he said if he wanted to see Dorothy he would have to come to church because I always went to church. So, he started coming to church there and I said to him, "You came there looking for me, but you found more than that." He became a minister, I'm trying to think of the year... Okay, he started going to the early sunrise prayer meeting and he gave a very, I think passionate, testimony and the pastor was impressed with him. And so the pastor said to him, "You sound like a prospective minister." And so my husband said, "Throughout my life as a child, they always said I would be a minister."

**STEIN:** Really.

**GARRIS:** Uh huh. And so he preached his trial sermon and the pastor was [very] pleased and he said "I thought you could only sell ice cream." So then, later on he had to take classes and he became ordained. We were there, I'm trying to think how long were we there, we were there before we started the building. Okay, we were there until, I would say until about 1962.

**STEIN:** And which church was it?

**GARRIS:** It was the Friendship Baptist Church, which was at that time—it was located at 1<sup>st</sup> and H Streets SW.

**STEIN:** At what point did you move to Capitol Hill?

**GARRIS:** My husband and I married on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1949 and we didn't come to Capitol Hill until April of 1957.

**STEIN:** And did you come to this house or somewhere else?

**GARRIS:** No, we moved to 301 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE and that building now—it's just across the street, but the entrance is around the corner. That red brick building.

**STEIN:** Uh huh, sure.

**GARRIS:** Now this large two-story building had an open space on the first floor with a separate entrance. The living quarters were on the second floor which included a screened-in back porch and a staircase which led to the yard.

**STEIN:** And is that where your children grew up?

**GARRIS:** Okay, we had only two children when we moved there. Their names were Tangela, who was seven years old and Grant Jr. who was three years old. We stayed there for nine years, from 1957 we moved here, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966.

**STEIN:** Tell me what the neighborhood was like when you first moved here. What were your neighbors like, and...

**GARRIS:** What were my neighbors like?

**STEIN:** Yeah, and what was the neighborhood like? Did it look somewhat similar to how it looks now?

**GARRIS:** Somewhat similar to the way it looks now. Hmmm...

**STEIN:** Was it a friendly neighborhood?

**GARRIS:** I thought so. I thought it was friendly. I did not know any of the people who lived here, but they were very friendly. I didn't have any difficulty making friends. Shortly after we moved here, while still employed as a postal employee, my husband wanted to establish a seven-chair barbershop. However, he was told that the neighbors would have to attend a hearing and approve or disapprove of a barbershop in their neighborhood. The neighbors approved.

**STEIN:** Yeah, they did.

**GARRIS:** Therefore, Reverend Garris established a functioning seven-chair barbershop at 301 on the first floor which was an open space. So named by me, Dorothy, as Garris' Tonsorial Shop. After his resignation from the post office he began operating, himself operating the barbershop as a licensed barber on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1961. However, he established the shop in 1957 and someone else operated it at first. [Interviewer responds affirmatively.]

**STEIN:** And while he was doing those things were you working as a teacher or were you taking care of your young ones?

**GARRIS:** No, I started as a teacher in September of 1954. At that time we already had two children. We had the girl and the boy. The boy was only 11 months and the girl was like close to four when I started teaching at Syphax which was only three blocks from where I lived.

**STEIN:** And at that time were your parents in that area as well.

**GARRIS:** Yes, at that time my mother lived only two doors from my husband and me. We were in an apartment and so was she [interviewer responds affirmatively] and that was on Q Street in Southwest.

**STEIN:** Uh huh. So you had a close family unit?

**GARRIS:** Yes, yes we had a close family unit.

**STEIN:** So you were staying with the children then you stopped teaching.

**GARRIS:** No, what happened was I taught at Syphax for five years.

**STEIN:** What did you teach?

**GARRIS:** I taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I started as a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. And then at the end of five years when school closed I came home for the summer. We were across the street in that apartment building, my husband had not had it converted to an apartment at that time. But anyway, I came home and it was time to go back to school and I said to my husband "I haven't had a period this summer." He said, "*What?*" [interviewee's emphasis] He said "I think we better go to the doctor." And I said "I think we better go to the doctor too."

So, the doctor said "No wonder. You're expecting." So I didn't return to Syphax. We went there and they gave me a two year maternity leave because I was a permanent teacher.

**STEIN:** Goodness. They don't do...

**GARRIS:** Huh?

**STEIN:** They don't do that these days I don't imagine.

**GARRIS:** I don't know. But anyway, I said to my husband, I said "The other two children are so much older than the new baby that I'd like to have two children during this two year period. And he said, "Honey,"—he always called me honey—he said "Honey, you've never had children close together." I said, "No, but I hope that I will have them close together this time." So, 13 months after the third child we had the fourth. So when I went back to school I was asked to give the birth date, they thought I only had one, they asked me to give the birth date of the child that they gave me the two year maternity leave for. So I gave them the birth date of the second child we had [interviewer laughs]. The person said, "Did you have two children on one maternity leave?" I said, "Yes, I had two children on one maternity leave." [Interviewer laughs].

We made a big joke out of that.

**STEIN:** You wasted no time.

**GARRIS:** No, I wasted no time. But I got my wish. I had those two children on one maternity leave.

**STEIN:** Very efficient [both laugh]. Now tell me something about the church—when that began.

**GARRIS:** Okay, I haven't quite gotten to that yet.

**STEIN:** Oh okay. All right.

**GARRIS:** I need to say something else. Reverend Garris noticed that his customers needed to make phone calls frequently and since he did not have a public phone available he had one installed [outside of] the barbershop. And later increased the number to four phones. The concrete bases are still in the yard.

**STEIN:** Oh is that right?

**GARRIS:** Uh huh. Although Reverend Garris was employed full time in his barbershop he held a meeting with [me] his wife, Dorothy Kernodle Garris, [our] four children—[we] now have four children, Tangela, Grant Jr., Lynnette, Kevin—and seven neighbors on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1963 and shared his inspirational vision to organize or found a church. [I] thought the name should be the New United Baptist Church because [I] hoped unity would prevail. Others in attendance expressed their views also. The worship services... I'm ahead of myself.

In the summer of 1963, Reverend Garris had the screened-in back porch upstairs converted to a room and also added a room on the first floor directly under the second floor converted room. The worship services were conducted in the recently constructed addition to 301 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE. The Garris family and some of [our] friends and neighbors attended. Also, as the word spread throughout the neighborhood, others came.

In August of 1966, August 1st, Pastor Garris moved his home and church to 1016 C Street SE. In early fall he hired an architect to implement his plan to section off the barber shop at 301 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE and convert the rest of it to a three-unit apartment building. He hired, instructed, and supervised the workmen and also did a great deal of the work himself.

**STEIN:** Your husband had many talents.

**GARRIS:** Yes he was quite an unusual person, he really was. On April 7, 1969 the New United Baptist Church was incorporated with the initial registered office as [our] home, here 1016 C Street SE. The initial registered agent as Reverend Grant S. Garris. The three who signed as incorporators were Grant S. Garris—my husband, James Hairston, and Hilton Overton. After the incorporation, Pastor Garris thought it was the opportune time to construct a church building. Fortunately, he, [I] his wife Dorothy, and a trustee of the church, Hilton Overton, located an ideal parcel of land on the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and South Carolina Avenue SE.

Pastor Garris decided to become his own building contractor, therefore the location of the site only four blocks from his barbershop and home enabled him to travel back and forth expeditiously to supervise and/or participate actively in the construction.

**STEIN:** Now, how were funds raised to build the church?

**GARRIS:** How were the funds raised? I'll let you in on a little secret and I haven't told this to many people, but during the time that my husband was building the church we lived on his salary and I donated all of my checks for the building of the church.

**STEIN:** Oh you did?

**GARRIS:** Hmm, hmm, yeah. After school and on weekends the older son, Grant Jr., mixed mortar and the younger son, Kevin, helped him push bricks up the ramp to Mr. Waddell Boykin, the bricklayer. Also, Trustee Overton was always ready to do whatever he could. The officers and members of the church watched with anticipation as Pastor Garris and the workmen made steady progress. At last on December—oh, I'm ahead of myself. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970 we marched from this house because this is where we had the church at that time to 14<sup>th</sup> and South Carolina Avenue and we walked there... let's see I did have that, where did I have that.

**STEIN:** You can just tell me.

**GARRIS:** Okay. We walked there to get started on laying the foundation for the building [interviewer responds affirmatively] that's why we went there. But I had it written down somewhere and I don't know where I had it [unintelligible], but anyway that's why we went there on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970.

Since my husband never had instructions on the building of a building it took him quite a while to build it. We marched to the groundbreaking ceremony August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970. Then after that he and I went on vacation and when we came back just before school started was when he started the building. The cornerstone says the building was built in 19—it said the "New United Baptist Church founded September 15, 1963 built in 1971. Reverend Grant S. Garris, founder, builder, and pastor."

I started to say that in early fall of 1966, my husband hired an architect to implement his plan to section off the barbershop and convert the rest of 301 11<sup>th</sup> SE to a three unit apartment building. He hired, instructed, and supervised the workmen and did a great deal of the work himself.

Pastor Garris decided to become his own building contractor, therefore—and I might have said this before—therefore, the location of the site only four blocks from his barbershop and home enabled him to

travel back and forth expeditiously to supervise and/or participate actively in the construction then return home or to work. Yes, I did say that before.

The officers and members of the church watched with anticipation...

**STEIN:** Yeah, I think that you . . .

**GARRIS:** As Pastor Garris and the workmen made steady progress.

**STEIN:** Yes, you went through all that.

**GARRIS:** Okay, okay. At last on December 31<sup>st</sup> on 1973 there was great rejoicing and jubilant celebration as Pastor and [I] Mrs. Garris, [our] family, and all of the officers and members of the New United Baptist Church held [our] first service in [our] almost completed building. And the address of the New United Baptist Church, at that time, was 1401 South Carolina Avenue SE.

**STEIN:** Was that the church where...what happened to that church?

**GARRIS:** The church is still there and the new minister—after my husband passed—the new minister sold the church to another young minister. It's no longer Baptist, it's now Pentecostal.

**STEIN:** I see, I see. Well, that...

**GARRIS:** And it's still there.

**STEIN:** [Responds affirmatively]. So tell me a little bit about the church, what it was like to be a pastor's wife [interviewee laughs], and what was the role of the church in this part of Capitol Hill and the community?

**GARRIS:** Okay, the role of the church in this part of Capitol Hill was to seek those people who needed to improve their lives and serve as a beacon of hope for them. We had services on the outside and people would come from the neighborhood [interviewer responds affirmatively] and the next time we had services on the outside we would see new people so they would tell their friends and they would tell their friends so that's how we built the church. The congregation of the church, that's how we built it.

**STEIN:** How large did it become?

**GARRIS:** That building is a rather small building. I would say that it would seat maybe 150. Later my husband also designed and built a balcony in the church after we had somewhat needed a balcony because of the seating capacity of the church.

**STEIN:** Were there other activities in the church in addition to the services? Outreach into the community or was it basically for worship?

**GARRIS:** Okay. It was basically worship services, but during the summer the choir would sing on the outside and that would attract the people in the neighborhood. Also, during the summer I would have vacation bible school and I would go in the neighborhood and knock on the doors and tell the people that I'm having vacation bible school and I'd like for you if you have children to please send them.

I also started a choir from the neighborhood and they would sing some Sundays. My daughter [Lynnette], my second daughter—I have two daughters and two sons—my younger daughter, I started her with music lessons and then I took her to the music teacher at my school so she played for this neighborhood group that I was in charge of. And that too was a way of reaching out into the neighborhood because those children's parents and their brothers and their sisters came and that increased our congregation again.

**STEIN:** [Responds affirmatively]. Now tell me when you were living here where did your children go to school?

**GARRIS:** My children went to Bryan Elementary School.

**STEIN:** Yeah.

**GARRIS:** Are you familiar with Bryan?

**STEIN:** I've passed by Bryan.

**GARRIS:** All four of my children went to Bryan Elementary School and my two younger children—the two that I had 13 months apart—they also went to Bryan. Then after that, the one who was 13 months older than the other one went to Hine, but she only stayed there one year. My eldest child went to Hine also and she was the valedictorian of her class at Hine. But there's almost 10 years difference between the first daughter and the second daughter.

**STEIN:** Right. So what was, as a teacher, what was your opinion of the schools?

**GARRIS:** They were doing an excellent job just like we were doing where I was.

**STEIN:** Yes.

**GARRIS:** I thought they did excellent for the children.

**STEIN:** And did your children go on to more school?

**GARRIS:** Yes. My eldest has three degrees and she works at the Library of Congress. She had got her last two degrees and she was told you can't get two degrees at one time, but she did. She got one in history and the other in library science.

My second child is a GS-13 at the Department of Justice. That's Grant Jr. [interviewer responds affirmatively].

My third child lives in Los Angeles, that's Lynnette. And she started to get her degree here, but she finished at, oh God I can't think of the name of that university in Los Angeles. But anyway, she got her degree also [a B.A. in Film from UCLA].

And my youngest has three degrees. He now is a lawyer and has two law offices in Florida. One of them is in Tampa and the other one is in Clearwater. I talk to him every day. He calls me three or four times every day. He's the youngest of my four children.

**STEIN:** That's nice. Well, you must be very proud of your children.

**GARRIS:** Yes I am. I am very proud.

**STEIN:** It sounds as if maybe the talent for preaching has gone into lawyering.

**GARRIS:** [laughing] Oh boy, well I don't know, but he's doing quite well as a lawyer. He has, like I said, both his Juris Doctor and his LLM. And he has a basic bachelors too, I forgot about that, but anyway. [unintelligible noise]

**STEIN:** I would just like to know a little bit more about life on Capitol Hill with the family back in, the sixties, the seventies, the eighties, how it changed. What were some of the ways in which families got together and had fun together and how that might have changed.

**GARRIS:** Earlier, I was telling you that we started the church where the apartment building is now. Since we started it there some of the neighbors in this neighborhood joined while we were in the building. We used to have picnics in the yard with the family and those members of the church and then other people would come that we knew in the neighborhood and we would invite them in too.

We had the church there from September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1963 until August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966 when we moved here...

**STEIN:** Yes.

**GARRIS:**...and we moved the church over here to our home.

**STEIN:** I was wondering about the racial composition of the neighborhood. Was it a mixed neighborhood then? Was it predominantly African American...

**GARRIS:** Not like it is now [interviewer responds affirmatively], but there were whites when we moved here, but at that time they would leave. If the blacks came in the whites would leave. So that's what happened. In fact, a couple of doors from me they were white, but they left. They were all around. But at that time, they seemingly wanted to separate themselves and so that's what they would do.

**STEIN:** So people tended not to talk to each other if they were of different race?

**GARRIS:** I wouldn't say they didn't talk.

**STEIN:** Well they weren't friendly.

**GARRIS:** But they didn't really mingle the way they do today. They didn't really mingle. See that was a long time ago, really.

**STEIN:** Yeah. What about some of the events that occurred, the kind of national events like, oh the assassination of Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the riots and those sorts of things. Did you feel that here?

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**GARRIS:** [beginning part is cut off]...When we first heard about Dr. King's assassination my husband had an appointment [to speak] and he was at a church. When we came out of the church, so much of DC was on fire.

**STEIN:** Yes.

**GARRIS:** What a scary time! I wondered, "What on earth will happen next?" But we got home safely and we were all so distraught about that. We just could not understand how that could have happened, but it had happened and we couldn't do anything about it so we had to learn to live with it. And as you said, there was more than Dr. King, there were three of them, you know...

**STEIN:** Yeah.

**GARRIS:** There was John, President John F. Kennedy, there was his brother Robert Kennedy. We just thought that was awful. And then Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**STEIN:** Were your children or people you knew involved in some of the riots and demonstrations that went on after that?

**GARRIS:** No. I didn't know anyone who was involved in it, none of my children were involved in it. I'm trying to think, my youngest was only seven. We were in this house and I remember his standing there at the sink trying to wash dishes and he said—tears streaming down—he said, “Oh...” he called me honey, they called me honey because their Daddy did. But he said “Honey, what a sick society.” He'd heard me say that. And we sometimes talk about that now, you know; when he talks about a sick society I say “I remember when you first said that.”

**STEIN:** Right.

**GARRIS:** He's now 41 years old.

**STEIN:** And he still has occasion to say what a sick society.

**GARRIS:** Yes, oh yes. Look what happened recently.

**STEIN:** Yeah.

**GARRIS:** That was just terrible.

**STEIN:** Can you tell me anything about your impression of politics in this city if that's something that was of interest to you and your husband?

**GARRIS:** Well, we liked the fact that later on we had—what we considered home rule. We liked that, we liked the progress that was made in that regard. But I don't think we were into politics too much. Since he was a minister and pastor, we were not into politics too much.

**STEIN:** That's interesting, there are some ministers who are very much into politics...

**GARRIS:** Yes. Yes.

**STEIN:** ...and others who are very much into... [both speaking at the same time]

**GARRIS:** That's true, that is very true. Now recently we had a minister who was trying to campaign, you know who it was, Willie Wilson? [interviewer responds affirmatively] Yes. And there were people who said, “But he's a minister!” So you're right, there are people who feel that never the twain shall meet and then there are others who feel this gives them a good opportunity to talk to their parishioners. And it would, it would give them a good [opportunity]...

**STEIN:** And of course Martin Luther King.

**GARRIS:** Yes, that's true.

**STEIN:** Jr.

**GARRIS:** That's very true. He was very much into it, very much. Yes, yes, yes.

**STEIN:** I'd like to know what you like about living on Capitol Hill and what you don't like about it. And maybe that's changed over the years, I don't know.

**GARRIS:** Right now I like the fact that the races are intermingling.

**STEIN:** Yes.

**GARRIS:** I really like that. Although I grew up in DC from age five, I went to segregated schools throughout my schooling. Even when I was graduated from college I still went to a segregated school, but I always said "If I'm ever given the opportunity, I will treat people as people. And I hope they will treat me the same way." I'm a hugger and sometimes when I hug the whites they look at me and I say to myself, "We're nothing but people." You know?

**STEIN:** Yes I know.

**GARRIS:** And we needed that kind of intermingling all the time, but I guess the time wasn't right for [it], you know years and years ago. We need to get together as people and see people as people.

**STEIN:** So, if you on the occasions when you felt rejected in those situations of hugging someone, but it seems as if you know how to keep a very positive attitude. So what's your secret?

**GARRIS:** Simply the fact that as a very young child I decided I wanted to be this way. My parents didn't suggest that I be this way and I grew up with people who would say, "Let's beat him or her up because he or she is white." And I thought that was ridiculous, positively ridiculous. I would say, "Not me. I'll have no part of that." I just, I don't know, it was just innate with me that I... now, a couple of weekends ago I walked up the street here to speak to my neighbors who are white, Lynne and Eric. Well Lynne had gone to be with her mother, her mother had surgery and she had gone to be with her mother. But Lynne's sister was there, as I walked in I hugged her and then there were two of their, two of either Eric's family members or Lynne's family members, I don't know. And when they came through the door I said "I got a hug for you too." I think she came first and then when he came I said, "I got a hug for you." I said, "I hope I'm not upsetting you, I'm just a hugger. That's just how I feel about people. I love people and that's my way of showing them that I do." And so I still do it. I'm sure some of them say, "Why is she doing that?" But that's just how I feel. I used to line my children up, I had both white and black in my class because I started with integration. I used to line them up at three o'clock and hug every child at three.

That's how I dismissed them. And they would hop out of line to get a second hug and say "You didn't hug me." I said, "I know I hugged you, but you can have a second hug." [interviewer laughs] I just think of the secular song, "What the world needs now is love, more love, it's the only thing that we don't have enough of." I agree with that. Love solves so many problems.

**STEIN:** You are so right there. Now tell me for how many years did you teach?

**GARRIS:** 26.

**STEIN:** 26. And it was fourth grade mostly.

**GARRIS:** No. I started as a fourth grade teacher and I did fourth grade the whole five years I was at Syphax which was located at Half and N [Streets] SW. When I came home and had the two children then they sent me to Aiton, 47<sup>th</sup> and Foote [Streets SE]. I was only there six weeks. By having the two children rather close I had some problems. I stayed there like six weeks and then I came home and stayed for the rest of the year. I had to go back so that I wouldn't have a break in service. So that's why they sent me there.

Then I came home, I was ill. And my doctor was able to get an extension for me, I got like six more months. And then they sent me to Van Ness which is 5<sup>th</sup> and M SE. It's across from the Navy Yard [interviewer responds affirmatively]. I stayed there 14 years.

**STEIN:** Oh did you?

**GARRIS:** And they had something called Equalization and Comparability and it was about—they would transfer you if had so many years service and your salary was a certain amount. So I was transferred to Lovejoy, 12<sup>th</sup> and D NE. I stayed there only three years.

**STEIN:** These are all elementary schools?

**GARRIS:** They're all elementary schools. I went to Mary Church Terrell which is Wheeler Road and Savannah. And I taught from, okay I started as a fourth grade teacher, but I ended up before I finished the 26 years, I did first, second, third, fourth, and fifth. I didn't do Kindergarten and I didn't do sixth.

**STEIN:** Did you in 26 years did you find changes in terms of the kids coming into school?

**GARRIS:** No, but they tell me they're very different now.

**STEIN:** Yeah.

**GARRIS:** I loved it. In fact, the principal I had for 14 years said my children thought I dropped from heaven. I said, “Well don’t tell them any differently” I said “because I don’t have any trouble out of my children. I could take them home with me.” She said “I’m going to tell them that you’re an earthling just like the rest of us.” She said “When you don’t come they just look lost. They said ‘Why didn’t Mrs. Garris come today?’ And they said well she wasn’t feeling well and she stayed home.” And she said, “They don’t want anybody but you.” She said, “What do you do to children?” I said “Treat them like human beings, that’s all.” And they seemed to have enjoyed that, they really did.

**STEIN:** Back when you taught did it seem as if the parents were involved with their children’s education?

**GARRIS:** Yes, yes to a certain degree they seemed interested, very interested and involved. And of course, when we had PTA meetings, we insisted that they become involved with their children.

**STEIN:** So they came?

**GARRIS:** Yes, oh yes they came.

**STEIN:** Whereas these days that’s a very difficult thing to accomplish.

**GARRIS:** Really?

**STEIN:** Yeah. In some schools, you know.

**GARRIS:** In some schools. Now the only participation I have done recently since I won the Senior Spelling Championship, I worked at Payne. I think I did it two years, helping the children to improve their spelling skills.

**STEIN:** Yeah.

**GARRIS:** I also accompanied them to the spelling competitions with the principal, it’s the same one who’s there now and the teacher who was in charge of the spelling. Mrs. Nevitt tried to get me to come back this year, but I told her “No, I didn’t think I was going to do it this year.”

**STEIN:** Well, let’s see. Are there any other things you think we haven’t covered?

**GARRIS:** Oh. I want to tell you something about the neighborhood

**STEIN:** Okay.

**GARRIS:** I have something to say...

**STEIN:** Please.

**GARRIS:** Let's see where it, here it is. Okay. When we moved to 301 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE, 300 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE, directly across from where we were living, was a wholesale outlet of sorts. A man we met delivered candy from that outlet. It's now a cleaners, you know where, right here the cleaners?

**STEIN:** Oh sure, I go there all the time.

**GARRIS:** Yes, he delivered candy from the outlet to other retailers. My children called him the candy man. There was a grocery store on this corner, 254 11<sup>th</sup> Street SW—SE, I'm sorry. 254 11<sup>th</sup> Street SE, on the corner, directly across from the wholesale outlet. It was operated by a Jewish couple who had three children, two boys and a girl. And oddly, their last name was Harris. I had never heard of a Jewish family with the name of Harris. Very much like mine, just change the "G" to an "H."

At 1013 C—across the street now, but it was around the corner from us when we lived in that building—there was a Chinese laundry. I can't remember the last name, but my daughter Tangela Garris Roe who is now 52 years old and my son Grant S. Garris, Jr. who just turned 49 years old, played with the children, the Chinese children Willy and Nancy. Let's see. Oh. In the back of our home across the alley from us at 1015 C Street SE, Mrs. Melessia Coleman operated a beauty shop in a separate small structure which was connected to her home. And it had a separate entrance and a separate exit. When she became much older her daughter-in-law, Deborah Coleman operated the beauty shop until a little over a year ago when she and her husband Joe Coleman sold the house to another couple who now live there with their three sons.

At 300 10<sup>th</sup> Street, at the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> and C Street SE there was a Brooks Cleaners and Shoe Repair which was operated by Mr. and Mrs. Everett Brooks. In later years they moved diagonally across the street to 922 10<sup>th</sup> Street SE and were there for several years before they discontinued their business. I think that's all I have.

**STEIN:** Did you do your grocery shopping at the store across from you?

**GARRIS:** No.

**STEIN:** Where would you go for groceries?

**GARRIS:** To the Safeway.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.

**GARRIS:** Yeah, to the Safeway because the prices were higher, you know, at a small store like that.

**STEIN:** Right. So I guess they just couldn't stay competitive a lot of those little stores.

**GARRIS:** They stayed there, they were there when we moved here in '57. They stayed there until their children were grown. Mr. Harris, was it Mr. Harris or Mrs. Harris? One of them passed away and that's when they moved out.

**STEIN:** I see.

**GARRIS:** I also had a tree planting and dedication of the tree in honor and loving memory of my husband. It was planted right... okay, it's the tree box just before you get to the alley. It's on the side of the apartment building. And I have pictures from that too.

**STEIN:** I spoke to Margaret Missiaen who remembers when you bought that tree.

**GARRIS:** Yes. Yes, Yes, Yes.

**STEIN:** She handles Trees for Capitol Hill.

**GARRIS:** Yes, yes, yes. I remember her and also there's also another—I have a letter here who I wrote to...

**STEIN:** I'm not sure that I remember that.

**GARRIS:** Becky, what was Becky's last name? Where did I have that [sound of papers being shuffled]. I'm trying to think, maybe it was in here.

**STEIN:** Well that's okay I think the papers might sound a little noisy on the tape recorder.

**GARRIS:** Oh I see. That would be noisy.

**STEIN:** I don't know whether you would be interested in having us, in sharing any documents that you have with the project that possibly we could make copies of some of things you have that might be of interest historically and for your story. So we can talk about that a little bit.

**GARRIS:** Okay. So how is that done and what does it entail and include?

**STEIN:** I think, I guess maybe you can think about the sorts of things that you think might be good that you would be willing to share and we can just go over them and see whether it makes sense to do that. How about that? We can stop the interview perhaps at this point and I thank you very much Mrs. Garris, it's been really fun to talk with you.

**GARRIS:** Oh you're quite welcome. Thank you.

**STEIN:** It's been delightful.

**GARRIS:** Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW