



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Marie Hertzberg

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

STEIN: This is Elizabeth Stein. I'm talking to Marie Hertzberg at her home at 600 East Capitol Street on January 24, 2002. Marie, it's really nice to be here in your home. Could you tell me a little bit about when it was that you came to Capitol Hill?

HERTZBERG: I came to Capitol Hill I guess in the 50s. I got married, and we decided we needed to buy a home. We were in an apartment—a small apartment.

STEIN: Where was the apartment?

HERTZBERG: At 215 Constitution Avenue NE.

STEIN: So you had come to the Hill even before then?

HERTZBERG: Yes. But, you know (laughter), I didn't really think I was part of the community. It was just a one-room apartment that I had, and when I got married, obviously two people can't live in one room. Rents were starting to go up, and we decided that maybe the thing to do was to find a small home. So I think it was in October fifty-eight or sometime in fifty-eight, we bought a house at 215 Carroll Street SE [ed: should be 115 Carroll Street SE]. That's the street that no longer exists. The Madison Library is over in that area now.

By 1960, or maybe late fifty-nine, the Congress decided to take two square blocks of property, which included Carroll Street. Carroll Street only ran from First to Second Street—it was a one-block street.

STEIN: What was it like?

HERTZBERG: Well, I'll tell you what it was like. When I decided I wanted a house, I walked into Barbara Held's office, and I made the statement that I wanted a house on Carroll Street because I thought it was the most interesting street on the Hill. It was a very varied street. The houses had been built more or less individually, or maybe two at a time. And it was lined with ginkgo trees, brick sidewalk, very wide alley behind, and then it backed to C Street, and C Street on both sides of the street had matching flatfront brick houses built all at one time. So the environment was very, very pleasant there.

STEIN: Sounds lovely.

HERTZBERG: And First Street, of course, faced the House Office Building. So we bought the house and some work had been done on it, but not very much and not very well. And we both worked, both went to school, and both remodeled. Oh, we were very young and had the energy to do it!

At that time people were much more do-it-yourselfers—that is to say, gardening, painting, paint-removal, that kind of thing. And we were making considerable progress. The house was only thirteen feet wide, but it was very charming. It did not have a front yard. It had a big square brick, and we bought this huge iron maple pot and put it there and filled it with flowers. We put real carriage lanterns on either side. We were going strong. Deep backyard, which we were starting to landscape. Parking for two cars.

And then one morning, we caught the *Washington Post*, and the headline was that the U.S. Congress was passing a bill to take two square blocks of that area. And we went through about a year and a half or two years of hell. They're taking it, then they have to pass the bill to take it, then they get involved with deciding what the property is worth.

STEIN: Did the neighbors get together during this time?

HERTZBERG: Oh, yes. The neighbors got together, and we met regularly. But at that time, it was very difficult to even get publicity. If it happened now, I think that the local press would be interested. At that time, "oh well." They thought Capitol Hill was a slum.

STEIN: Really?

HERTZBERG: Well, the Hill had gotten very bad during the war, because it became sort of a rooming house area. Nobody did a thing with anything, and a lot of people had this notion that they were going to tear everything down and make another Southwest out of the area. And then, sometime in the 50s, people started to buy houses very close to the Capitol. And suddenly, you know, the ones that they've done something with look very nice!

Now, Carroll Street was—I guess it *was*—practically all restored. It was very difficult to get a house there. C Street was pretty well restored because it went from First to Second, and that was the part closest to the Capitol. And the restoration was moving down Southeast—practically nothing in Northeast.

Well, then you had to go down to the Justice Department and ask for a second appraisal and eventually you settled on something. In the meantime, you had to look for another house, but (laughter) you didn't have the cash for the down payment, because you were still paying the mortgage on the first house.

STEIN: You were at that time about what age? You and your husband?

HERTZBERG: I guess we were in our thirties.

STEIN: And what were you doing?

HERTZBERG: We were doing graduate work, and we were both working. I was working at Commerce during the day, and I did graduate work in the evening.

STEIN: Where were you going to school?

HERTZBERG: I took some courses in math at the Department of Agriculture, because I needed the math, and the economics I took at American U. My husband went to school during the day because he was becoming a clinical psychologist. But he did have odd jobs; he worked for the Alexandria Mental Health Clinic in the evening and had some group therapy there. In other words, we were very busy.

So we spent about a year looking around for one, a house that we liked; and two, saying to ourselves that until we got money out of the other house, we can't make a shift.

STEIN: What were the arrangements for buying you out?

HERTZBERG: They had these appraisals, and you could get a second appraisal. And then you went to the Department of Justice, and people were assigned to talk to you. I must say, the Justice Department was very genteel and nice about it. They acted like they were on our side (light laughter) more than on the side of Sam Rayburn, who I guess was still around there at the time.

You just had a series of meetings, seeing what you could do to get a few cents more. The general feeling was that if you hired a lawyer, they would take a third of it or what have you. So you could not increase that assessment by the amount that a lawyer would take. The best advice we got—there was a lawyer who lived at the corner of Carroll and First Streets—both husband and wife were lawyers. They came to see us, and they advised us—they said do it on your own. If you want some advice, we'll talk to you about it. But don't get a lawyer because you're going to come out on the minus side if you do. They're not going to be able to help unless something went very wrong.

STEIN: In those days, were there any organized community groups that would support you?

HERTZBERG: The Restoration Society. We belonged to it, and they offered meetings—I guess it was passed by the House, you know it's been a long time ago. When they passed this thing finally, we knew we had lost the house.

Finally, everybody reached some agreement. I think the only people who did not go through the Department of Justice were the Congressmen who lived on the block. One lived on Second Street, and then there was at least one on Carroll Street, and I don't know if there were any on C Street.

But all the other people had to go through the Justice Department. And then you signed papers, and then they said, "Is there anything in the house that you'd like to take with you?" We had just put in a kitchen, so we said, "the whole kitchen."

STEIN: (Laughter).

HERTZBERG: My husband's people were up in Buffalo. My father-in-law was head of the Psychology and Education Department at the university there. So, we would go up a few times a year. They were tearing down these huge, huge mansions there. I mean, there was no effort to preserve them, and they were gorgeous.

See those shutters on those windows? Those came from Buffalo. We had gotten the shutters and brought them down and put them on the house. We asked for the shutters.

Oh, and something else (laughter), which may sound very foolish, but we did do it. When we first acquired the house, the backyard was all clay. We went down to the U.S. Capitol in the fall, and we would put piles of leaves in plastic bags, and we dug it in, and we bought manure. Anyhow, we built up all this soil to about a foot and a half, and we said we were going to take the soil with us.

Well, we had this old Edsel that our in-laws had given us, and it was about ready to go, so we extended the insurance for six months, and we used it to haul the soil and put it in the middle of the front yard here. By that time, of course, we had acquired this house. So we moved the soil.

Of course, once they decided to take two square blocks and the Hill was very small, you can imagine what happened to the prices of houses. They increased by a third.

We were working with the Barbara Held outfit, with Arline Roback. We kept looking and looking, and we couldn't find anything. And then Arline called us and said, "There's a house I want you to see." She said, "I sold this about eight years ago to this man who was an engineer, and he was going to buy it, move in, and bring in his family from Hawaii."

And then he signed the contract to go to I guess it was Ethiopia then. And he just locked up the house. It had been vacant for five or six years.

He had had a friend get in touch with Arline and said, "I'm coming back to the States, but then I'm going to be going to India." His marriage had broken up then. He said, "I want to sell the house." Arline immediately got in touch with us, and we came to see the house.

Have you ever been in a house that hasn't been occupied in five years? The house had lace curtains on all the windows, you know the old-fashioned lace curtains? The only way I can describe it is that Charles Addams would have loved it (laughter).

STEIN: Oh, dear (laughter).

HERTZBERG: They were two feet across—these curtains were hanging down all holey, and all dirty, and a deep gray color (laughter). As a matter of fact, after it was ours, the first thing we did was get rid of the lace curtains.

It took quite awhile before we could move in, because we were negotiating. We postponed the date of closing, and I guess he was amenable to it once we had a contract out. And then, once we closed on that house and got the money, we moved in because we couldn't rent anywhere—we had to save all our money.

STEIN: Were the other people who lived on Carroll Street—except for the Congressmen—also young couples?

HERTZBERG: There was a mixture of all ages. There was even one black family that had the small house that had been there. I guess they might have been the second generation. They left the Hill. I guess we saw them once or twice after that. They had a teenager or twenty-year-old kids who were now in college. They just broke the ties when they couldn't have the house that had been the family house.

The Sergeant-at-Arms of the House lived there. This lawyer couple that were very wealthy. This newspaperman from Tennessee, who was a pistol. When we reached the point where we all had to be out, and he had not settled. He had this huge German shepherd named Wolf, who loved him with a purple passion (laughter). We had to be careful that Wolf didn't throw me over.

STEIN: (Laughter)

HERTZBERG: I understand that the day when we were all supposed to be out, the wreckers showed up right down the street. And he was still in the house. He sat on the stoop with Wolf. I said, "You want to come in and see mine?" And Wolf went, "Grrr!" (Laughter).

The man lingered there quite awhile, because obviously they couldn't wreck everything at one time. And then he bought something on Constitution Avenue, I believe. I think he was the last person to leave.

STEIN: That's fascinating. I never knew about any of that.

HERTZBERG: For years, this was one of the things that had been very painful to everybody, because everybody thought that those blocks that were destroyed were so attractive. And it was not the first taking. There had been another taking earlier, I guess around the New Jersey Avenue. I think it was the second time the Congress had taken property. I don't remember the details of the first. And then there was a threat of taking New Jersey Avenue, and then they changed their minds at a later date.

STEIN: Did you grow up here?

HERTZBERG: No. I was born in New York City. My husband—since his father was a college professor, they moved around a lot—he had been in Colorado and Iowa before they settled in Buffalo.

STEIN: Did you get married in DC?

HERTZBERG: Yes.

STEIN: What brought you to the District?

HERTZBERG: I was an economist. Women economists, you know, were very scarce. I was working on Wall Street for a very low salary. It was very interesting work.

STEIN: This was right after you had gotten out of college?

HERTZBERG: Yes. I sent a resume. They were a small outfit that invested your money, in essence, if you had a certain amount. I worked with them in a room where we kept tab of the ups and downs of various stocks. But it didn't pay well, and I didn't feel there was too much of a future for a woman there. So I got an offer from the Federal government, and I thought I'd try it for a summer, and then accumulate some money and go back to school to NYU.

STEIN: Where you had gone to undergraduate?

HERTZBERG: No. I had gone to Brooklyn College as an undergraduate, but I had started graduate work in finance at NYU. I came here, and it was a temporary job at the Census Bureau. Through some miracle, I started to work there, and there was this French-Canadian guy who was in charge of this group, and he got several promotions. The next thing I knew, I became an assistant supervisor, and then a full supervisor and got two raises over the summer.

STEIN: Excellent.

HERTZBERG: I decided that, "Gee, I could live in Washington, DC." (Laughter.) And I never left. By December, I had gotten a call from not the Census Bureau, but what is now the Bureau of Economic

Analysis, and I went to an interview there for a permanent job. And I made the transfer. On January first I was on a new job.

STEIN: And your husband?

HERTZBERG: He was taking some courses at GW. I guess they had a good psychology department there. He thought he wasn't permanent here, either! And then we met, we got married, and then he did some work at the Alexandria Mental Health Clinic at night. Eventually, we both settled here.

STEIN: Where did you get married?

HERTZBERG: The Unitarian Church down on 16th and Harvard Street. Do you know who A. Powell Davies is?

STEIN: No, I don't.

HERTZBERG: Well, he was a minister there, and he was very well known. He was an Englishman. He married us in the garden.

STEIN: Lovely. Did you go to the Unitarian Church?

HERTZBERG: We did for awhile. The last I heard, they're thinking of tearing it down. I have not kept up with it. Once we started to remodel houses, we didn't go to church on Sundays anymore!

STEIN: What was the 600 block of East Capitol Street like in this area when you first moved here?

HERTZBERG: Well, I can tell you my first night here, we put our bed on the top floor, in the front. And, you know, there's traffic on East Capitol. It does come to almost nothing after midnight. And there's traffic on Sixth Street, and I was screaming, "I can't take this! This is Broadway and 42nd Street!"

STEIN: (Laughter).

HERTZBERG: Carroll Street, because it was a one-block street, you could hear a pin drop after about ten o'clock.

STEIN: What a luxury in the city.

HERTZBERG: East Capitol Street, the 600 block, was not that great a block. We thought the house had potential. It was a corner house. We weren't looking for anything this big. We had had a thirteen-foot house. When we saw it, we said, "Oh, dear." Arline encouraged us to take it. She said, "The house is only 40 feet long. It's not a big house." You know, this is it.

She said, "it's sort of tall. It doesn't have that many rooms." So, we finally decided to take it.

Now, the street had streetcars going down East Capitol Street. A streetcar came down, and there were platforms—you got on in the middle of the street on a big platform. We didn't have Metro, so that in the morning, there was quite a bit of activity.

We were the second family to buy a house in the 600 block with the thought of restoration. The other family had 602, and they had had it for a number of years. They were very lonely, and they were very glad to see us (laughter) move in here, this house being empty for years next door.

The rest of the block was very heavily rooming houses. Lots and lots of rooming houses. 606 had been purchased by a couple, and then the man of the two had had a heart attack, so they had just left it empty and unrestored, because he felt there was no way that he could move in the house.

STEIN: What year was this?

HERTZBERG: This was about sixty-one, sixty-two. In the early 60s. The people up and down the block thought that both us and next door were very peculiar people (laughter).

STEIN: They didn't know you were the wave of the future.

HERTZBERG: Yes. I know, 604 was a rooming house. Someone named May Pickett ran it. We took our little bit of furniture (laughter)—other than putting a bed on the third floor, and a table—we sort of stacked what we had in the middle of the room here. She came in and saw, and she said, "Why is that furniture on top of each other?" (Laughter.) And we said that we're going to restore the house. So she said, "What's wrong with it?"

STEIN: (Laughter).

HERTZBERG: The mentality was entirely different. I guess from World War II—May had been abandoned by her husband years earlier, she had raised two kids, and her sister had bought two houses during World War II and turned them into rooming houses—it was very lucrative. So (May) bought a house, then her sister-in-law bought this sort of flat-front house with the porch.

But right up and down, there were rooming houses.

STEIN: Were they mostly for people who worked in Congress?

HERTZBERG: During the war, all these people had been brought in to do war work. Then they became tourist homes. In the first place, we didn't have that many hotels in town, and the suburbs hadn't developed with places where they took in tourists. Also, it was cheap to stay in a tourist home. So all these people were running tourist homes. They put a light on when they had a vacancy. (Light laughter).

Which reminds me, May's was one of the last houses to be sold, and she always said, "The street looked so pretty at night with all these rooming house lights on." She thought now it was just going to the bowwows.

There was this complete dichotomy of the people who were coming in and restoring houses, and the people who had the rooming houses who thought that that's the way it ought to be.

STEIN: At what point did the rooming houses start to disappear? And why?

HERTZBERG: They came in World War II, and they weren't run by very young people—these women were in their thirties or forties. It reached a point where these people were retiring. The new generation wasn't buying rooming houses. The amount they were getting for a room wasn't much, and you had to stay there all day to get it rented during the day.

So, gradually—either because somebody died, or they decided to go to the suburbs, or they went into a retirement home—these properties came on the market. One by one, they were purchased, and almost without exception, they became private homes, except for if you go down four houses, there's a place that is called Quorum House. It's an apartment house.

Well, there weren't any zoning laws then—or what there was there wasn't much—because this guy from Virginia bought these two houses. One of them had beautiful plaster molding. He threw them together. You go down some stairs to go into the entrance, and he put all these very, very tiny apartments into it. And it was perfectly legal. There was nothing we could do about it.

So that was roughly what the area looked like, and then it gradually changed. Across the street was St. Cecilia's, a Catholic high school. It wasn't for the neighborhood; children who came there were mostly from Anacostia and what have you. When we first moved here, it was run by Sisters. We got to know a couple of the Sisters.

There again, things changed very dramatically. At about three each afternoon, two of the Sisters would come out in their long habits, and they would stand there, and these kids would come out, and they weren't to say a peep (light laughter). They were supposed to go mostly to the streetcar and get out of here fast.

Then the 60s came along, and I guess the next thing was they decided to tear down buildings and put a gymnasium at the corner. There was this beautiful four-story building with an entrance on Sixth Street. There was a chapel in there, and the sisters lived in there, and they had guest rooms. I don't think the students used the space. Well, they tore it down and put up that horrible gymnasium, and then they did something to the next building and put classrooms in there.

STEIN: What about the Restoration Society? Were they not on that case?

HERTZBERG: Yes. We met, we protested. But again, I don't think that the laws on the books were the same as they are now. It was sort of hopeless. Yes, we met with them many times.

They decided to put a young Sister in charge, and the two Sisters who were there went back to—I guess it was Rockville. I don't remember what order they were. Holy Cross, it was. Anyhow, when the young Sister came in, she decided that the students should run the school. What was going on was that at three o'clock, the boys from the local school would park up and down the street and try to pick up ... (demure laughter). Finally, the police had to put a stop to it. Because these kids were picking up the girls.

The Sisters decided to hold some dances there, and they would advertise throughout the city. Hundreds and hundreds of people would show up to go to these dances. There wasn't any room inside. And we had a riot where they broke down police cars.

STEIN: At what time was this going on?

HERTZBERG: This was in the 60s, when everything was supposed to be "you do it yourself, your own way." Finally, Sister Joan decided, no more dances because at the last one they broke windows on one side of the school. So the school—about ten, twelve years ago—was closed because it wasn't making any money. They couldn't find sisters to serve as teachers, so they had to go out to the community and hire teachers. First they combined it with another school, and then they decided to just close it down.

It was empty for a number of years because I guess they wanted three point one million or something, and of course some of the local people were interested in turning it into something residential, but you can't start at that price and take something like a school gymnasium, and put in houses. You couldn't sell houses for very much then.

Finally, they talked to the U.S. Congress to give them three million one. Then they put in huge sums of money. It's the nursery for the Library of Congress, but they occupy only the basement level. The upper level, nothing has ever been done with it.

STEIN: So what happened to all the money?

HERTZBERG: They had to pay for the land and the building, and then they had to put windows in the basement level, and they changed the entrance. If you look now, there's this incline that goes down into the basement.

STEIN: So they fixed it—so they now own it?

HERTZBERG: They own it, and they have the nursery there. The Library at one point wanted to have rooms in one building where people doing research could stay, and wanted to do a library school in the other building, I guess the gymnasium. But nothing has ever come of that.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

STEIN: I see. Tell me, what happened after the assassination of Martin Luther King?

HERTZBERG: The night before the riots started, I remember that I tried to make some phone calls, and you just couldn't get through. I called the phone company, and they said, "Oh, there's just a lot of phone calls being made." I think the phone calls were the plans for the riots (light laughter), Lord knows.

Anyhow, we went to work the morning that the riots started. I was at the office, and my mother-in-law had lost her husband and then had remarried. And she and her new husband lived in Florida. She was supposed to be flying up that evening to Washington. I'm at the office, and the phone rings, and it's my mother-in-law. She says, "I have the radio on, and I hear there's rioting going on in Washington, DC." I say, "But mother, I'm here at the office and *nothing* is going on."

STEIN: (Laughter).

HERTZBERG: And of course, the rioting was on Fourteenth Street. So, I decided that since my mother-in-law's coming and we had to go pick her up, I would take a couple of hours of leave. And I walked out of Commerce and went up to F Street where there was a bus. By that time, we didn't have a streetcar anymore.

I couldn't believe what I saw. The storefronts had all been smashed. Glass was all over the floor. There were very few policemen. Kids running up and down the street. I finally got on a bus, and the driver says, "This is the last bus I'm taking through. It's impossible to get through this thing."

I came home. I guess my husband by that time was working for the State of Maryland at a mental health clinic. So he got home okay, because there wasn't any rioting there. By the time we both got home, we realized things were pretty bad. My mother-in-law was on the plane, and we couldn't tell her not to come (laughter).

We decided to go to the airport somehow, and we got stopped by the police and explained that we had to get to the airport, which we did, and we picked up my mother-in-law. She was mad as a hornet. (Laughter.) She said, "How can you say that you didn't know what was going on?"

I guess that they brought the National Guard in after the first night. The National Guard, some of it was stationed in Lincoln Park. They put curfew rules in so that after the sun went down, you were not allowed out of your house. By doing that, this thing quieted down.

What did get hit in the area—they decided to hit all of the Safeways. There was a Safeway around the corner on Seventh Street. They went in and smashed the merchandise. There was one on Massachusetts Avenue at about the 300 block. They took all of the frozen food and threw it on the sidewalk. Those Safeways never opened up again. The only one that remained was the one across the street from Eastern Market for awhile, which they closed when Safeway was sold to another organization. They owned that property, and they needed cash, and they immediately closed it, and we found ourselves without any grocery stores.

The riots—it depended on where you were. We didn't have rioters up and down the street here. The only thing that we got very uptight about was that a car showed up and it was filled with men. They parked across the street, and they weren't moving. We didn't know who they were. So I called the police, and the police said, "It just sounds suspicious. But we don't have any police to send there, but if they start to do anything peculiar ..."

So I called 604, which was May Pickett, who was still a rooming house. She was taking in police chiefs who were being trained by the FBI. So she had all these police chiefs in there (laughter). The chiefs immediately went out. And do you know who it was? It was the gas company—it was either gas or electric, I don't remember.

They wanted to make sure that if these buildings were set fire, they would have to turn off the power. So they were just sitting there all night (laughter), waiting to see what would happen next. So that took care of that.

Of course, after the riots, the city was different. Seventh Street had all been burned down. Not our Seventh Street, but Seventh Street NW. That stayed in a sort of half-burnt state for years before they did anything with that. The grocery stores were gone, the department stores stayed for awhile, then one at a time they all disappeared.

STEIN: You actually had department stores here once?

HERTZBERG: Oh, yes!

STEIN: Tell me a little bit about these stores and how they changed.

HERTZBERG: F Street NW was like Main Street. From about Seventh to Fourteenth Street. Downtown had all these department stores and one at a time they all disappeared. Hecht used to be a huge building at Seventh, and now that's about the only thing that's there.

STEIN: What about shopping on the Hill? Other than the grocery stores, were there places where you shopped over the years?

HERTZBERG: No. As a matter of fact, Pennsylvania Avenue—a shop would come in, and a lot of them did not work. They failed. The Hill was too small. At one point, there was this lovely coffee shop with a wood-burning fireplace. It lasted a couple of years, and that went. Of course, there's been a fair turnover in restaurants. A fair turnover in restaurants. A lot them just don't make it.

There's never really been a lot of stores, even on Pennsylvania Avenue. You don't have very much variety. Other than a couple of shops for framing—we didn't have an antique shop or very much in gift shops. We had mostly restaurants of one kind or another.

What's come in is the Korean grocery store. There were two grocery stores on East Capitol that were a non-conforming use. There was the one on Fifth and East Capitol, and one on Fourth. Older people were running them, and when those people retired, these Korean families bought them. And they revived them. They're very useful! I run down to get my milk and my juice there, and my ice cream. I do my major shopping at Eastern Market. But particularly things like milk, juice, ice cream, my spices—they have a spice aisle—I get at either one of those Korean stores. The people that run them are very nice.

Now, the one on Fifth and East Capitol has just been sold. They had this family that was running it that was a mother and a father, and these two sons in their twenties or thirties who had wives. The way they ran the one there was that the mother opened the store in the morning, and then the two sons were there during the day when merchandise came in. The daughters-in-law are around the cash registers. Those stores are open from about seven in the morning till about ten, eleven at night. They do a lot of business. Mostly in small amounts. They're very polite, they're very pleasant, and I'm very happy that they're there.

At some point, this black man who had worked for Safeway opened a grocery store down on Potomac Avenue and was doing very well there. I used to go there to get dog food. I tried to support him. And then one of his employees would make home-made raisin bread. But it was too far away to really use it as your main grocery store.

And then he tried to open up a second one in Northeast, and he went bankrupt. So, that didn't quite work out. He had very good experience in management of a store that carried everything. His only problem was that he had the wrong location. He had to be closer to Eastern Market.

STEIN: Do you have any experience with the schools in the area?

HERTZBERG: No, because I don't have children. I've been active in the Garden Club—very active in the Garden Club. I was an officer for awhile.

STEIN: When did the Garden Club start up?

HERTZBERG: That goes back I guess to the 50s. It was a small group of women who were probably middle-aged and did not work. They started a Garden Club and met once a month and had a high tea in mid-afternoon and had lectures and what have you. Well there were (**unintelligible**) Christmas decorations and so on at the market. At that time, you had to be asked to join (laughter).

STEIN: (Laughter.)

HERTZBERG: Now, anybody can join. And everybody does. They come and they go. At that time, you had to be asked to join, and then you had to attend a certain number of meetings. You had to work with a member on a project to show you had certain skills (laughter).

STEIN: What were the criteria for admission?

HERTZBERG: Living on the Hill, I think. Someone who saw you gardening said, "Would you like to join the Garden Club?" And then you had to show that you could make a contribution. We would do a tree at Christmas time that the Federation wanted done. I was asked to join, and I joined.

By that time, the younger people that were joining were working. So instead of meeting in houses, we started to meet in the evening in some place. And that's what we do now. We don't meet at people's homes. That group is active. We sell bulbs at the market. I always sell bulbs, and I also buy bulbs. I have a couple of hundred in the front yard. I've been fairly active in the Restoration Society, particularly in the field of zoning.

And, of course, there are the tour buses. The tour buses that go down the street on East Capitol are a disgrace. During the height of the season, you can get as many as fifty a day. They're diesel run. On a hot day, eventually the air's so blue you can't see across the street.

Some of them feel that they have the right to park. It's illegal to run the engines but they do run them. I've been working to try to get them off of there. Sharon says something *will* be done about it, but I'll believe it when I see it.

I don't think that tour buses should be allowed on residential streets. It may be the best way for them to get to the Capitol, but there are other ways to do it. You can come in through the throughway. I don't know Northeast well enough, but they say there's a way of going through Northeast and then you will eventually come up North Capitol, where you do not come through residential areas. I think that restriction should be put upon them.

STEIN: Yes. This is a most elegant street.

HERTZBERG: They probably give substantial sums of money to—I don't know—maybe the City Council. Sharon is trying to work on it.

STEIN: Can you say anything about your impressions of politics in the city and how that's changed over the years?

HERTZBERG: Well (laughter). Getting rid of Marion Barry was the best thing that ever happened to the city. What can you say about him?

STEIN: Do you remember when he was a positive force in this city? Can you remember back to that?

HERTZBERG: I don't ever remember him as a positive force. I didn't know him in his very early days when he was head of these organizations that were trying to help black people. I didn't know about him, because I wasn't living where he was living, or doing what he was doing. But by the time he became mayor, my first impression of him was when I went to a meeting where he was supposed to speak. I don't remember whether he was trying to be mayor or what this was all about.

I found that he showed up with about twelve of these guys that surrounded him. They were about six foot four, like this was the U.S. Army or something. I thought, "What kind of hell? Nobody's going to shoot him." I never thought that this guy had a true feeling of what the problems of the city were. He was a very biased person.

And of course, we used to have these sort of cement blocks on the 600 block that were octagonal-shaped. We said we didn't want them removed.

What he did was, just before he had to take off—remember, he was sent to jail—he gave each of his friends one block from about Third to Lincoln Park. These guys went out and hired Mexicans who had never laid brick. They took all the cement blocks off—they didn't prepare the street properly.

These Mexican laid the brick—they worked very hard. I'd see them in the morning and see them when I came home. You know, they were working for a living, but they did not know how to do it right.

You go down this block—it's starting to happen there around my house—and all these bricks start to get all uneven. You get down at the other end almost to the corner, and someone has taken out three different rows of brick because they were up about four inches. There are sinkholes all over the place. It wasn't done right.

I'm sure that these poor people that worked there were given minimum wage. I got to know two of them who worked in front of my place. When they were ready to leave, they came to see me. They rang my doorbell and said that they had finished their job. And I said to them, "What are you going to do next?" And they said that they were going to go back to Mexico. They had family there. They had big families. To which I said, "Well, are you coming back to the United States?" And they said, "Yes."

I said, "Do you have proper papers, may I ask?"

One of them said, "I've got a passport from Puerto Rico."

I said, "Are you Puerto Rican?"

He said, "No, but I get in and out a lot."

The other one also seemed to be getting in and out. They evidently came and did these jobs and then went back home for a period of time. But bricklayers they were not (light laughter).

STEIN: You mentioned Lincoln Park. Since you're a dog person, I wonder how Lincoln Park has changed over the time that you've been here.

HERTZBERG: I have arthritis now in my knees. This is my fourth English setter. I'm having someone take him down to the cemetery, because I cannot handle it.

I used to go in the other direction. I used to go to the Capitol grounds with my dogs. I'd go down A Street and then go around the Capitol and then back here. I did not use Lincoln Park. Now that I have someone coming to pick him up, they do take him down to the cemetery.

Lincoln Park looks better, certainly. They've redesigned it, and it does look better. I don't know anything about it, because I don't go down there. Whether it's safe, or not safe.

After Seventh Street which leads to the Market, unless it's going to somebody's home, I don't do very much in that direction. As a matter of fact, even in that direction, since I left First and Second Street, there's very, very rare occasion when I go up among those houses.

STEIN: Which?

HERTZBERG: Where I used to live. Once in awhile, I have some occasion to go, but East Capitol's sort of my route. Toward the Capitol. Because you go in that direction to get buses or to go to Union Station.

STEIN: What do you like about living here, and don't you like about living here on the Hill?

HERTZBERG: I like the Hill. I think the reason why I like the Hill is I'm from New York City. My last home was in Brooklyn. It was very much like this. There were these little communities of private homes. You didn't have supermarkets. You had these little specialty stores, usually run by I guess first- or second-generation immigrants. You had a meat market. You had a shoe repair guy.

For years, I would mail my shoes to be repaired up there. My father always said, "The guy worked seven days a week, from sunrise to sunset, and never took a vacation." He (the shoe repairman) just didn't understand why a psychologist said that you would go crazy if you didn't have a vacation (laughter). This guy enjoyed his work.

I think that this area has sort of the quality of a community in a major city. You have a mixture of age groups. People with children. People without children. Single, married. Everybody sort of gets along. You are now getting to the point where you have some people who are very wealthy, and some people who are very middle class. That is I think the newest thing that has happened here.

The house down the street that had a sign up for ten days sold for one million three hundred and ninety five thousand. Now that's something new. Whoever bought that has got to have some money. Then, of course, we had that restoration of the house with the deer. In the next block? There's that house that has the side lot, which has a plaster deer on the front lawn. Well, a fortune's been put into that house. It looks gorgeous, it just looks gorgeous.

And then in the next block, they're doing that house on the corner on Eighth and East Capitol, which they're putting back together brick by brick. That's sort of a new trend here where lots of money's being poured into real estate.

STEIN: Which will somewhat change the character of who can afford to live here.

HERTZBERG: But, I feel very comfortable here. I know a lot of the neighbors. I do a lot of gardening. I'm part of the Restoration Society. This is where I want to live. The only thing that bothers me is the crime situation. I think the police—they don't catch anybody!

Do you know about, was it last year on New Year's Eve that they broke into all these houses across the street?

STEIN: No, I don't recall that.

HERTZBERG: Well, on New Year's Eve, between I guess three and five in the morning, someone did the whole block across the street trying to get into houses.

At one, the burglar alarm went off, and they didn't get in. At one, he got in through the basement and went up one floor and took a purse. In one, they found a chair that he had moved around to see if he could open windows on the first floor. They were out of town.

I think about six were targeted. In one, someone got a photograph of him, but the police said it wasn't clear. After that incident, this guy kept coming back and coming back.

STEIN: The criminal?

HERTZBERG: Yes. There were these break-ins at four in the morning. According to the police, the pattern was the same. What happened to me was that about four in the morning—Devon was just a puppy so he wasn't particularly keen on hearing noises—I heard five footsteps. I thought it was down here—I sleep on the top floor, in the front.

Of course, I was terrified. I just went and turned all the lights on. I could go in the hall and get all the hall lights on, the bedroom light on. I just screamed, "What is going on down there!" And I heard five more footsteps. And nothing else.

I dialed 911. Well, they were trying to catch this guy, so six police cars showed up. When the police cars came, I said I think someone's in the house. I guess I may have thrown the key down to them. Anyhow, they came in, and they checked everything. They said no one had been in here. I said, "No. I heard footsteps. I heard footsteps. I can't explain, I've got to think my way through this thing."

They acted like I was neurotic because there'd been so many robberies.

STEIN: They didn't see any sign of someone having entered?

HERTZBERG: No. So, the next morning, my phone rang. One of the neighbors said, "Marie, I know you always keep your iron gate closed. You realize it's opened?"

I said, "Strange. I called the police last night." I thought, something really did happen.

I went to put out the garbage, and I came back, and I looked at the mail slot, and all the screws except one were gone, and this thing had been pulled out. And then I realized what I had heard. There are five steps. I heard him come up the five steps. He heard me yell, and I heard him go down the five steps.

Since I was told that the police were trying to work this thing and that there was a detective in charge, I finally got his name. I finally got him at 1D [ed: Police substation 1D1] and told him what I thought had happened.

He said, "Why are you calling me?"

I said, "Because it sounds like it's part of the same thing that you're working on."

To which he said that I was to call 1D1. So I called 1D1 and left a message. The sergeant there was about to retire, so he didn't do anything. Finally, one of the officers came, and I told him what had happened.

And he said, "Well, why would anybody do that?" I said, "I don't know!" (Laughter.)

STEIN: (Laughter.)

HERTZBERG: I guess maybe he wanted to put something in there to get the door off, I don't know. But, it certainly happened. I think the crime situation here is bad, and very little is being done about it.

STEIN: How has it changed over the years? Have there been waves back and forth? Do you think it's a little bit better now? Worse now? The same?

HERTZBERG: (Unsure). Well, first of all, you have these people who break into cars. A dozen cars, or six cars, get broken into. Then they must catch someone, or he must change his locale. So for six or eight months, it's very quiet. Is it the same person who comes back? I don't know.

But you get that, and then you get these people who now during the day either try to come in through the patio, or come in under the stairs. There's a sprinkling of it all the time.

Then you add either a rape or an attempted rape—about three months ago, right next door in front of that building. I went to meetings, and asked the police. Somebody said that she wasn't really raped. There were police there from two thirty till five in the morning. Something had to have happened. As far as I know, that's never been solved.

(Pause in conversation.)

HERTZBERG: Well, I guess that we've covered it, haven't we?

STEIN: Yes. I think we've done well. This has been very interesting. I'm so glad that we did this.

HERTZBERG: Well, the Hill is a very interesting place. I've always been part of it. Even though I worked, I've always at least known the neighbors. Usually, since they know that I'm sort of interested in crime, people do get in touch with me.

STEIN: It's been very interesting. Two questions for you, having to do with photographs. The first one is, would you be agreeable to having someone take your picture as part of the archives?

HERTZBERG: (Nervous laughter.)

STEIN: You'd rather not?

HERTZBERG: I'd rather not.

STEIN: Well, it's up to you. The second one is, might you have any photographs of historical interest, or documents? I was thinking if you have pictures of Carroll Street.

HERTZBERG: I could look. I have a little envelope in which I keep pictures. In that one year and some, we were so busy trying to pull it together. I don't know whether I have a picture. And I don't have a picture of this original house, either.

You're under so much pressure trying to live in a house that hadn't been lived in. The first thing that happened was we had a big snowstorm, and the water from the roof hit the basement. So we immediately had to take our money and do something about the roof. In those stages, you don't take photographs.

Now I wish that I had sort of kept a tab of what happened here. But we were desperate. You were going to school, you were working, you were restoring, the riots came. If we hadn't have been young, I don't think we would have survived.

Nowadays, people don't move into houses until they're restored. But when this thing got started, people moved in and started to work on their places. When did you first move in on the Hill?

STEIN: In seventy-eight.

HERTZBERG: By seventy-eight, I guess people were buying restored houses. But in the early days, there was no such thing as a restored house. You had to buy something and do it.

STEIN: I thank you very much for this interview.

[END OF INTERVIEW]