



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

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**Interview with Henry Wrona**

**Interview Date:** February 12 and 14, 2003

**Interviewer:** Carole Kolker

**Transcriber:** Betsy Barnett

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

[Tape begins in the middle of a sentence.]

**KOLKER:** ...is Wednesday, February 12, 2003. I'm Carole Kolker and this is an interview with Henry Wrona. We are at Mr. Wrona's apartment at 305 C Street NE, #202, Washington, D. C.

[Tape pause.]

**KOLKER:** Okay, I'll tell you where I'd like to start is—have you tell me how far back your roots go on Capitol Hill.

**WRONA:** I've lived here for about 45, 50 years now. I've lost track but I can look it up in the file cabinet if you want to.

**KOLKER:** Oh, that's okay. And when did you move here?

**WRONA:** Well, I came to Capitol Hill—I was working downtown, working for the Italian Embassy. And that program ended and then we went to work for private industry and that program ended. Then I took a long vacation to California, came back, and lived in the house with, you know, six, seven guys. And one of the guys I've known for a long time worked on the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate. And said, you know—Senator Wiley [Alexander Wiley, (R) Wisconsin] at that time was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and he was the Chief Clerk on the committee. And said, you know, "He's looking for somebody and you've vacationed long enough and I've made an appointment for you to see him tomorrow." I said, "I've just arrived in town tonight." He said, "That's too bad. You have an appointment tomorrow." Well, I went to see Senator Wiley and we had a nice little talk. And he said, "Well, the job is yours if you'd like it. You look like somebody I'd like to have around." And so, I said, "Good. When do I start, you know, next week, week after?" He said, "No, you're all dressed up. You've got a tie on. There's a desk; it's empty. Go to work." And I've been here ever since. But, not with Senator Wiley, of course. But, with five other senators.

**KOLKER:** And, what was your background for this job that qualified you...?

**WRONA:** None, except I went to business school. I never did go to college. I went to high school, graduated, and I went to business school. Well, I was interested in business and business proceedings. In high school I won a shorthand contest. I was the best shorthand writer in the country and...

**KOLKER:** And, where was this?

**WRONA:** In Rhode Island.

**KOLKER:** In Rhode Island, I see.

**WRONA:** In Rhode Island. And, while I was going to business school, we got—you know, it was just before the war, World War II, that is. And, telegram said—I took a Civil Service exam, “We have an opening. We need you. Please come.” And, at that time, they started you out, I think it was twelve-twenty, \$1,220 a year.

**KOLKER:** Oh, my.

**WRONA:** And I went to Washington and got the job immediately because they were hiring all kinds of people and been here ever since, except for a six year period when I went back—six months rather—when I went back home during World War II, after World War II. And my father had died. And, so, I stayed with my mother for a short time and then decided to come back. And I’ve been here ever since.

**KOLKER:** Your family roots are in Rhode Island.

**WRONA:** In Rhode Island.

**KOLKER:** Is that where your parents are from?

**WRONA:** They were from Poland, both of them were from Poland. And...

**KOLKER:** Do you know when they came to the United States?

**WRONA:** Well, no I really don’t, because I don’t know too much about my parents’ background, except for my mother. I know she came...I think she married at the age of 13, my father married her. And then, she went back and forth to Poland, I think about four times, before she finally made up her mind she wanted to stay in America, I think. My older brother and older sister were born in Poland. And, then, the last time she went home, went back to Poland rather, she brought her mother back. So, when she brought her mother back, then she just stayed. And, so, I’m 80, and I’m the youngest of ten children. So, I don’t know when the hell they got there.

**KOLKER:** And, so, you all grew up in Rhode Island?

**WRONA:** All grew up in Rhode Island.

**KOLKER:** In...where...what...?

**WRONA:** Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

**KOLKER:** Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

**WRONA:** If you know where that is. That's about 30 miles, 35 miles—let me see, south of Boston.

**KOLKER:** Pawtucket.

**WRONA:** Pawtucket. P-A-W...Pawtucket. [spells it]

**KOLKER:** Oh, thank you.

**WRONA:** But, if you're a Pawtuckian, you say "Patucket".

**KOLKER:** Okay, so, I assume having a job there, you were looking for a place to live—when you got your job with Senator Wiley—

**WRONA:** I was living in a group house.

**KOLKER:** And, so, what made you choose...

**WRONA:** The group house?

**KOLKER:** No, this apartment.

**WRONA:** Well, I was working on Capitol Hill. I was not working on Capitol... Yes, I was working on Capitol Hill and... If I get excited, don't, don't you get excited.

**KOLKER:** [Laughs] Okay.

**WRONA:** And, I was living on New Hampshire Avenue and I had an apartment there. And I was sharing it with some people. And I think my niece was here at that time, too. And, working on the Hill—I'd worked I guess about a couple of years about that time—and was... This particular lot was empty. There was a big "For Sale" sign on it for a long time. It was a little hill. And then, all of a sudden they started building on it. Well, before that I had moved from New Hampshire Avenue to Maryland Avenue to the John Adams House. And I was there for about two or three years when they started building this one. And I watched it being built and it was a beautiful apartment and before it was finished I came over to inquire about it. And they said, yes, they were taking leases and I signed up. And I moved in in August. And they didn't even know I was here, even though I signed the lease, because I didn't have to pay for the month of August. I didn't pay my rent until September. So... And I've been living—not in this particular apartment. I lived next door for six years and I've been in this one ever since.

**KOLKER:** So, this is in, I'd say, in the '50s?

**WRONA:** Let me see. Let's go backwards.

**KOLKER:** Okay.

**WRONA:** This is 2003, so forty years ago would be, what, 1963?

**KOLKER:** '63.

**WRONA:** Well, 1959 I would say.

**KOLKER:** So you were already living on the Hill briefly.

**WRONA:** When I first came to Washington, no. I lived all over Washington.

**KOLKER:** But when you moved from New Hampshire Avenue to Maryland Avenue.

**WRONA:** To Maryland... I've lived here ever since.

**KOLKER:** And was it because of the neighborhood or...

**WRONA:** Proximity to work. I was working in the Dirksen Building. At that time the Hart Building wasn't built. Well, I was working in the Dirksen Building and the Russell Building. I mean, it depended on who I was working for. And I was married somewhere along the line there, for about four years and with that we were living in Fairlington and commuted. But, when I was living alone, I thought, What the hell? Why are you commuting? Why don't you live where you're working? It'd make more sense to you. And, so, I decided that's what I wanted to do. And, so, I moved to Maryland Avenue, got a nice little apartment there in the John Adams House. But, then, I watched this one being built. And when it was finished I decided I'd like to move into it because it was a brand new building. And here I am. And it was real nice to go to work. Just to get out of bed and roll around the corner and there you were.

**KOLKER:** Was there anything appealing about the neighborhood? It's...

**WRONA:** The neighborhood at that time was not very appealing, because it was a mixed neighborhood. And by being not appealing, I don't mean because it was mixed, I mean because we had a lot of problems. I was held up several times, three times. But yet, between this building here and the Senate office buildings, they were sort of like row houses. They're all spruced up now, they're beautiful houses. But at that time, most of the houses had black people in them. And those black people couldn't have been any nicer. And the houses had steps going up to the second floor. Most of them did because that's where the entrance was. Now the steps are gone and the entrances are on the ground floor. But, those people would watch out for you. Because I'd come home late every night, 7:30, 8:00. And they'd be sitting on the steps in the summertime and in the wintertime they'd be walking around. And you always felt protected and never had to worry about a thing. But, then, after the riots... When were the riots? In '68?

**KOLKER:** '68, yes.

**WRONA:** And then things went to pot.

**KOLKER:** So, it changed for these neighbors or the relationship...

**WRONA:** It changed everything.

**KOLKER:** In what way?

**WRONA:** The neighborhood. They didn't spruce up then, but shortly thereafter people were leaving the houses. Well, they were being evicted out of the houses. And, you know, property was going to go up after things settled down.

**KOLKER:** Um-hmm.

**WRONA:** And, so.

**KOLKER:** Tell me about these neighbors. Did you know their names?

**WRONA:** Their first names.

**KOLKER:** First names.

**WRONA:** Um-hmm.

**KOLKER:** And they knew your name? They called you...

**WRONA:** They knew me. They called me Henry or Mr. Henry. Most everybody called you Mr. Henry for some reason or other. And I let people call me what they want to, as long as they don't call me a bastard. But, even then, if they want to call me a bastard, that's their problem.

**KOLKER:** And did you have a relationship with them in any other way other than in passing?

**WRONA:** No, except always talking. I always stopped and talked to them and they would talk to me. Most of the people there were very, very nice. But after the riots, as I said, it was very, very, very uncomfortable. I mean, I couldn't walk from here to the store without being spat at or... One time three girls were walking down the sidewalk and—I suppose you can't blame them. I don't know—and they absolutely pushed me into the road. They would not move for me, separate so I could keep on walking on the sidewalk. I went through Stanton Park, had bottles thrown at me. And two or three times when I went to the store, I came back and there was a mugger behind me waiting. So, what did I do? I just kept on living here because I liked the apartment and you got to know people here. And it started getting better

and better and better. And now we have the Page School across the street with the 24-hour security guard. We have the day care center across the street with a 24-hour security guard, with the Capitol police going up and down the road. So, it's over-safe now. I can't say that, it's really not over-safe. But, when I first moved here, it was very— You couldn't leave anything in the car. If you left a paper or anything in the car that would show, you could be sure it would be gone the next morning.

**KOLKER:** Now, this was when you moved in. This has nothing to do with your relationship with your neighbors. This was just the general climate.

**WRONA:** Oh, no, no, no, no. This was just the neighborhood.

**KOLKER:** Uh-huh.

**WRONA:** No, this was not just in front of this apartment here. It was the whole area.

**KOLKER:** The whole area.

**WRONA:** I mean, I would no more walk across Fourth Street at nighttime at that time because Stanton Park was absolutely deadly at nighttime. In the summertime, you'd have your windows open if the weather was good and you could hear all kinds of screaming and yelling. Sometimes for help and sometimes for mercy and sometimes just plain old happiness.

**KOLKER:** So, you were here during the riots.

**WRONA:** Um-hmm.

**KOLKER:** Do you remember that time?

**WRONA:** Well, pretty much so, because I was working for Senator Kuchel at that time, from California. [spells it, twice] because people always want to know how you spell Kuchel. And at that time, they were having the Cherry Blossom Festival. And one of the girls in our office was the princess from California. So, you know, those things sort of tied me into remembering the dates and whatnot. And, of course, everything was called off because of the riots. And they let us go home early because the place was getting filled with tear gas all around town and smoke from the fires. And I had friends who lived over on Denton Street over there in Southeast—a young couple. And they called me and said, you know, “Come over here and spend the night with us. We don't want you to spend the night alone, especially with that big window in the living room.” And so, I closed all the blinds and walked over there in the middle of the afternoon. Not the middle of the afternoon. Well, yeah, I guess it was. And it was so deadly quiet and smoky and tear gassy. And I went over there, spent the night with them, and then came back the next day. And there was smoke for a long time. And in Stanton Park there was a dry cleaning establishment that

burnt. They torched it. And of course, down on H Street was filled with smoke. So, it took a long time. So, let alone downtown. We didn't get the smoke downtown. We had all the smoke we needed right here.

**KOLKER:** There was a lot going on right in...

**WRONA:** The neighborhood was just... You had to be very, very careful. So...

**KOLKER:** Just a minute. You've been here for a long time. Have you gotten involved with...

**WRONA:** No, as I said, I worked. My last job—well, my last two jobs—I worked for Senator McIntyre from New Hampshire and then my last job was Senator Rudman from New Hampshire. And I became very involved with two men, both men rather.

**KOLKER:** In what capacity?

**WRONA:** [Laughing] Very involved with two men. Let's strike that. We don't want that going on the record.

**KOLKER:** Okay.

**WRONA:** Senator Rudman, I was his office manager. And Senator McIntyre, I ended up being his office manager. But, before that, I was close to him in the way that I drove him whenever he had to go to the airport or go to a meeting or go to a big broadcasting company or—I was more, I was an aide in the office but I was close to him in the way that I was sort of his personal aide. And it was the same way with Senator Rudman. I ran his office for two terms, because that's all he wanted. And I told him when I became 70 I was retiring because that was the end of his second term. And he said, "Well, since you're retiring, I'm going to retire." And I said, "Well, you can't retire. You have a long way to go." And he said, "No, I'm really thinking about it." And he didn't retire, he went with a law firm. But he felt two terms for any senator was long enough. And so we both retired together.

**KOLKER:** So, that was ten years ago.

**WRONA:** Twelve years ago.

**KOLKER:** Twelve years.

**WRONA:** Yeah. It was 1992. Ten years ago, going on eleven years.

**KOLKER:** Okay. How about your church affiliations in the community? There are so many churches on Capitol Hill.

**WRONA:** I went to church when I was home because I had to. When I came to Washington, being on my own, I never went to church unless it was a wedding or a funeral or a baptism or...

**KOLKER:** So, you wouldn't have found your neighborhood there. How about the neighborhood associations or any...

**WRONA:** No.

**KOLKER:** Nothing.

**WRONA:** As I said, I worked seven days a week...

**KOLKER:** Oh, my.

**WRONA:** ...and I did not get involved. Selfish of me, probably, but when you work seven days a week you don't really have time to get involved.

**KOLKER:** No. So your social life didn't revolve around the Hill.

**WRONA:** No, it revolved around the office.

**KOLKER:** The office.

**WRONA:** That's why I told you I wouldn't have very much to tell you.

**KOLKER:** Well, and how about your co-workers. Did many of them live on the Hill?

**WRONA:** No. At that time, people didn't really want to live on the Hill.

**KOLKER:** Really?

**WRONA:** Now, it is. It's different. This apartment was empty. I don't mean empty, I mean, there were a lot of apartments available most of the time.

**KOLKER:** Well, then, tell me who would have been living in this apartment in those early years.

**WRONA:** People who worked downtown.

**KOLKER:** Hmm-hum.

**WRONA:** We had one couple who lived in Virginia. They liked the neighborhood and so they lived here. But, there was always an apartment for rent. And now it's changed and we have.... I'm the oldest person in the building and then we have another resident who is a little bit younger than I am and then we have a couple who live here six months of the year and six months in California. He's a retired professor from

Berkeley. But, six months of the year he teaches at George Mason University here. So, we are the oldest people here in the building. Everybody else is young, working, as you can see how quiet the building is. Even with the door open, you don't hear the elevator going up and down. You don't hear anybody going in and out.

**KOLKER:** So then it sounds like you have a little community here with—in the building.

**WRONA:** I did in the office and, once I retired, here. I am the president of the condo, of the Board of Directors.

**KOLKER:** So, this is now a condo?

**WRONA:** Yes. It went condo about 15 some-odd years ago. More than that, maybe 20 years.

**KOLKER:** And, at that time, was there much of a turnover or did there...

**WRONA:** There was. You had a choice of either buying. You could stay if the person who bought it wanted to rent to you. And we chose—this friend of mine and I—she lives upstate New York, but we knew each other when we first came to Washington, both went to work for OPA. So, we bought the unit together and, so, I fixed this up myself. Because you had a choice when you bought it, “as is” or, \$10,000 more they would spruce it up the way they wanted to because they were going to do the whole building. And I chose to buy it “as is” and do it myself, because I had ideas of what I wanted, not...

**KOLKER:** And what were they offering in terms of upgrades.

**WRONA:** Money wise?

**KOLKER:** Well, for the \$10,000, what were you going to get?

**WRONA:** They put new tile in the floor. They were renovating the bathroom. They put new cabinets in the kitchen. They were putting in a new stove, I think at that time, and probably maybe a dishwasher. I'm not quite sure just all. But, at that time, that area over there where the buffet is, was a dining room. And I always thought it was strange they would make a dining room in front of the toilet. And so that never did agree with me. And so when I took over the apartment, I had some contractors come in and told them what I wanted. I wanted a counter here that I could sit around and I wanted the—I didn't want the dining room area, I wanted the kitchen extended. And so they extended the kitchen as far as the doorway there. And so it added cabinets by pushing the refrigerator over. And it just made the whole kitchen bigger.

**KOLKER:** So you got what you wanted.

**WRONA:** Beg pardon?

**KOLKER:** I said, you got what you wanted.

**WRONA:** I got what I wanted and was very happy with it. And just recently I had the bathroom extended into the bedroom, because this way I can get my wheelchair in and out of the bathroom.

**KOLKER:** And, at the time that they converted to condos, would you say that most of the people—that there was a large turnover in occupants?

**WRONA:** Yeah. Well, not a real large turnover, but some people who bought it wanted to move in, others wanted to rent.

**KOLKER:** So, it was an investment.

**WRONA:** But now you can put your “For Sale” sign up or “For Rent” sign up and within a week’s time it’s practically gone. And this apartment here now is up for sale, I think. Not for sale, but, I mean, if I wanted to sell, it would sell. Sold recently for about \$150,000. We bought it for \$36,000.

**KOLKER:** And it’s one bedroom, one bathroom?

**WRONA:** Yeah. You can walk around and see it if you want to.

**KOLKER:** And this is really your dining area.

**WRONA:** Yes.

**KOLKER:** That would certainly make a lot of sense.

**WRONA:** Yeah. I’ve had many a dinner party here and I had many a party here. And what we did was just serve buffet style and eat where you want to, wherever you could find a place to sit down and eat. The counter space would always handle four or five people. This table here opens up and that table has a little history.

**KOLKER:** Yes?

**WRONA:** It raises. You can pull it up and make a dining room table out of it. And the reason why I bought it, because Senator McIntyre would meet, have dinner over here once a month, twice a month when his wife would be away. And so, but he did not like sitting at the counter, nor did he like sitting in the chair with a tray in his lap. He wanted to sit at a dining room table. So I found this table at the Convertible Shop and brought it home, bought a chair. So when he came over for dinner—[Noise] and the other side goes up and then goes up to a...

**KOLKER:** It just looks... Oh, my.

**WRONA:** ...table. And he was happy.

**KOLKER:** I'm sure honored.

**WRONA:** And, since he was happy, I was happy.

**KOLKER:** And I see it's on wheels.

**WRONA:** It's on wheels.

**KOLKER:** How functional.

**WRONA:** It's rather beat up right now because of the wheelchair. And, I finally rearranged the furniture. And, I've got it over here in this corner now so that I don't have to hit it anymore.

**KOLKER:** So I'm going to assume that when you had these parties, these were Hill people. I mean this was...

**WRONA:** People from the office, people, friends. Some friends that I'd known for all these many years.

**KOLKER:** But, not related to the neighborhood.

**WRONA:** No, not.

**KOLKER:** How about related to your—the people in the condo?

**WRONA:** When it was an apartment house, I knew a lot of the people here. I guess I was much younger then and so were the women.

**KOLKER:** You were social.

**WRONA:** And, on this floor here, I knew everybody and everybody knew me. And, at that time, we all kept our doors open. We would come... Well, I don't really mean open all night long. But we'd have our doors open and exchange cocktails and exchange friendships and exchange friends and, you know, that sort of stuff. It was just like an open community here on the second floor. And, so, if you had a party, you invited most everybody.

**KOLKER:** How many units are in this building?

**WRONA:** Forty-two.

**KOLKER:** So, it's small. You can get to know everyone.

**WRONA:** And, we had a fire in here one night. And there was a woman who lived in one of the apartments and she liked to drink and smoke. And she put her pans on the stove one night and had several drinks and sort of either passed out or fell asleep, whatever. But, everything started burning. And about two o'clock in the morning the fire trucks came and they told us all to get out of our apartments. Well, there were only one or two of us that came out of our apartments and everybody else did not because we knew what was going on. And they didn't want anybody to see who they were sleeping with, so, consequently, they grabbed the [inaudible] and the smoke then came out. [Both laugh] So, it was a funny night, even after the firemen left, even though there was a fire.

**KOLKER:** Memorable.

**WRONA:** Memorable.

**KOLKER:** Well, if you worked seven days, then you didn't have time for sports or anything...

**WRONA:** No.

**KOLKER:** ...that would be local.

**WRONA:** No. Because with McIntyre, not McIntyre so much because McIntyre's wife was living here. So, they had pretty much of a home life. But, you know, working late, I would drive him home or drive him to the airport or drive him wherever he had to go and take care of his personal needs here in the Senate. When he had to go to a meeting, make sure, you know, he looked just right and all that sort of stuff. And with Rudman, Rudman did not have his wife here. She lived in New Hampshire. She lived here for a short time while she was going to school to get a couple of more master's degrees. But, so, he living alone, I don't know. I would make sure the apartment was clean, get a cleaning lady for him, make sure his clothes were clean. I just took care of him. In the office, ran the office and took care of him. Picked him up, took him home. And today that man is a very valuable man to me because I've needed transportation for the last year and a half and he's provided his private limo service. And I use the limo service every other day, every day if I want to, and he pays for it. You don't find very many people like that anymore.

**KOLKER:** No, no. I was going to ask you when you said you drove him places. You said you moved here to live close to work. Did you take advantage of it by walking to work or how did you...

**WRONA:** When I was living here?

**KOLKER:** When you were working on the Hill.

**WRONA:** Walked to work, yeah. Because it was just down the road. One block. And, so, by picking him up in the morning, I would go right to the garage if I had to pick him up early in the morning. Otherwise, I would go to the office and open up the office and then he would call and say he'd be ready to be picked up. And I'd go get him, come back. And there'd always be doughnuts—

[Third person's voice.]

**WRONA:** Mr. Humphrey, how do you do? [Tape stopped at this point.]

**KOLKER:** That was the mailman who just came through your open door.

**WRONA:** Absolutely.

**KOLKER:** And, you were telling me... I asked you if you felt safe here and you just told me such an interesting story. I was wondering if we could...

**WRONA:** What was the story I was saying.

**KOLKER:** You were just telling about being down in the laundry room. Your relationship, you know, how safe you feel here.

**WRONA:** Oh, yeah. That was it. I mean, I came back upstairs and the phone rang and it was Elaine up on the fourth floor, who runs our building. We pay her.

**KOLKER:** Is she the building manager?

**WRONA:** She doesn't like to be called manager.

**KOLKER:** Well, it's a condo, I guess.

**WRONA:** It's a condo. And she owns a condo and she takes care of the books. A board member can do all that sort of stuff, but she does it so well and had been doing it that we'd just as soon keep on paying her and having her do it.

**KOLKER:** And her name is Elaine—?

**WRONA:** Elaine Foster. And, so, Mr. Humphrey knows her very well, too. She's been in the building, not a long time, but, well, I guess about the last 15 years or so.

**KOLKER:** And how long has Mr. Humphrey been your mailman?

**WRONA:** Quite some time. I don't know how many years because I've never really paid that much attention to it until I've been retired. Because, when I came home, I'd check my mailbox. I never did see the mailman, so— But, because of my condition, he brings the mail upstairs.

**KOLKER:** Oh, my. And, so, you said you were downstairs in the laundry room and left your door open.

**WRONA:** I left my door open because I feel that safe about leaving my door open. I never lock it when I go out in the backyard and sit or when I'm going up and down the stairs or whatever. I feel that safe here.

**KOLKER:** And is this since it's turned into a condominium or has this always been the case? This sense of...

**WRONA:** No, it has not been the case. Before the riots and shortly thereafter the riots we had all kinds of robberies. People in the elevator at gunpoint holding people up. My next door neighbor here, a young girl, moved into the apartment house one night and—well, she didn't move in in one night. But, shortly after she moved in, I heard screams and I ran to my door and there were guys living in the apartment next door and down at the corner and they all came running out. And there was this guy beating the hell out of her. But she was able to get him out of the apartment by juggling around, and get to the door, get it open, and screaming bloody murder. And then he went down the stairs. And then one night when we were all with our doors open—we were in somebody's apartment having our cocktails and having a good time—and somebody came into my apartment and ran off with all my liquor. And, I thought we heard a noise and we did. We came to check on it and we saw him running down the stairs.

**KOLKER:** And did you ever find out who was responsible?

**WRONA:** No, because the doors were open. People just came in off the street and they would walk around the building. And we had the laundry machines broken into many times. And so finally we had to lock the front door and lock the back door and we haven't had very many problems. After we locked the front door, there's a security code on the security phone that you can give to everybody, so that if they lose their key they can use the security number to get in the building without having to call me or call anyone else. And, turned out that these people would give the security phone to their friends who would give it to their friends who would give it to their friends, and then all of a sudden we had all kinds of strangers walking in and out of the building. The machines were being broken into again and it always looked like an inside job because there were no doors broken, no windows broken. And we finally had to take the security phone, change the numbers, and not give anybody a number, and that way we now have a secure building.

**KOLKER:** And how long ago was this problem? I mean, how long did it persist?

**WRONA:** That was about 15 years ago, 16, maybe. About 15, 20 years ago.

**KOLKER:** So there were still problems even after the building became a condo and the neighborhood had changed, you said.

**WRONA:** Oh, the neighborhood has changed a lot. Yes. And we still have problems with the neighborhood.

**KOLKER:** In what way?

**WRONA:** Well, neighbor kids roaming around the streets, holding you up and whatnot. One night I came home from work, oh, I guess it was about 7:00 at night. I got home... got out of the office early, took him home early, and got home early myself. And, as I was walking home from the Hart building here I noticed a couple of guys on the road, just around the corner here. And, it just didn't look right. I mean, you knew they were up to no good. And I looked behind me and there was my next, not my next door neighbor but my neighbor from the upstairs, an elderly woman, and she saw the same thing. So she was hurrying to catch up with me and I was hurrying to get on home. And before anything could happen, a car stopped at the stop sign and so we were both able to get across the street and get into the apartment before anything happened. Two weeks later, I was coming home at the same time but stopped at a cocktail party in the office for one of the receptions that one of the states were having, the state society parties or whatever they were. And stayed five minutes to say hello to some of the constituents and then came on home. And missed being murdered, I guess, by about five minutes, because the same two guys had killed a man coming from the store. And it happened right outside the building here on the corner. I saw all the commotion but I just went into the building and started calling neighbors to find out what was happening.

**KOLKER:** And this is during that period that's 15 years ago, or it's...

**WRONA:** It's about 20 years ago.

**KOLKER:** Twenty years ago.

**WRONA:** Fifteen, 20 years ago.

**KOLKER:** And, how about today? How much has changed in that respect?

**WRONA:** Well, as I say, the neighborhood is so well patrolled now, with the Page School, the day care center across the street. And we don't have people walking around the streets anymore like they used to. Stanton Park is all lit up at nighttime. So you don't really have those big problems there anymore. And we were getting a lot of people in the neighborhood because of the restaurants on Massachusetts Avenue and

around the corner. And I don't say they were bringing in the bad people. But the people were around there and here. So.

**KOLKER:** So, the security is really rather recent.

**WRONA:** Yes.

**KOLKER:** Since the...

**WRONA:** I mean, the patrol cars would come by because of the Senate Office Building. But, now that we have the Page School and the... You know we have the young kids living there.

**KOLKER:** And how recent is that?

**WRONA:** Well, gosh, I think about ten years at least. It used to be a funeral home. And the funeral home sold out to the Senate and they made a Page home out of it. They have about 30 pages there, I think. All year long.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**KOLKER:** You were talking about the restaurants here. Where did you go for you? Did you have some favorite restaurants?

**WRONA:** The Monocle.

**KOLKER:** The Monocle.

**WRONA:** I spent many a night and afternoon at the Monocle. And the restaurants here... No, right down the street here there was a barber shop and dry cleaning establishment on the corner of Mass. and they tore that up and made a restaurant out of it and I can't remember the name of the restaurant now. But, it had to do with some man who lived in the neighborhood... I'm sorry. I wish I could remember the name because the name was a long name and it referred to him in a way. [The Man in the Green Hat] And we used to go there on occasion, but since then it's become an Indian restaurant and I'm not that fond of Indian food. I've been there several times, but unless you know what you're ordering...

**KOLKER:** You know, now that you've mentioned that there was a barber shop, can we just back up a little.

**WRONA:** Mm-hmm.

**KOLKER:** When you first moved in here, what were the amenities of the neighborhood for you in terms of where did you do your grocery shopping and the cleaners?

**WRONA:** Well, right down at the end of the road here, on the corner of Maryland Avenue and Third Street, there's a beautiful little building there now. But before that, that little beautiful building was an apartment house upstairs and a mom and pop grocery store downstairs. And you could buy milk, bread, you know, the little things. And there were a lot of little grocery stores around here. Over on Stanton Park, there was a little grocery store. And there was a grocery store down the street here. But all of that has changed. Now at Maryland and Third Street, it's a beautiful little building with a beautiful yard and it's the executive offices, I guess, of what is... I call them "chows" [phonetic spelling]. And then when I say "chows", they say, "Well, what is a 'chow'?" You know what a 'chow' is, don't you? A C.E.O.

**KOLKER:** Oh, okay.

**WRONA:** And, so, that is the headquarters of the "chow". They moved down Pennsylvania Avenue, down to Constitution, rather, and Second. And they just moved, I guess, a couple of months ago, moved the staff down there. But the "chow" himself, according to Bobby Baker's wife, who works for the company and she does the real estate sort of stuff and I talked to her one day about it, and... because I knew they were moving out... And she said they've got this nice building down the street, but the "chow" himself likes this building so much he wants he and his staff to stay in this building. So...

**KOLKER:** If you'll forgive my naivete, but when you're saying the "chows", the C.E.O.s, of...

**WRONA:** Federal Express. Excuse me,

**KOLKER:** Oh, okay.

**WRONA:** Excuse me.

**KOLKER:** Excuse me. [Laughs]

**WRONA:** Yeah, that was sort of an office for the Federal Express office. Now, what kind of an office it was... local office. It wasn't, of course, the main office because it was too small.

**KOLKER:** And, the mom and pop store, was it a true mom and pop store?

**WRONA:** Oh, yeah.

**KOLKER:** Did you know the mom?

**WRONA:** Oh, yeah, mom and pop both. They were a nice Jewish couple and...

**KOLKER:** Do you remember who it was?

**WRONA:** No, I don't. That was a long time ago.

**KOLKER:** Did they live above the store?

**WRONA:** No, they didn't. They had a beautiful home in Spring Valley. Not Spring Valley, Silver Spring. Excuse me. I spent a lot of time at the doctor's in Spring Valley. Spring Valley's always on my mind.

**KOLKER:** And, so, you knew them by name. They knew...

**WRONA:** Oh, yes, yes. And they were very lovely people. And I always remember her especially because milk at that time was coming in the plastic cartons. Well, the paper cartons, but they were covered with wax so they were sort of glassy, waxy. And she would say—oh, I'm not going to go into the accent because I don't do it that well, but—"Vy do you want to buy this milk. It's covered with Vaseline." I says, whatever her name was, "That's not Vaseline that's wax on the box, to protect the box so that the milk doesn't spill out." "That's Vaseline." [Interviewer laughs.] Yes, she was selling it even though it was Vaseline.

**KOLKER:** So, were they an immigrant couple?

**WRONA:** No. Well, no, because they spoke very good English, so... But, that doesn't mean they weren't immigrants but I don't think they were.

**KOLKER:** Were there children... Did their children help in the store?

**WRONA:** Not in the store, no. But, I don't think they ever needed the children there.

**KOLKER:** And, so, this was at Maryland Avenue and...

**WRONA:** And Third Street.

**KOLKER:** Third Street. And the other...

**WRONA:** Yeah. It was right down at the corner.

**KOLKER:** And the other mom and pop stores were...

**WRONA:** At Stanton Park there was one. And there was one over here, but it closed shortly thereafter I moved into the neighborhood. And where the parking lot is now for the Senate, that used to be a big

apartment house, two apartment house. And then the Carroll Arms Hotel was on the corner. And that's where Mark Russell got his start, if you remember Mark Russell.

**KOLKER:** Yes, yes.

**WRONA:** So...

**KOLKER:** So, is that someplace that you would have frequented?

**WRONA:** The Plaza Hotel was on the next corner, where the rest of the parking lot is. So, between the Plaza Hotel and the Carroll Arms Hotel, yes. That's where I spent a good part of my life.

**KOLKER:** So that the neighborhood had a lot to offer in terms of a social life.

**WRONA:** Yes, yes.

**KOLKER:** And, also, it had the amenities. How about the cleaners?

**WRONA:** Had cleaners right across the street. Had cleaners in Stanton Park. Had cleaners down the road. I mean, I don't know where all the cleaners came from. We had more cleaners around here than you knew what to do with. We still do. We don't have one across the street because that's the 116 Club now. It's a private club, mostly for lobbyists. But, there's cleaners down the road, around the corner. There's one on Massachusetts Avenue. There's one over on Sixth and Maryland Avenue. And, they're all around.

**KOLKER:** And, it was this way when you moved in?

**WRONA:** Um-hmm.

**KOLKER:** So, it's always... Those amenities have...

**WRONA:** Yeah, they were here.

**KOLKER:** ...and services haven't changed.

**WRONA:** Barber shop was right down the corner.

**KOLKER:** Is this a barber shop that you went to regularly?

**WRONA:** All the time. I went to it even before I came to work on the Hill.

**KOLKER:** And the barber's name?

**WRONA:** Oh, I don't remember now.

**KOLKER:** Okay. [Interviewer laughs.] I'm not going to push you on that.

And, how about movies or theater?

**WRONA:** I've never been a movie buff. I'd go to the movies, but I wasn't much to jump to the movie house. Still don't.

**KOLKER:** And how about the hardware stores. Is there a hardware store around here?

**WRONA:** There's Frager's over there on Pennsylvania Avenue. They've been here all these years. Pennsylvania between 11th and 12th. There's the District Hardware Store that's on Eighth Street, across the street from the Marine Barracks. They've been there for a hell of a long time. So...

**KOLKER:** So, would you say that everything you needed was here or...

**WRONA:** Oh, yeah. And on Pennsylvania Avenue you had a five-and-dime store at that time.

**KOLKER:** Where was that?

**WRONA:** Oh, god, that was a long time ago, before they started sprucing the neighborhood up. Now you have nothing but fast food restaurants and banks and that sort of stuff. But right on the corner of Sixth Street and coming on down this way, you had... What were we talking about? This happens when you get to be 80 years old.

**KOLKER:** You were saying that the five-and-ten was gone. Did you have to go anywhere... Did you have to go kind of off the Hill to take care of any of your purchases?

**WRONA:** Well, yeah. I'd go downtown to the department stores or out in the suburbs. Well, there weren't too many malls at that time. And, I'm not much of a mall person anyway. I like a small store, a private store. I like a store that I can go into and get attention without... Not knowing what I'm buying, I want somebody to explain it to me. Not just grab something off the counter and... off the rack and go to the counter with it. No. We had pretty much every... We had men's shops over on Pennsylvania Avenue between Second and Third Street, a beautiful men's shop. I used to buy my clothes there.

**KOLKER:** Really?

**WRONA:** And... Pennsylvania Avenue has always sort of been a busy avenue.

**KOLKER:** And so your relationship to the city seems to be....

**WRONA:** Capitol Hill.

**KOLKER:** And how about your relationship to the downtown center? Do you see that as your back yard in any way or...

**WRONA:** No. Downtown was downtown. It was there. If you needed it, you'd go downtown. You'd go to the National Theatre. You'd go to the Warner Theatre, at that time. Not the Warner Theatre at that time. It's where the... There's a restaurant there on that corner, which was a very nice restaurant. And they had, not entertainment in the afternoon, but they had a piano cocktail hour, that sort of stuff. It was just a lovely place to go to in the afternoon and evening and have dinner. The National Theatre was always there if you wanted to see a play. We didn't have the Kennedy Center at that time and... So, then you had your... They had Woodward & Lothrop's, you had Hecht's, and you had Kann's Department Store which is now nothing but big apartment houses. And...

**KOLKER:** So, it sounds to me like your life was so much centered...

**WRONA:** On Capitol Hill.

**KOLKER:** The other thing I'm thinking about, just reflecting. You've witnessed so many changes here and, I was thinking about this apartment. When you moved in, was it air conditioned?

**WRONA:** Yes.

**KOLKER:** It was?

**WRONA:** It was air conditioned. Those convectors you can see underneath the window. Now, that's a new one. And so was the one in the bedroom. But, somebody in the apartments here, we tried to get all the unit owners to convert to new ones about ten years ago because the old ones were causing problems. They leak and then you have a problem of the water going down to the unit down below and then, of course, then they sue you. But most everybody converted except, oh, I would say maybe a half a dozen have not. And they're still having problems. But they feel that's what they have insurance for. So the insurance pays whatever problems arise.

**KOLKER:** So, then, that hasn't been a change? How about the changes on Massachusetts Avenue? Massachusetts Avenue has really seen a lot of change.

**WRONA:** Starting from Stanton Park coming this way, those were all private homes. There used to be a hair dresser there in one of the buildings. On this side of Massachusetts in that block you'll notice there's a new building which is next to the Page School. And they tore down a couple of houses to build that building. I don't know what's in there. You can see it from this window, you can see the back of it. But, they were all private homes. Now they're all restaurants, except for the house on the corner which was a bed and breakfast—breakfast and bed, whatever, and I think it still is. It's right on the corner of Massachusetts and Fourth Street.

**KOLKER:** I think I know about this, yes. So, has that always been here?

**WRONA:** That's always been there as far as I know. And now, all those homes are converted into restaurants. Schneider's Liquor Store has most always been there. And then from Third Street down to Second Street, you had... There was a Safeway here when I first came. And that Safeway, like all Safeways in those days, depending upon the neighborhood, the kids would hang around. And there would always be a dozen kids hanging around there and raising hell. And one time I was in the store... Well, I went to go in the door and the kid was sitting on the bar of the door. And I opened the door slowly and went on in. And, of course, he had to get up. And, while I was in the store shopping, he brought in his friends and said "There he is." So right there and then I knew by "There he is" I was in trouble. So I bought a bottle of something with... I think it was salad dressing... something with a good neck, to protect myself when I went out. I told the manager in the store. He said, well, they would sort of keep an eye out for me. But, I went out there and he says, "You kicked me." And I said, "I didn't kick you. You were sitting on the door and I just opened the door gently and you stood up and walked away." "You kicked me." And I just then walked past him and he turned around and kicked me right smack in the butt. And I said, "You dirty little bastard, you try that one more time, the cops will be here so fast it will make your head spin." They thought that was the funniest thing they heard, but that was good enough for me because it kept them laughing and jumping up and down and whooping. And I was able to get on home safe and sound. So.

**KOLKER:** And you're on foot, I'm assuming.

**WRONA:** I'm on foot.

**KOLKER:** You are.

**WRONA:** Mm-hmm. Oh, yeah, I was just, you know, the next block.

**KOLKER:** So, when you went to the grocery store or running your errands...

**WRONA:** Well, you never thought of it, about being attacked or anything like that at nighttime. It's only as you get older you think of these things. When you're younger, you don't think of them. And that block there, outside of the Safeway... and then there was a liquor store in the next block across the street. But most of them were houses and people living in there.

**KOLKER:** And did you know—were they close enough that you knew these people... [Interviewee speaks over the rest of the question.]

**WRONA:** No. You knew some of the characters. There was one old man who lived in... He must have been about 80 years old and had, I think, about a 40-year-old bombshell. And she really was a bombshell. I mean, she had the body for it and she had the attitude for it and she had the personality for it. She had the red hair to go with it. And everybody knew who she was. And she loved a good time and she had a good time and he, evidently, enjoyed having her around. But that was the only character that I knew that lived in one of the houses. Everybody else was pretty normal. But then, all of the houses were more or less torn down and they've made office buildings out of them and they've made restaurants out of them. The one on the corner was all torn down and they built apartments.

**KOLKER:** And how recent...

**WRONA:** That was a long time ago.

**KOLKER:** Oh, it has been a while.

**WRONA:** Mm-hmm. And now we have... The Red River Grill is there. And then that French restaurant, I can't even remember the name now. One I never liked because it's too small inside. [Ed: probably La Brasserie.] As I said, my bailiwick was The Monocle.

**KOLKER:** You were living here when they built the Hart [Senate] Office Building.

**WRONA:** Mm-hmm.

**KOLKER:** And that certainly changed the landscape a little.

**WRONA:** Oh, that certainly did. That was a beautiful little courtyard where they had beautiful little homes and then when the... The first thing to go in the area was the Carroll Arms Hotel. And then, the Carroll Arms Hotel was the 116 Club, which is right across the street now. And when the Carroll Arms Hotel closed down, they moved into that courtyard. It's called Justice Court now, but I don't think it was called Justice Court then. It could have been. But, they took over several houses and kept their 116 Club there. And then when that was torn down to make room for the Hart Building, they moved into this corner here across the street. Now they have that whole building on the corner of Third Street and C Street.

**KOLKER:** The Hart Building did make a considerable change in, you know...

**WRONA:** Yes. Because, I forget... Yeah, because that was where the...As I said, there were beautiful little homes there. It was a whole...

**KOLKER:** What did they look like? What kind of homes were they?

**WRONA:** Oh, they were sort of like town houses. But they were sort of individual houses, but, yet, they were attached together. And it was a small little neighborhood. Well it took the size of where the Hart Building is, that was just that area. Because I think the Belmont House is next to the Hart Senate Office Building, which has never been torn down because that's a historical piece, I guess, as you well know.

**KOLKER:** So, I'm just thinking of these changes that you've seen in this neighborhood. You're sitting here, looking out the window and watching. You know, you can see just how much has changed, and...

**WRONA:** Well, yes, I have. They've changed this whole block down here. As I said, these houses now are going for \$500,000. One went recently, I guess last year, for \$550,000. And, we think the only reason why they bought it and paid for it with that kind of money was because it has a garage. And parking is hard to find around here. But before you could buy those houses for 10, 12, \$14,000 I'm sure.

**KOLKER:** And, how about just talking a little bit about just the demographic changes of your neighborhood. If I said to you, "Describe your neighborhood," how would you describe it?

**WRONA:** When I first moved here or now?

**KOLKER:** Well, let's do both.

**WRONA:** Well, when I first moved here, it was a shoddy neighborhood. I mean, I think... I don't know. You've probably been reading things in the paper and magazines and whatnot every now and then where Capitol Hill was a sore sight. And it was a sore sight. I mean, one block away and you'd be in mud puddles.

**KOLKER:** When I say your neighborhood or ask you about your neighborhood, what are the parameters of your neighborhood for you?

**WRONA:** Well, now that's...

**KOLKER:** What do you think of...

**WRONA:** Well, I never would go beyond Massachusetts Avenue in those days, because that was a bad neighborhood. I would never go beyond Stanton Park at nighttime because that was a bad walk. Well Pennsylvania Avenue on the other side was not too bad because you had your House office buildings over there. And of course, going down the Hill was not bad at all because you're going down into the downtown area.

**KOLKER:** So, when you're describing your neighborhood to me as shoddy, you're talking about this area,

**WRONA:** This area. Well, and farther out, of course, it was worse.

**KOLKER:** Okay.

**WRONA:** Like the houses around in this block here. One house, there were ten kids living in one house.

**KOLKER:** And this is on C Street?

**WRONA:** Right here next door. Well, the funeral parlor across... And as I understand it, it was Lee's Funeral Parlor Home, and they owned all their property. And, then, when the... everybody died in the family, I guess, then there was a period of time where they were trying to settle the estate. And from what I understand, there were houses... Well, there must be what? About four or five or six houses on this side. And there are about four, five, six, seven houses on the Maryland Avenue side that are back to back. And as I understand it, when the estate was finally settled there was a group that bought these houses. And then they all took a house for their share of the money that they put in or whatever. I don't know quite. But, that's when the neighborhood started getting spruced up.

**KOLKER:** And what was the relationship of the Lee family?

**WRONA:** The Lee family owned the funeral parlor. It was called Lee's Funeral Home. That's where the Page School is now. That's on Fourth Street. On the corner of Fourth and C Street. Well, and Massachusetts Avenue. It's right there at the point. And as I understand it, that family owned all these houses from the house next door to the house on the corner of Mass Avenue. And then the houses behind it that are back to back.

**KOLKER:** And you said a minute ago that the people next door—there were ten children.

**WRONA:** Well, not right next door but in that block in one of the houses. There was... Every one of the houses had big families in it. Now, where they got all those kids to sleep, I don't know, but... One of the people were—I knew quite well, I knew—she was a lovely lady and he was a World War II veteran and I won't say his name because people would recognize his name because he's all known all over Capitol Hill. I think he's probably dead now, but... Two or three o'clock in the morning you'd open your bedroom window and she'd be out there saying "Gracie, Mary, I think it's time to come home. You've played long enough." And these were two year old kids. And I guess one of the sons shot another son, I don't... That was the kind of neighborhood it was.

**KOLKER:** And was this an integrated block?

**WRONA:** Oh, yes.

**KOLKER:** It was.

**WRONA:** Yes. And, in fact, my very next door neighbor was a black person. A very lovely lady. Drove around in a pink Cadillac. One morning I heard banging on the street and I looked out my bedroom window and there she was. I was parked on the corner but I was parked in from the corner. And she had this Cadillac. And she must have had a few drinks. And I heard this bang, bang, bang. That's why I looked out the window. And she was banging my car, pushing it forward so she could [laughs] make room for her Cadillac. And I opened my window and I said, "Lady, what the hell are you doing?" So, she stopped it but left the car right there with a little bit of it sitting in the driveway there. So...

**KOLKER:** And on these houses that you said were back to back on this area down on C Street...

**WRONA:** On this side of the street, on C Street. You'll find a lot of brick houses and then right behind them on Maryland Avenue there are another row of brick houses. And as I understand it, that was all Lee's estate.

**KOLKER:** Is there an alley way behind them.

**WRONA:** In behind them.

**KOLKER:** Between them. And they were... both black and white families living in these houses.

**WRONA:** Yes, this was quite an integrated neighborhood.

**KOLKER:** Do you know where the people were working or what kind of jobs...

**WRONA:** No, I don't.

**KOLKER:** ...any of your neighbors had?

**WRONA:** No.

**KOLKER:** No. I mean, so it was really just a...

**WRONA:** I mean, there were very few people working in the Senate. So... It's not like it is now. You've got... Well, we've got about six Congressmen in this building alone. Senator... what's the lady's name from Texas?

**KOLKER:** Kay Bailey Hutchison?

**WRONA:** Yes. Lives right on the corner there. Um, what's his name from Kentucky? He lives two doors down. Mitch McConnell I guess his name is. See, when you're out of the Senate, you begin to forget

about them. And Senator Roth lived across the street in Justice Court. But you have senators all over the place now, and congressmen.

**KOLKER:** So that's a big change from when you moved here.

**WRONA:** Yeah, and that's why you get a lot of patrol cars now going up and down, because of these senators around here. You know, they get pretty much what they want, so...

**KOLKER:** So, do you still have those familiar faces that you see?

**WRONA:** Not as many as I would like because they change. You know, your senators come and they go. And the staff that we had are pretty well gone around the country. And, I think I'm the oldest one that was on the staff, the last staff. And so I'm in close touch with one family and he's still working, he's now Chief Communications Director for the Majority Leader, Senator [William] Frist.

**KOLKER:** And how about your neighbors? Do you know your neighbors today?

**WRONA:** Hello, how do you do, you know. In the house right across the street is a retired couple. The house at the very end is owned by a man whose father owned a lot of property around here and he used that house more or less for an office and living quarters. I haven't seen them lately at all. I haven't seen anybody going in that other house.

**KOLKER:** How do you get to know your neighbors?

**WRONA:** Just by being out on the street. Now when I'm home in my wheelchair, walking around, you say hello to everybody. Before when you were working you didn't have time to say hello. You might wave if you recognized the face, but...

**KOLKER:** Is there much of a turnover?

**WRONA:** Not really. The house on the corner, yeah, because a Senator owned it a long time ago. Well, John Glenn's daughter lived there first. Well before that I don't know who lived there. The houses at that time, when I first moved here, you could buy either one of them for \$29,000. Now you can't touch them for less than, I don't think, 400,000. But, John Glenn's daughter and son-in-law lived there and I knew them quite well. And then when they got their divorce, then a senator from Illinois moved in. I can't think of his name off hand. And they did a wonderful job of restoring the building and spent thousands of dollars on the front and back, side yard, putting in trees and flowers. And it just looked like a little park. And Kay Hutchison moved in. I won't say anything. You just go out there and look for yourself. She just let everything grow to pot. So...

**KOLKER:** So there've been some really dramatic demographic changes.

**WRONA:** Oh, yes, yes. Well years ago, before we got this new law into effect where panhandlers can't, you know, stand in front of restaurants and stores anymore, there'd always be bums sitting on the—I shouldn't say bums, homeless people—sitting on the corner of Kay Hutchison's wall. But she had all this—she didn't, but the Senator before her did—had this stuff growing there now that's got prickly things on the stems. And they'd go over the wall. So, there's not much you can do about sitting there anymore unless you want to sit on a prickly branch. But you used to have a lot of people roaming the area. We had one man that used to urinate in the doorway in the back until we caught him one day. And then he'd be over in front of the Safeway at that time and he would beg money and he would drink Listerine to keep himself high. And one of the guys in the building was moving one time. This was after it went condo, and he was going to sell his condo. And the guy's name was Ed. And he had talked to him over there and brought him home, gave him a bath, and the guy helped him restore the apartment and was just absolutely—after he shaved and gave him new clothes—he was a different person. But then after the job was done, he went back to the Safeway, stood in front, started drinking Listerine again. And I haven't seen him since. But, there were all kinds of panhandlers. An old man. God, I thought he was a hundred years old. And every time I'd see him, I'd give him a buck because I felt so sorry for him. Then I found out that he was only about 50 or 60 years old and [he'd] take the buck and go get some more vodka. So that was enough of that. Then, there was Betty, who would always sit on the wall, who hated every man she saw and spent a lot of her time in St. Elizabeth's. But when she would sit on the wall there—her family lived in the neighborhood somewhere, I don't know just where. But I'd give her a few pennies and she'd mutter some name after I left. And I just felt sorry for her. I haven't seen her for a long—Well I haven't seen anybody panhandling in the neighborhood anymore.

**KOLKER:** How recent has this change...

**WRONA:** Oh, this has been within the last five, six, seven years.

**KOLKER:** So it continues to... Sounds like, from what you're describing, that the neighborhood continues to change.

**WRONA:** Oh it is. It's changing every day. So...

**KOLKER:** From your point of view, what have you lost?

**WRONA:** What have I bought?

**KOLKER:** Lost. You know, in terms of neighborhood quality of life.

**WRONA:** Oh. I haven't really lost anything because, you know, everything that's happening is for the good, I think. You know, people are restoring their houses. They're keeping their yards nice and clean. And there are a lot more people in the neighborhood now who work in the area. Like at nighttime, I see people going down the street. When I used to work here, I'd practically be the only one. Maybe one or two of us would be coming down the street, living in this direction. And, now... Well the day that 9/11 [September 11, 2002] happened, and I went out in the street because it was my dialysis day and I was waiting for my bus, and I had never seen such a stream of people going up this road here. And I wondered where they were all going. I finally asked somebody and they told me that the Senate Office Buildings were closed because of 9/11. Well the bus arrived and I went and my dialysis center is at Eighth and C Street, just five blocks up the road here. And I walked back home that day because it was a nice day and I was not in my wheelchair and I could walk. And I still saw this stream of people. Well these people lived around Stanton Park, over there in the other park over there around 11th Street.

**KOLKER:** Lincoln?

**WRONA:** Lincoln Park. They were living all over there, which was a big eye-opening to me. And, they continue to still live all around here and growing more and more. In fact, my therapist lives over on 15th and C Streets, and she says that's all being renovated. And I understand Senator [Patty] Murray moved over there somewhere. So, if she moved over there, you know it's going to be spruced up.

**KOLKER:** So, are your boundaries changing?

**WRONA:** No, not yet, not yet. Well, my boundaries really aren't changing because of my wheelchair, my condition.

**KOLKER:** I just wondered, mentally, if you thought of the Hill in a different way in your relationship—

**WRONA:** Well, I am in a way. Because, you know, you go out to, like, 14th and 15th Street. I never did consider that the Hill. Yet those people consider themselves living on the Hill. Well, fine with me. If you consider it the Hill, I'm not going to argue with you.

**KOLKER:** And what do you say to people when you meet them in the city or you're outside of this area and they don't know you, if they say "Where do you live?"

**WRONA:** Third and C Street, Northeast. Very rarely do I say do I live on Capitol Hill.

**KOLKER:** Oh. Why?

**WRONA:** For the simple reason that I never thought of it. My address is Third and C Street, Northeast, 305 C Street, and it's...

**KOLKER:** That's interesting. And, when you meet someone out of town and they ask you where you live?

**WRONA:** Then I might tell them I'm on Capitol Hill so that might give them some idea of where in Washington. But if you're talking to somebody who's living here, working here, Third Street Northeast then gives them an idea. Without saying Capitol... I've just never done it, to (inaudible) say Capitol Hill. Then, I will say, yeah, it's like maybe two or three blocks from the Capitol. So—

**KOLKER:** When you think of yourself and where you live, do you think of yourself as being—living on the Hill or a Capitol Hill resident or a Capitol Hiller, you know, part of this neighborhood.

**WRONA:** Well, yeah, I feel like I'm part of the neighborhood. I don't participate much in the neighborhood because once I retired, when I expected to do a lot, that's when I started going to the doctors. You know, you don't go to the doctors 'til you retire and then when you retire, that's all you do, go to the doctors or go to the hospitals. And...which I've been doing for the rest of my life. I mean, from the past...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

**KOLKER:** This is Carole Kolker. Today's date is February 14, 2003. I'm here at the apartment of Henry Wrona at 305 C Street NE, in Washington, and we are going to continue with an interview that started on February the 12th.

[Long pause on the tape.]

**KOLKER:** Okay, Mr. Wrona. Today is Friday and we were finishing up on Wednesday and I just felt that maybe you had... When we stopped, you were just talking about the economic changes in your neighborhood and I just thought, wondering if you had any more thoughts about Capitol Hill today or your neighborhood today.

**WRONA:** No, except that it's a real nice place to live. I've enjoyed living here, enjoy living here now. And, you've got most everything on Capitol Hill that you really need. You've got your small little community here and it makes it easy living.

**KOLKER:** Easy living.

**WRONA:** Well, it's easy to get to stores and... Well, in my situation, though, being in a wheelchair and not being able to get around as well as I can because I don't have my peg leg yet, as I call it, I can't go to

the little store across the street because it's so crowded in there a wheelchair won't fit. If I went in with my wheelchair, my scooter, I'd knock everything down. I don't think they could sue me, but I think I could sue them. But, I think all stores and restaurants are supposed to be wheelchair accessible. And they are not. And it's that way with most of the little stores around. The restaurants are difficult to get into with the wheelchair because a lot of them have steps. The liquor store has stairs going up. All the stores have stairs, except the little grocery store. And it's the same way on Pennsylvania Avenue. If I go over there, you can't go into the stores because of the steps. And those that don't have steps are so crowded by the doorway... I did go into a liquor store one day for the hell of it because I just got so tired of not being able to go into one and this one had no steps. But he had a lot of boxes around the door and I had my scooter and I just charged in and knocked all the boxes over. And he came running over, said he wanted to know if he could help. And I said, "Yes, I'd like to purchase so-and-so and such-and-such." And, so, he picked up the boxes and got what I wanted and guided me outside like, you know, I was a valued customer. But, he wasn't worried about my being a valued customer, he didn't want me to knock over any more boxes.

**KOLKER:** But, you said the living's... It's an easy... I liked that.

**WRONA:** Yes. It's easy to get around and... I can go to Eastern Market and shop at Eastern Market with my little scooter. I've been to the Safeway, which is fourteen blocks away. Even though I can't see that well, if I drive carefully, I can find the ramps and avoid the pitfalls. You know our sidewalks are mostly brick in this part of town and all it takes is one little brick to be shot up by a root. And, all of a sudden, if you hit that brick with your scooter, it isn't very hard to be tipped over. I've been tipped over twice and that's why I have these problems with my hands.

**KOLKER:** Oh. I was interested, when I came in you were telling me that your friend Elaine is writing a monograph, a biography.

**WRONA:** That's what I was telling you about, that little book that they're preparing.

**KOLKER:** Yeah. And you had mentioned to me that you are a World War II veteran.

**WRONA:** Mm-hmm.

**KOLKER:** And, will all that be in this book? So...

**WRONA:** Mm-hmm. Now she's doing a lot of research on the Internet. She's getting a lot of the information that I couldn't give her. I can give her the information but I can't give her time and dates. She's finding all that on the Internet, which is surprising to me because I don't have a computer and I'm not interested in the Internet right now, because I feel I have no use for it. The radio is fine, the telephone

is fine. So, why bother with a lot of other gadgets. But, she's able to go on there and find out the exact glider division I was in, what it was called, what we did and when we did it.

**KOLKER:** And Elaine is a neighbor.

**WRONA:** She is a neighbor in the building, but she also runs our building for us. Well, as I say, she does own a condo, so she had been handling the books and we just kept her on.

**KOLKER:** Oh. And, does Elaine—Foster, is that what—that's her surname.

**WRONA:** Yeah. Dr. Elaine Foster.

**KOLKER:** Okay.

**WRONA:** She has a doctorate in musicology or something or other. But she's a very lovely lady.

**KOLKER:** And, are there any other people living in this building now that their names would be recognizable to the public? Public figures.

**WRONA:** We have six Congressmen.

**KOLKER:** Um-hmm.

**WRONA:** And maybe seven now. I think there's a new one. We had several Senators living here, but the Senators are gone. Senator Murray was our last Senator, from Washington state. And, I understand she's moved over there to near 15th and C Streets, Northeast.

**KOLKER:** And the Congressmen who are here now, do you see them?

**WRONA:** Baron Hill lives on the same floor. Yes, I just saw him yesterday. And he's from Indiana, a very nice person. And then Congressman Gutknecht [Gil] from Minnesota, who was on the same floor around the corner. And the others, I don't really know their names because I'm really not that interested.

**KOLKER:** Are they active in the association, in the condo?

**WRONA:** No. No, they're not.

**KOLKER:** They're not.

**WRONA:** Because they're only here temporarily. They're here when the Congress is not in session. And most every weekend they've gone home. It's just like when I worked in the Senate. There wasn't time to do that. Even though I lived here, I worked seven days a week. When they're not working here in Washington, they're going home to work.

**KOLKER:** So, their families are not here. It's just...

**WRONA:** No, no. Gutknecht's family is not. Baron Hill's family is not. They come every once in a while, but no.

**KOLKER:** But, yet, they've bought a condo.

**WRONA:** Yes, because, I guess, it's easier and cheaper for him to live in a condo than it is to try to find a house, if he's going to live in it by himself.

**KOLKER:** Or an apartment where he would pay rent.

**WRONA:** And this way he has a small apartment. It's big enough for him and Goodnick and all the others that live in the building.

**KOLKER:** Okay. Well, I want to tell you that...

**WRONA:** Senator McGovern, when he was running for the president, was here.

**KOLKER:** Oh.

**WRONA:** All the time, because his secretary lived here.

**KOLKER:** And what was her name?

**WRONA:** I can't remember her name now, but...

**KOLKER:** Yeah.

**WRONA:** It's a long time ago. That's when he was running for the presidency.

**KOLKER:** And how would you know that these people were here. I mean, did you see them?

**WRONA:** [Laughs] 'Scuse the laugh. With a motorcade of about thirty, forty cars, you know, the Secret Service and everybody else, blowing their horns and coming into the building like gangbusters, you couldn't help but notice. And one day, it was so funny, because listening to the radio they were talking about Senator McGovern and he was spending the weekend out on his farm in Maryland somewhere and catching up on his homework. And I couldn't help but laugh because the motorcade was outside, he was downstairs dictating to his secretary, and... It was sort of a joke.

**KOLKER:** So, that's how you know when there's somebody important around.

**WRONA:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**KOLKER:** You just had to look out your window.

**WRONA:** Oh, yeah. Now, there's a Congressman from Texas who lived right across the street. And that was years ago, that was when [Lyndon Baines] Johnson was the president. And he was a very close friend of Johnson's, being from Texas also. And every Sunday, not every Sunday morning but many Sunday mornings Johnson would come to visit him. I don't know if they had breakfast together, whatever. But he was there across the street visiting. But, you knew when Johnson was here because you heard the motorcycles, the sirens, the whole damn two yards burst out across the street. So, you couldn't help but hang out the window and look at him.

**KOLKER:** Are you finding similar things going on with the Bush administration?

**WRONA:** No, not really. There isn't anybody here, I think, that's close to the president that I know of. There are an awful lot of Senators and Congressmen that live in the neighborhood. I think I told you that Kay Hutchison lives across the street and Roth lives across on the other side of the street. And McConnell lives right down two doors away down the street. There are Senators all over the place. But, you never know they're around. I mean, they're just ordinary people.

**KOLKER:** Blend in with the neighborhood.

**WRONA:** Except, if the president comes or if something happens. Now, like, when Kay Hutchison had a robber in her house or something or other, I mean, the cops were here real fast, I think. Faster than you would if you or I were being robbed. [Laughs] And the neighborhood, of course, is all spruced up. Like on Third Street there, between C Street and Massachusetts Avenue, those houses were very decrepit. And, now. I think you could have bought them for 12,000, \$14,000, those little row houses. And I don't know what they cost now, but I don't think you could touch them for under a hundred. And they're cleaned up and they're painted and the yards are kept up nicely.

**KOLKER:** So, it's a nice place to live.

**WRONA:** Yeah.

**KOLKER:** Yeah. Well, I want to thank you very much for giving me this time, sharing your memories with me.

**WRONA:** Well, Carole, I'm very happy to talk to you. I only hope I could give you some information that will be useful to you, but I doubt it seriously. But, that's something for you to figure out.

**KOLKER:** Yes. I think you'll be quite pleased, and, you know...

**WRONA:** If you don't have a shredder, you can come use mine.

**KOLKER:** [Laughing] Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW