



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Ellen Breen

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

HARTNAGEL: This is Nancy Hartnagel. I'm interviewing Ellen Breen in Wilmington, Delaware, in Ellen's apartment. Ellen, could you tell me your address, please?

BREEN: It's 2401 Pennsylvania Avenue, Apartment 211, Wilmington, Delaware 19806. The apartment is called the Devon.

HARTNAGEL: OK, that's great. Tell me your maiden name and your parents' names, please.

BREEN: My maiden name ... I was Ellen Cannon before I became Mrs. John Breen.

HARTNAGEL: And is that C-A-N-N-O-N?

BREEN: ... O-N.

HARTNAGEL: And Ellen, your parents were named?

BREEN: My mother was Alice Neitzey and she was born in Washington.

HARTNAGEL: And your grandfather; I'm sorry, your father?

BREEN: My father was Michael Cannon and he was born in Clare, Galway, Ireland.

HARTNAGEL: And your grandparents?

BREEN: My maternal grandmother was born in Georgetown. We are fifth generation Washingtonians because of her.

HARTNAGEL: And what was her name, Ellen?

BREEN: Her name was Mary Ellen Tennant.

HARTNAGEL: T-E-N-N-A-N-T?

BREEN: ... T. And her father was Andrew Douglas Tennant.

HARTNAGEL: And you said you're fifth generation on the maternal side and then obviously if your father came from ...

BREEN: We're first generation ...

HARTNAGEL: ... first generation on your Dad's side.

BREEN: Uh huh.

HARTNAGEL: And what brought your father to Washington?

BREEN: As far as I know, his parents came to Washington and made a home for two little boys they'd left in Ireland with relatives. And when they had established a business and a home which took about five years ...

HARTNAGEL: Wow.

BREEN: ... my grandmother, who was Julia Burke Cannon, returned to Ireland and brought the little boys back directly to Washington. They never lived in another city.

HARTNAGEL: And, in Clare, the town of Clare?

BREEN: Clare, Galway. I have that birth certificate which I'd be happy to show you. The baptismal certificate.

HARTNAGEL: So your father, Michael Cannon, how old was he when he came?

BREEN: He was, he said he was five years old but I think he was probably six or seven.

HARTNAGEL: OK, and what year would that have been, do you know that?

BREEN: I don't know, I'd have to figure it out from the time of his birth. It was 1890s.

HARTNAGEL: In the 1890s, OK. And, the business that your grandparents established here during the five year period ...

BREEN: They had a huge bar ...

HARTNAGEL: Really?!

BREEN: ... in Washington. In fact, this publication that I would like to search out at the Library of Congress always celebrated this on St. Patrick's Day. They described it, they gave pictures of it and it was known as the largest bar in Washington. It was at Tenth and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. That is now the site of the Department of Justice. And when I was a child the Department of Justice building had not been built, and we would go down to Pennsylvania Avenue, where from Seventh Street to Tenth Street was like, it was a market. And very interesting. A farmers' market.

HARTNAGEL: The old Central Market, as I recall.

BREEN: The old Central Market. Not the one on K Street, not the one on Eighth Street SE. It isn't there anymore. It was the original farmers' market and it took in a space of about, at least one city block, maybe more. And that is now the site of the Department of Justice.

HARTNAGEL: Yes. What was the name of your family's bar?

BREEN: It was Cannon's.

HARTNAGEL: Cannon's, OK. Was your family in any way related to Joe Cannon, who was the Speaker of the House of Representatives?

BREEN: No, the House, no.

HARTNAGEL: No. OK. And Ellen, we'll get to the particulars about you now. What year were you born and your birth date, I guess.

BREEN: I was born on May 5, 1918. I was born at home.

HARTNAGEL: And where was home?

BREEN: The home was 1928 Second Street NW. It was in what was called LeDroit Park. You might recognize it today as the site of Howard University.

HARTNAGEL: OK. And how long did you live in that house?

BREEN: I don't, I only have one memory of living in that house. I was about two years old when we moved to 24 Fourth Street NE. And that was the site of our first home on Capitol Hill. And we lived there until I was, I'd gone to school probably second grade.

HARTNAGEL: Before you moved ...

BREEN: Then we moved to 113 Third Street SE.

HARTNAGEL: Southeast. So you moved from Northeast to Southeast.

BREEN: Now, wait, excuse me. Yes. It was the other side of East Capitol Street. We lived on the north side of East Capitol Street at 24 Fourth Street and then you crossed East Capitol, you go into Southeast. And it was the first block off of East Capitol. It was East Capitol, well, 113, that tells you. It was between A and B on Third Street on the west side of the street. And it was a dear little house. I have happy memories of it. To me it was typical, looking back, typical Capitol Hill. It was a wide brick house with black shutters and black door and it was a tiny house. It was very small. And it was a beautiful street. St.

Mark's Church was across and St. Mark's faced A Street and the long side of that church came down Third Street. Now that property is now all of that block was taken in and it's now the Library of Congress annex.

HARTNAGEL: Yes, right.

BREEN: And when we lived there, I remember at night from our beds, my sister and I could look out and see the dome of the Capitol. And it was very interesting to see that. At the time, I realized that it was something special. And as I've grown older, I've realized just how special. I remember when that light came on, it was twinkling, like a diamond. And my mother or father, I don't remember which, told us that means Congress is in session. Very interesting for two little girls, one of whom hadn't even gone to school yet.

HARTNAGEL: What as your sister's name?

BREEN: Julia. She was named for my paternal grandmother, Julia Burke. And I was named for my maternal grandmother.

HARTNAGEL: OK. Your maternal grandmother was Mary Ellen Tennant. So is your name Mary Ellen?

BREEN: No, it's just Ellen. I didn't get the Mary.

HARTNAGEL: (Laughs) OK. You said you had one memory of the house at Fourth Street NE. Or it was a memory of the LeDroit Park house?

BREEN: No, it was a memory of the house on Second Street NW. I remember my father playing a game with me and it is so clear, I just, I can't, I can't believe I remember that far back. And it was around the time of the birth of my sister. She was not born yet. And we played Owl's Eyes. I don't know if you would know what that was ...

HARTNAGEL: No.

BREEN: ... but it was making big eyes and putting your noses together and saying ooooo, you know. And I remember the porch, I remember the steps, I remember out there with my father in the dusk, playing that game.

HARTNAGEL: That's fascinating, Ellen. Now I wonder, if you moved from the Fourth Street NE house to the Third Street SE house, do you remember how old you were when you moved?

BREEN: I was still going to St. Cecilia's. I went to first grade to St. Cecilia's which was at Sixth and East Capitol, and not the building that's there today. It was the convent, the old convent. And it's funny, but the other day, I had a picture in my hand of that red brick building, and I put it away and now I can't find it (Laughs). I wanted to show it to you. Because I loved it so much and it was so, had so much more character than that building that replaced it. Horrible, you know.



St. Cecilia's; from an undated post card

HARTNAGEL: Yeah. Now, what do you remember about the inside of St. Cecilia's. Tell me, give me the ...

BREEN: Oh, St. Cecilia's was, and see my middle name was Cecilia. Well, it was a square, absolutely square, red brick, dark red brick building. And it had an iron fence around it that went down Sixth Street and there was an entrance to the school on Sixth Street. But the entrance to the convent, the formal entrance would be used for real occasions by the nuns, was on East Capitol. And East Capitol was the dividing line. Anything south of East Capitol was not quite up to what was ... East Capitol was the main drag. And I really, I had happy, beautiful street. Absolutely. The trees, this little traffic, you know.

HARTNAGEL: When you lived there, Ellen, did East Capitol Street, when you lived near East Capitol Street, did it still have the sort of second roadway closer to the houses or was the street at that point ...

BREEN: No, there was no off roadway. It was a big avenue and with a wide sidewalk. And if there's a second roadway, I haven't seen it. Even down to the court, I remember, see we lived at Fourth Street and we used to take walks, we'd go up from 24 which was again between East Capitol and A Street and we'd go up to East Capitol and usually turned right and walked toward the Capitol, toward First Street, in that direction. And it was just a big sidewalk and a broad roadway. And there was a streetcar line.

HARTNAGEL: Yes, I was going to say, was the streetcar line still ...

BREEN: There was a streetcar line that ran, I should remember where the name of that streetcar, where it went. I know that ...

HARTNAGEL: Would it have gone somewhere like Capitol Heights, or? ...

BREEN: No, it was not in that direction. Going in the other direction, going away from the Capitol, I think it was to 13th and D, but going out of the city, I can't remember. And the route went up to First Street, turned right, went around by the Union Station and went out that way. And the streetcar line that came to our house in Southeast when we moved to First Street where we really, that was the house we lived in all our lives ...

HARTNAGEL: All right, tell me when you moved to First Street.

BREEN: We moved to First Street when I was in third grade and by that time my sister went to school, and I didn't get to return to St. Cecilia's. We went to St. Peter's. Now they were the same nuns, the same Holy Cross nuns, but as I said, anything south of Pennsylvania Avenue did not have the cachet that anything above, north of Pennsylvania Avenue had. It was like the farther you got away from East Capitol, the less ...

HARTNAGEL: Now, tell me the address of your First Street house.

BREEN: 530 First Street SE.

HARTNAGEL: What were the cross streets there, Ellen?

BREEN: Well, it was beyond, the streetcar came from Mt. Pleasant out at Wisconsin and what is that avenue there where all the traffic is?

HARTNAGEL: Massachusetts?

BREEN: No, not Massachusetts. Nebraska, I guess. It's the dividing line between Maryland and the District.

HARTNAGEL: Western Avenue.

BREEN: Western Avenue, that's right. That streetcar came from Mt. Pleasant to First and E Streets SE and we lived at First and F, we lived one block beyond the end of that car line.

HARTNAGEL: So were you near the park?

BREEN: Garfield Park. Was beautiful in those days. It's changed. It's not ever like it was then. And also Garfield playground was a big part of the community life there. There was a marvelous playground teacher, her name was Miss Susie, and I'm at a loss to think of her family name. They were a prominent Virginia family. She lived in Alexandria and she had several brothers all of whom were lawyers. Now I could find that name for you. But she was very attractive. And we did not go too much to Garfield playground. My mother was very careful of us. We were not allowed to do a lot of things that most children did, until we had two brothers. Now, when the boys came, things were different. They were allowed to join things and do things that we never did and because of that careful business in the beginning, we were, I think we were a little strange. (Laughs). Maybe I'm still that way (Laughs), I don't know.

HARTNAGEL: Ellen, are there, were there four of you altogether?

BREEN: There were five of us.

HARTNAGEL: Five of you, OK. And you're the oldest?

BREEN: I'm the oldest.

HARTNAGEL: And then there's Julia.

BREEN: Julia, Michael, Robert and Cathy, who was Alice Catherine, named for my mother.

HARTNAGEL: OK. And ...

BREEN: And nobody lives in Washington anymore.

HARTNAGEL: Are they all still living?

BREEN: No. Robert is dead. He died at the age of 59. He had five types of arthritis and it was really the medication that killed him. His organs dissolved from the powerful medicines and he bled to death, he hemorrhaged, they did everything to stop it, removed his spleen, but nothing helped.

HARTNAGEL: But you said you don't have any family left in Washington?

BREEN: I have people in the suburbs. My children are there in the suburbs. But there's nobody still ... And everybody has died. The Breens are all gone. The ah ...

HARTNAGEL: Well, let's just go back now and we'll pick up with your schooling at St. Peter's where you started in third grade. So this might have been maybe around 1925, 26.

BREEN: '29, I'm trying to think. I was thinking about the Depression, and that was 1929 and I was at St. Peter's then. I would have been ten. 1918 to 1929, I would have been ten years old. Probably in fifth grade.

HARTNAGEL: And is your family still operating Cannon's Bar?

BREEN: Oh, no! That is now the site of the Department of Justice.

HARTNAGEL: OK. But in 1929 was it?

BREEN: Oh, no, I never knew it.

HARTNAGEL: You never knew it.

BREEN: I only heard about it. And it's interesting because since I came to Wilmington, Delaware, I met a family. The father of that family claims to be a cousin of mine. His mother was a Burke. And how we found out, he was talking about remembering making a trip to Washington to see this famous bar, and he said it really was a sight to behold. And he talked about how long it was and, I said, well that was my grandfather's bar.

HARTNAGEL: So your father ...

BREEN: And it turns out that this man now claims to be a cousin of mine because he came from Clare, Galway, and the Burkes were all from Clare, Galway.

HARTNAGEL: OK. What did your father do? Did he ever work in the bar?

BREEN: No, well no. He did not. He went to St. John's College High School, and I think maybe there were times when he peeped into that bar. They lived over the bar and I, we had an aunt who lived in Washington. She lived at Dupont Circle, just off Dupont Circle, at 1925 N. That was Aunt Delia, and she was the nearest thing to my grandmother that I ever knew. And it was through her that I learned a lot about my grandmother and she would tell me that they had this absolutely, they were very successful. The apartment was beautiful, she told, she described the decorations, she told me about ...

HARTNAGEL: This is the apartment over the bar, where ...

BREEN: ... over the bar, and she told me about, ah, now, I've lost the track there. What else was it she told me? Oh, dear.

HARTNAGEL: How beautiful the apartment was?

BREEN: Well, she told me how beautiful the apartment was. My grandfather had a string of race horses. One grandfather had a string of race horses and the other one had boats. These were their interests. The Neitzey grandfather, my mother's father, he was born in Germany, and I don't know too much about his early history. Can't remember what it was Auntie told me that I wanted to remember. But they were highly prosperous.

HARTNAGEL: And what was Delia's full name, your Aunt Dee?

BREEN: Aunt Dee was Delia Burke Reddington. And that's how this connection with this family in Delaware was verified through the name Reddington.

HARTNAGEL: OK, um ...

BREEN: And she had a son, Burke Reddington. They loved that name Burke.

HARTNAGEL: Now, tell me what you remember about St. Peter's School. Did you go into the building that is still there?

BREEN: I went to St. Peter's, oh, yes. They haven't changed it, have they? No, and I did have a memorial thing that came and I must, I'm going to go through my things and find these for you, these pictures, and this memorial that came out that was put together. Had the names of all the nuns and the picture of the school. Of course, I didn't like it like I liked St. Cecilia's. It wasn't as elegant. It was not as elegant. It was a poor parish school. And we had the wonderful same nuns and we certainly were taught beautifully there, but it, the surroundings, the environment was quite different. But we were in a convent at St. Cecilia's. And I remember when I made my first Communion and there were two of us, Ellen Cannon and Rose Cauliflower.

HARTNAGEL: (Laughs)

BREEN: Everybody laughs when I say Rose Cauliflower. Her father owned a very prosperous lumber, coal business. And my father was not in that class, I can tell you. But at any rate, we went down to St. Peter's for instruction and we also went down to be examined, pass the exam for our first Communion. And I will never forget the afternoon that we went down. And I was the first one called. The two little girls from the convent school, you know, took precedence over the kids from St. Peter's. And I was the

first one. And I'll never forget the nun. Her name was Sister Elaine. Very impressive, and I do love those Holy Cross nuns. One of my granddaughters is now in Holy Cross Academy in Kensington. And one of the nuns there, it was interesting, she was so interested to know that I'd gone there. I've never met her, but this is through my daughter. She said, "Oh, I was there when your mother was there." I don't remember her; I remember a few girls and a few names but not too many. Of course, I remember Rose Cauliflower. But going back to first Communion exam, it was, I will never forget, I guess I was shaking in my boots and I was called first and I remember, it was familiar, the habit, the nun, I wasn't afraid of her, and I saw her write down on the book, OK. And I often think that's a funny thing to write down when you're saying somebody is ready to receive Communion: OK.

HARTNAGEL: (Laughs)

BREEN: Sister Elaine and very impressive. And she comes into my story later when I'm thinking of St. Peter's and how we bought groceries and some of the parishioners that I remember from there.

HARTNAGEL: Well, then let's go right into that ...

BREEN: Well, I was thinking, Mary Jo [Hartnagel, who helped arrange the interview] had mentioned something about grocery shopping.

HARTNAGEL: Yes.

BREEN: And when we lived on Third Street ... Now once we moved to First Street, our family had grown, it was the Depression, we had a really hard time. It was not easy.

HARTNAGEL: What year would you have moved to First Street, do you recall?

BREEN: Well, I know I was there in 1929. I'm trying to think. I could check and give you absolute dates ...

HARTNAGEL: No, no, that's alright. This is ...

BREEN: ... by the birth of my sister and things ...

HARTNAGEL: OK, so by 1929, so the Depression has started.

BREEN: Yes, the Depression is in full tilt now. And my father always said he made more money in the Depression than he made when it wasn't the Depression.

HARTNAGEL: What did your father do, Ellen?

BREEN: He was in the wholesale grocery business. And you know we, it was weird.

HARTNAGEL: Did he have a store?

BREEN: Oh, no. Oh, no. We never had a store. He was dealing with institutions, with hotels, with, it was, ah, it was huge amounts of food.

HARTNAGEL: Where did he go for, for his office?

BREEN: Well, he had an office, there were several places where he had an office. The office that I remember most was at I Street, 1925 I NW. That's the one that I remember. And there was another one down by the wharf. I don't know exactly where that was but it was in that area.

HARTNAGEL: Did he have a warehouse or something?

BREEN: Yes, yes, yes.

HARTNAGEL: And, so your father was a wholesale grocer, and you were saying that he made more, he said he made more ...

BREEN: He said he made more, he did better financially during the Depression than he had up until that time. But it didn't show ... Now we always owned our own house. We always had a car from the time I was a little girl, I remember the Model-T Ford, and I would watch out the bedroom window and watch him crank that car and get in. And I could tell him exactly all the movements to go through to get that car to run and to go. I guess it was the age I was. That was typical of a child born in that age.

HARTNAGEL: Yes, yes.

BREEN: I don't, you know, that was long before I went to school.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, that you could have started that car ...

BREEN: I could have started that car. And also it was interesting, we didn't have a garage and he rented a garage in the early days, not in later years, but we would walk in the evening or we'd drive and put the car in the garage. I can see him lock the thing and then we'd walk home.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah. Nice. Where did you shop, Ellen?

BREEN: I wanted to tell you about the Keilers.

HARTNAGEL: OK.

BREEN: This I think would be interesting to you as a resident in that area now. At Third, Third and C, yes.

HARTNAGEL: Southeast?

BREEN: Yes, Southeast. On the southwest corner, I don't know what's there now.

HARTNAGEL: A private home.

BREEN: Well, is it a new home, is it restored? ... This was a funny little store; it came out like this on the corner and it had funny little wooden steps with a hand railing and you went into a very small store. And it was really a very, my father was very particular about food, and about where it came from, and long before it ever got to us. And I would say it was not a gourmet store, but it was the next thing to it. And for that day, maybe it was gourmet, I don't ... Now it wasn't Georgetown, it wasn't Connecticut Avenue, I'm not claiming that. But it was an excellent store. And it was run by a man named Harry Keiler and he had a brother who was George Keiler. These are the people that I remember. George was not like Harry. Harry was, they were both big men and you could tell they were brothers. But George had something wrong with one eye. His hair was tousled. Dear soul. I don't think there was anything, speech difficulty, but he delivered the groceries. And he delivered them in a pushcart, that was a wooden pushcart. He probably made it himself, with big wooden wheels. Two wheels and then this cart. And he would deliver the groceries.

HARTNAGEL: And how would you, how would he know what to deliver to your house?

BREEN: Well my mother would call up. And our telephone number was Atlantic 1677. I will never forget our first telephone. And that was in the house on Third Street.

HARTNAGEL: OK, the house on Third Street. So you're maybe ...

BREEN: And I loved, once in a while I would be sent there. Once I was sent to buy something, this was when we lived on First Street. And I'm walking up North Carolina Avenue past those English-style basement, you know which basement houses. I will always love those houses. Now across the street was something else that you wouldn't really remember. Isn't it funny, the mixture in that neighborhood.

HARTNAGEL: Yes, and you can sort of pick out ...

BREEN: And you can pick out, and there was a mixture in the people who lived there.

HARTNAGEL: What do you remember the neighborhood being like, Ellen, say from your First Street residence, because you said you lived at First Street longer than anywhere else?

BREEN: Well, I was thinking about the neighbors. That might tell you something. My father was in his own business. The man next door to us was a master carpenter. He worked for W.C. & A.N. Miller who built all those houses in Spring Valley and out Massachusetts Avenue. Absolutely perfection in his work. Very quiet, unassuming man. All he knew was work, and he ...

HARTNAGEL: What was his surname?

BREEN: His name was Taylor. And, Oscar Taylor. And they also had five children. Three boys and two girls. And the mother was, I can't remember her name. The daughters were Madeleine and Beatrice. It was very ...

HARTNAGEL: How about other people who may have lived there or nearby? ...

BREEN: Well, on the other side of us, now as you know, across Garfield Park, which was ruined when they built that nursing thing there. That ruined that neighborhood.

HARTNAGEL: Now what was the nursing thing?

BREEN: Well, it was during the war, during the World War II when Providence Hospital expanded their nursing school.

HARTNAGEL: Oh ...

BREEN: ... and they had to have room for nurses to live. And it ruined that street. But across the park and then the terrace and then New Jersey Avenue and then the power plant that heated the Capitol, the Congress, the Senate office buildings. Then next door, that was Mr. Taylor on this side; on this side was an engineer. He was Mr. Stewart; he was the head of that whole power plant functioning. And he was, that family was really very elegant. Their children were all grown up, they were older. And they were, they were very, very good to me. I liked them very much. Next door to them and this is the interesting thing, was the chief of police ...

HARTNAGEL: For the whole city?

BREEN: ... for the whole city. Robert Barret who has a sort of, I don't know, if you read Katherine Graham you get one picture, if you talk to my father, you've got another. I mean ...

HARTNAGEL: Well, what did your father say?

BREEN: Oh, he thought he was great. But politically, I don't think he was above reproach, myself, looking back. And my sister has married into that family, Cathy, the youngest one, yes.

HARTNAGEL: And is it B-a-r-r-e-t-t?

BREEN: I think, I don't think it's two Ts, I think it's just one.

HARTNAGEL: OK.

BREEN: And she's married to Jim Barret who, they're all in police work, all that whole family. And she has ten children, seven sons and three daughters.

HARTNAGEL: Your sister, Cathy?

BREEN: And she's about as big as a minute, she's darling, and she's lived all over the world. She's had a wonderful, wonderful life. And one child raised the other. I don't think she had as much trouble raising ten (laughs) as I did raising three.

HARTNAGEL: (Laughs). Alright now, Ellen, so you went to Keilers for food because your father was particular about food. How about for clothing, where would you go?

BREEN: Well, now, clothing was another thing. We did not go in much for clothing. That was where the economy took place. And I remember when I went to Notre Dame convent, I wore one school uniform for four years.

HARTNAGEL: Now, where was Notre Dame convent?

BREEN: That was at North Capitol and K, over by ... The whole block was the Jesuits' and the Notre Dame de Namurs were nuns. Their convent ...

HARTNAGEL: Was this for high school?

BREEN: This was for ...

HARTNAGEL: OK.

BREEN: ... for high school. And it was the Jesuits and the Notre Dame nuns and St. Aloysius as you know is very famous. And I not only lived as a little girl in the shadow of the Capitol but I went to school in the shadow of the Capitol all my life. And that's all the education I had. I never went to college.

HARTNAGEL: Really?

BREEN: ... But I'll tell you, those nuns were amazing. We had four years

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

HARTNAGEL: We're at Notre Dame. You're at high school. And you were recounting ...

BREEN: I loved it, I absolutely, it is the treasure of my life.

HARTNAGEL: But what had triggered this is I had asked you about shopping for clothing.

BREEN: Well, and I came to my uniform. And what I wanted to tell you about, you know all the private schools were invited to the White House for tea in the year that you graduated. And the Roosevelts of course were in the White House and Mrs. Roosevelt was the hostess for these graduating seniors in 1936.

HARTNAGEL: And is that the year you graduated?

BREEN: That's the year I graduated. And I had nothing to wear. I'm wearing a borrowed coat and I'm wearing a school uniform. It was not an easy time. And the funny thing is, I was somewhere in a group and it was a group of women, and I don't remember what it was. And the question was, what effect did the Depression have on you? How did it affect you? I said it didn't affect me at all. But it started me thinking, and I realized it did affect me. It had a very definite, serious effect. But I had never ever thought of it when it was going on. I just accepted it. It was life, it was what I knew. I didn't know anything else.

HARTNAGEL: And in what ways did it affect you, on reflection?

BREEN: Well, I want to tell you about getting to this tea party at the White House.

HARTNAGEL: And this would have been 1936, so we'll still in the Depression.

BREEN: Yes, we're still ... And the thing is, or the effects of it, and my, my, one of my, my mother's younger sister who really was a role model for me, and I don't give her the credit that she deserves, undertook to outfit me so I could go to this tea. And I will, it was the, oh, it was the biggest event of my life. And, of course, there was a prom. There was a graduation. And here is this child who has gone to school all these years with the uniform. I lived in it. I don't know what I lived in in the summer. I can't remember.

HARTNAGEL: But, but, your years at St. Cecilia's, St. Peter's, and then at Notre Dame ...

BREEN: Notre Dame. And I loved ...

HARTNAGEL: You had a uniform in every one of those places.

BREEN: No, not at St. Peter's. We did not. At St. Cecilia's, we didn't.

HARTNAGEL: OK. Just at Notre Dame.

BREEN: And that was one of the things that I loved about Notre Dame, that we had a uniform, and see, that was, that would tell you something. But it never dawned on me. And I loved the uniform, I was very proud of it, even wearing it all that time, I never got tired of it. But my aunt outfitted me to go to that tea, and I loved it. I will never forget it.

HARTNAGEL: What did you wear, Ellen?

BREEN: It was a very simple, it was called, it was May wine was the name of the color of the dress. And it was a straight, tailored dress with a round collar, buttoned down the front, and it was, it was not cotton but it was like dotted Swiss. It had tiny little raised dots and a big leghorn hat and white shoes. And it really was a very, she excellent taste. And she spared no expense. It was ...

HARTNAGEL: Do you remember where you got it?

BREEN: I remember getting the hat. I can't remember where I got the dress. I got the hat at a hat shop on Connecticut Avenue, in the block where the Uptown Theater now is. And the funny thing is, in later years, I had TB, and I was hospitalized for over a year. And when I was in George Washington University Hospital when it was all being diagnosed, there was a doctor who, I don't know, he just sort of took a fancy to me, and he used to come in and visit, just sit and talk. These were Jewish people, and he's telling me, you know, various things. I'm asking him about ... turned out his mother owned that hat shop.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, how amazing.

BREEN: Wasn't that funny?

HARTNAGEL: Do you recall what the name of the hat shop was?

BREEN: No, no. Just remember the hat shop.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah.

BREEN: And, of course, that was the way my life went, that's the way my life went. It went from Capitol Hill, up Connecticut Avenue, up Wisconsin Avenue. I lived in different places as I grew up.

HARTNAGEL: How long did you live on Capitol Hill? All through your ...

BREEN: Well, I lived, the funny thing is, when I was 17 I went to live with my grandmother. And I lived, but my family was still living at 530 First Street, and I think this might, maybe not interesting to the

historians, but when my mother died, she died on May 30. And all our lives that 530, we always said, back at 530, when we were at 530, and she died on May 30.

HARTNAGEL: Wow.

BREEN: Wasn't that interesting?

HARTNAGEL: And what year did she die, Ellen?

BREEN: Mother died, I guess it was eleven years ago. She was a hundred, almost a hundred.

HARTNAGEL: Wow, oh, Ellen.

BREEN: She would have been a hundred in October. She died ...

HARTNAGEL: How astounding.

BREEN: ... she died at the end of May. She was the longest-lived person in her family. And she was also a very neat little lady. She was very tiny, she was, she had, she could always make the most of what she had. We were not wealthy, it was not, I'm not trying to say that. The thing was, I treasure the Catholic education. It means so much to me, and I'm, I'm at a place in my life where, it's, it's heartbreaking. It really is. It's troubling some. It's not pure joy, if you know what I mean. But I will never, ever, ever forget my debt to the Sisters of Notre Dame.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah. Well, what do you ...

BREEN: They were so wonderful.

HARTNAGEL: Now, I think that school is no longer there.

BREEN: No, and you know what? When it closed, after a hundred and twenty years, I was asked, we did a memorial book, and my class asked me to write the memorial for our class, for the Class of '36, and I was so happy to do it. And they were so generous in their compliments about it.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah.

BREEN: It was wonderful.

HARTNAGEL: Now, how long, did your mother ... did your mother continue to live in Washington, Ellen?

BREEN: No, she died in Reno, Nevada. She was living with Cathy.

HARTNAGEL: OK.

BREEN: But she's buried in Washington.

HARTNAGEL: Where is she buried?

BREEN: In, there, everybody in my family is buried in Mt. Olivet, and all the Breens are buried there and my husband is buried there.

HARTNAGEL: OK. OK. Well, now ...

BREEN: My grandparents, the Cannon grandparents, are buried there. And that is another whole story. That would make, that story is, it would be fiction. Just to write it as it is, yeah.

HARTNAGEL: (Laughs)

BREEN: Of those grandparents, those Irish grandparents.

HARTNAGEL: The Irish grandparents who ran the bar. That was a whole block long.

BREEN: Uh, huh. And I have pictures of those two grandmothers. Maybe Mary Jo would show you those. They're probably dusty.

HARTNAGEL: Well, we'll look at them afterwards, how about that?

BREEN: Well, she's getting them.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, is she getting them right now? OK, great. Well, what do you remember about these grandparents?

BREEN: Well, I don't, I never knew my grandmother Cannon. I never knew either of those grandparents.

(Voice of Mary Jo Hartnagel in background: Why don't I put them here and we can look at them.)

HARTNAGEL: Yeah, OK.

BREEN: But my little grandmother, Mary Ellen, she was there when I was born. She's the one who assisted at my birth, my own birth. And after that Mother never had a baby at home. (Laughs)

HARTNAGEL: Oh, you were the only one born at home?

BREEN: I was the only one. The others were born ...

HARTNAGEL: And do you remember Providence Hospital being down there in that neighborhood, Ellen?

BREEN: Oh, my dear, I could tell you stories about Providence Hospital. Speaking of this hurricane we've just had, there was a horrible tornado that hit La Plata, Maryland, when I was in third grade.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, no kidding?

BREEN: Yes. And Sister Bethany, who was our teacher, made all sorts of collections, and we went two or three times a week to visit those children who were so banged up and battered.

HARTNAGEL: In La Plata?

BREEN: ... in that storm. They picked one child out of a tree. And there he was in Providence. And mother had ...

HARTNAGEL: And you went into Providence Hospital to visit them?

BREEN: Oh, yes, and I had a broken arm and I had it set there, and Mother had babies there, and we went to see them, and, yes ...

HARTNAGEL: Because it was the neighborhood hospital, besides being the only Catholic hospital ...

BREEN: And it was, it had a really good reputation at one point. It's changed somewhat. And I remember where it was brought, I remember ... I told you I went to live with my grandmother. Well Providence Hospital was built on Louie's farm, which was adjacent where, Varnum Street was Bates Road, Varnum Street in Brookland was Bates Road when my grandmother moved there. And it was a big farm. And Providence Hospital built on one end of it, and on the other end the Josephite Fathers ...

HARTNAGEL: The Josephites.

BREEN: ... built their seminary.

HARTNAGEL: Yes.

BREEN: And later in life, when I was married and had children already, I lived on the other side of that place where that farm was. My grandmother lived on this side, on Varnum ...

HARTNAGEL: Your grandmother lived on Varnum Street ...

BREEN: Yes, and I lived there and then, this was years later, I lived on Allison Street which is the other side. And from my front door, when I opened my front door, there's this beautiful statue of St. Joseph in the seminary looking right in my front door.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, Ellen. Neat.

BREEN: My life, it's really

HARTNAGEL: OK, alright now ...

BREEN: And then you see, when I worked at Catholic U ...

HARTNAGEL: No, we're going back now, before we get to Catholic U, we have to go back to your marriage. When did you get married?

BREEN: I got married in 1940.

HARTNAGEL: Ok, so you were, like, twenty-two, maybe.

BREEN: Twenty-two. And I was married in St. Anthony's Church, because I was living with my grandmother.

HARTNAGEL: OK, you were married at St. Anthony's in Brookland.

BREEN: Uh, huh.

HARTNAGEL: And you married, you said, John Breen.

BREEN: John Breen who lived in Chevy Chase, at Blessed Sac—they were in Blessed Sacrament Parish.

HARTNAGEL: OK. And the Breens who lived on Eighth Street SE, now is that your husband's brother?

BREEN: (laughs) No. The Breens, well the Breens. That house, 212 Eighth Street, belonged to his aunts. They came to Washington from Scranton. And what happened beyond Scranton, I don't know. They, originally, I'm sure, were from Ireland but I never heard any of that history. There were three aunts: Aunt Ginny, Aunt Margaret, and Aunt Aggie and Uncle Mike. And they lived in that house at 212 Eighth Street. And they were dear. And they were pillars of St. Peter's. And they always looked gorgeous. They had fur pieces, and big hats, and, oh, my, and their house was, and I just thought, isn't this lovely. And they used to say to me, Ellen, dear, we would kiss you if we could reach you, but you're too tall. (Laughs)

HARTNAGEL: (Laughs)

BREEN: And they were, Aunt Ginny was really something else. I can tell you. And she raised that family. Their mother died when she was not, she was a teenager.

HARTNAGEL: Then how were you and Rose Breen related?

BREEN: Well, Rose married Francis Breen, who was actually ...

HARTNAGEL: And what was Francis to John, your husband?

BREEN: He was his brother.

HARTNAGEL: It was his brother, okay.

BREEN: Now they lived on F Street, the Breens. These Breens, my husband, his widowed mother and nine children lived on F Street in that first block around the corner. First Street is here, 530 is there, here's F Street and the Breens lived ...

HARTNAGEL: So it was Southeast, F Street SE, OK.

BREEN: And the aunts lived at 212 8th Street.

HARTNAGEL: And they were the aunts of your husband's ...

BREEN: They were the aunts of Rose's husband.

HARTNAGEL: And your husband?

BREEN: And my husband.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah, ok. And so then at some point that house must have come to Rose and Frank.

BREEN: It was left to Rose, yes.

HARTNAGEL: OK, alright. And so after you got married, where, well how did you meet your husband? He was also a Capitol Hill person.

BREEN: He was also Capitol Hill person. I knew him because he was very active in sports. I used to see him in the St. John's uniform growing up. And of course they moved while he was still in high school, they moved out to Chevy Chase. His family. And the funny thing was, he was a star at St. John's basketball. I have all the papers, all the newspaper things from that time. And then he was also, you know Garfield playground fostered really wonderful tennis stars. I was trying to recall the names, it's so funny, I can see those boys but I can't remember very many of their names. My husband was one of them. And

my son is a marvelous tennis player. I mean they were all talking about the American [unclear] that he does and the kids, his sons are tennis, that's the sport in our family, basketball and tennis. Except for Anthony who is absolutely amazing at baseball.

HARTNAGEL: Is he your grandson?

BREEN: He's my oldest grandson.

HARTNAGEL: So we're going back now to when you and John are married and where did you live after you got married?

BREEN: We lived at 5000 New Hampshire Avenue, which is New Hampshire Avenue and Farragut Street NW. And then he went to war and I was there by myself for years and then, we lived there for 10 years. When he came back we were there.

HARTNAGEL: And when were your children born, Ellen. Tell me their names and their birthdates.

BREEN: Paula was born December 8, 1946. Ann was born June 19, 1955. John was born July 24, 1960. And they're all grown up. And they're not, well Ann lives actually in Kensington. John lives in Bethesda, and Paula lives here. And I have seven grandchildren.

HARTNAGEL: And they're probably scattered all around, too, now, or? ...

BREEN: Rebecca's in California. Laura lives in her own little apartment in Bethesda. They're the only two who finished college. But we have, we have the others who are still in school. Claire and Paul are in high school. John's children, high school. Anthony will go to college this year. And then, Sarah's the only one in grade school now. She was born right, she's the only one Mother never knew. She's 12.

HARTNAGEL: Yes, because she would have been just a baby when your mother died. Now, Ellen, we're going to go back again in time to your work history, because you mentioned earlier ...

BREEN: Well that is a checkered career, I'll have to tell you. And I don't know if I can recall dates or not. I can pretty well tell, but ...

HARTNAGEL: Did your mother ever work?

BREEN: Never. She painted, she played the piano, she ...

HARTNAGEL: When you say painted, you mean fine painting, artistic painting?

BREEN: Yes, artistic painting. The painting I do, those chairs, which I did 20 years ago and they're still the same color ... (laughs). I couldn't paint, I couldn't draw a straight line, but mother did beautiful artwork and I wish I had some of it. But you see she lived with Cathy and everything is there and a lot, I was thinking of a photograph, this has made me think, but Mary Jo knows, I live in the past anyway. And people say what a wonderful memory I have. Sometimes I wish I could forget. There's a lot of heartbreak; there really is.

HARTNAGEL: I'm sure there is. But now we're going to go back to your own work history. And I know that you worked ...

BREEN: Well, I started at Catholic University.

HARTNAGEL: And about what year would this have been?

BREEN: It would have been 1937. I graduated from the academic, the prep school, the college prep course in 1936, and of course it was no thought that I'd ever go to college, there was no money and there was no federal aid or any program at that point. Then I went back for a year of postgraduate training, which was a secretarial course.

HARTNAGEL: And did you do that at Notre Dame?

BREEN: At Notre Dame. And then I went to work at Catholic University from there. I graduated in June and then August I went to work at the university and I worked in many, many places. I went to work there for Dr. De Ferrari who was at that point, he was dean of the graduate school and head of the summer session. And Catherine Rich, have you ever heard of her?

HARTNAGEL: I don't think so.

BREEN: Well, I'm sure Michael [Hartnagel, the interviewer's brother and Ellen's friend] probably has heard of her. She in the final days of her work history became the registrar, but she was always a guiding force and I mean a real force at the university.

HARTNAGEL: And were you in secretarial jobs?

BREEN: Yes.

HARTNAGEL: And what was that like? Did you work there after you got married, during the war years?

BREEN: You were not allowed to work at the university if you were married.

HARTNAGEL: Really?

BREEN: And another thing, I want to go back to tell you, that is the segregation in Washington that took place in my growing up years. The changes there and the changes, I mean you knew if you got married, you did not work at the Catholic University of America. Women did not work and be married and I knew that I had to work. And so I began to look around to find out where I could go that I could have a job, and that my next job was in the District government. I worked for the Board of Public Welfare, Child Welfare Division, and that was another happy place for me. Well I loved the university and I am very grateful to them. The things I learned at that university and it was a proper place for a girl who was longing to go to college and had no opportunity to do it.

HARTNAGEL: Did you not have an opportunity as an employee, possibly to ...?

BREEN: Oh, no, there was no such thing! No, my dear, we made \$80.00 a month. That was the salary and we were very lucky to have a job, it was the Depression.

HARTNAGEL: Was it a 40-hour work week, Ellen, or was it even longer than that?

BREEN: No, we worked, it was 40 hours, yes.

HARTNAGEL: What did you work, like nine to five?

BREEN: Yes. Regular office hours. And I worked in the registrar's office, I worked in the summer session. When I first went my job, I kept the grades, the records of the grades. And it was done on cardex cards, do you know what cardex cards are? They are big files and each card and each student had a card and as the grades came, you entered them by hand. You had to have decent penmanship, that was one of the requirements. And the students came in and you gave out the grades.

HARTNAGEL: You handed the students their grades?

BREEN: No, I read the card to them. And then if they asked to see it, I showed it to them and Dr. Campbell was dean of the college. And that was when I worked in the college office. But even in the summer school, I kept the grades.

HARTNAGEL: And this would have been like the late '30s and maybe early '40s?

BREEN: No, this was like 1938, '39.

HARTNAGEL: So before the war. And before you got married. And then you worked ...

BREEN: I lived at my grandmother's and many times I walked to work, not always, sometimes I took the bus. And that bus went up, you know, Michigan Avenue and turned on Fourth Street and there was no bridge over the railroad track in those days. That bridge was not built until after the war. We walked over those railroad tracks. And I had several beaux who used to wait for me when office hours were over. One in particular. And they would walk me home to my grandmother's, up to Varnum Street, which was quite a walk.

HARTNAGEL: Now, what occasioned your move to your grandmother's? You were starting to say that.

BREEN: I really don't want to go into that.

HARTNAGEL: That's fine. And, Ellen, I think you worked again at Catholic University, for Cardinal [Theodore E.] McCarrick.

BREEN: There was always a welcome for me at Catholic University. Unbelievable. And I do want to talk about the Shrine. Unbelievable. When I was in desperate straits and had to go back to work after my marriage, they put out the welcome mat for me. And that's when I went in there and I worked in the vice rector's office which was across the hall and across a wide breach from working on grades and admissions and dealing with college students. I was working with the vice rector, the rector, well, not the rector, but the vice rector and I worked for ... The vice rector's office was here and here were the two vice rectors, Father McCarrick who was vice rector for student affairs, and Monsignor Radigan who was vice rector for academic affairs. And I was actually Monsignor's secretary. Father's secretary was a girl, a Spanish-speaking girl, you might know because he's dedicated to the Spanish-speaking.

HARTNAGEL: When you say Father McCarrick, we are speaking about now-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

BREEN: Cardinal, Archbishop McCarrick. Absolutely dear. All of us in the same office.

HARTNAGEL: And, Ellen, when would this have been, in the '50s?

BREEN: No, no, no. Let me see. It would be the '60s, because John, yes it was the '60s. And Father McCarrick was a very young priest and dear Monsignor Radigan, oh, he was such a dear.

HARTNAGEL: I think I have here, from a story at Catholic News Service, that Cardinal McCarrick was assistant chaplain, dean of students and director of development at Catholic University from 1961 to 1963.

BREEN: That's right, and that's when I was there. And then I went to the Supreme Court from there.

HARTNAGEL: Tell me about how that occurred.

BREEN: That was in the administration of Kennedy, John F. Kennedy. I was working at the court on the day he was murdered.

HARTNAGEL: Really?

BREEN: Yes.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, Ellen, and what was your job at the court?

BREEN: I worked for Justice Burton. I was his secretary. Harold Hitz Burton. And that's an interesting story. When I was a little girl my father used to take us to walk in the evenings toward the Capitol and we walked ... Now the Supreme Court is not there. There is a row of very elegant townhouses, red brick, very, very architecturally perfect, beautiful. The setting was beautiful. And there was a wall around, a low wall. And so Julia and I, my sister and I, we would climb up on these walls and he would hold our hands and we would walk on these walls. We were called the wall-walkers. Well the day that I was interviewed, I worked in the stenographic pool at the Supreme Court. That was my entrance there. And the day that I was interviewed for the job with the justice, it was a luncheon. Mrs. Burton was there, his secretary who was leaving was there, Mrs. Cheatham, Justice Burton and me. And we were talking and I said that I had seen the building built. And that was very interesting to these people, how did that come about. And I said, well, I walking to school, to Notre Dame, from First and F across that concourse in front of the Capitol there, and I saw that building as it went up. Well that was very interesting. And then it dawned on me, and I said as a little girl, I used to walk on the wall that was around here in front of those houses before they took them down. And he said that's very interesting, my mother lived in one of those houses. Can you believe it? Before she was married, her name was Hitz. Her father, there was no delegation or diplomatic to Washington, between Washington and Switzerland, except they had this what they called an emissary. So there was no formal building. And his father was that emissary and it was in their house, from their home. They were one of the people living in these beautiful homes when we were walking on the wall.

HARTNAGEL: And, Ellen, do you recall those homes? Were they like three or four stories high?

BREEN: I just can't describe them. But they were red brick and there was red, there was, the trimming, oh, I just loved those houses. And I want to tell you more about the Keilers. I like those houses across the street from St. Peter's. I loved those houses with those windows and then the little French English basement houses on North Carolina Avenue.

HARTNAGEL: How are you doing? Are you OK?

BREEN: I'm okay. I'm thinking about a May procession at St. Peter's. This would have been my brother, my brother, Bob, God bless him, had a very special role in it and the May procession crossed the path at Second, is it Second. (Interruption; mail being delivered.) The May procession passed the children on the way to church and the police were chasing crooks or culprits of some kind, and they went right through there, they sped through there at 80 miles an hour. The car turned over. It would have all been disaster for the, it would have been horrible, and we had just passed by. And Monsignor Connelly, I should tell you about him, and Father Daly, and it was a hymn that we sang, "Daily, daily sing to Mary," and I always thought it meant "Father Daly sing to Mary."

HARTNAGEL: Was Monsignor Connelly the pastor of St. Peter's then?

BREEN: Yes, he was a funny little man. He was about this big, very proper. And you know, like some little men, they always stand up so straight. And he used to take walks and he'd walk down many times in the evening, you'd see him passing around through our neighborhood going to walk in Garfield Park.

HARTNAGEL: Ellen, I think ...

BREEN: Are we over time?

HARTNAGEL: No, no we're doing fine. You sound like you had just a wonderful childhood in that neighborhood.

BREEN: The neighborhood meant so much to me. And I would come home from school, St. Peter's, put on my skates, this was my routine, and skate down to Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue, the back way, to the library. I did that two or three times a week.

HARTNAGEL: The library that's still there?

BREEN: Yes. The Southeast Library.

HARTNAGEL: Was that there all throughout your childhood?

BREEN: All my childhood. And I loved it. Oh, I read every book in the children's department and they finally said, well you can go and read some book, this little doll. Am I talking too much?

HARTNAGEL: No, you're talking just right.

BREEN: Now, what was the other thing I wanted, I wanted to tell you about segregation and about politics. Now the segregation is sort of hard. But as a child at 113 Third Street, the Ku Klux Klan came to

Washington and made a big protest. Now I don't know what all that was but they gathered, huge forces of them, on Third Street right in front of our house. We were all inside with the doors closed, peeping out, except there was a woman named Mrs. Witt. Now she was a neighbor and everybody was shocked, I remember. She lived in a house at the corner that faced A Street and she had a beautiful back porch across her house. Here we are in this tiny little house. She had this beautiful back porch. And all these men in their sheets and their faces covered, and she came out on her back porch and went (claps).

HARTNAGEL: Ah, clapping.

BREEN: And the whole neighborhood talked about it for weeks. They were shocked. She was such a proper lady and they didn't expect such behavior and especially not for the Ku Klux Klan.

HARTNAGEL: You said you wanted to talk a bit about segregation, Ellen. What is it that you remember about that?

BREEN: First Street runs down this way, the streetcar is here, First and E, actually it stopped at North Carolina Avenue and then there's E Street and then before you get to F was a little tiny street with little tiny houses and it was called Heckman Street. Now it's not Heckman Street; do you know the name of it now?

HARTNAGEL: Duddington Place.

BREEN: Duddington Place, I could not remember that, and I wanted

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

HARTNAGEL: Where we left off, you were just talking about the Ku Klux Klan gathering, march, that you had witnessed and Mrs. Witt who shocked the neighborhood ...

BREEN: by coming out and clapping for them.

HARTNAGEL: And that was leading us into a discussion of what your recollections about segregation are, Ellen. So maybe you could tell me what your perception of that was.

BREEN: I asked you about the name of Duddington Place. I couldn't remember. It was changed, and there is a historical reason for that change, but I don't know, do you? Well, Duddington had something to do with that street, but I've forgotten what that was. And that happened long after I was married, long after World War II that that street name was changed. Also there's another interesting street that is like

that. It's right at the block off B Street which became Independence Avenue, it's up closer to the Court and the Capitol. Carroll Street. Now John Carroll of Carrollton, we all know all about his connection with that area but I don't know anything about Duddington. If I knew, I've forgotten.

HARTNAGEL: If I can find out, I'll let you know.

BREEN: Now that Carroll Street was different from Heckman. When we lived there, Heckman Street probably might have had two or three white families at the very most. The McAdams, the Clarks. There was an Italian family. They were the most colorful people but I can't remember the name. And everybody else was black. Now it was a quiet, working-class neighborhood. Everybody went to work, some of those people owned their homes. I remember once when children, two or three boys, 8 to 10, 10 or 12 years old, on skates and in wooden wagons, you know those wagons kids used to have, it was on an incline, came down Heckman Street and whirled into First Street and they were reported to the police. They were supposed to remain on Heckman Street. They were respected as long as they stayed on Heckman Street. Now that is one memory I have and also the slum area that encroached from beyond Garfield Park, beyond New Jersey Avenue, beyond the power plant and the railroad track. Over in here was a slum area, and I think nothing in New Orleans was any worse. A black neighborhood. And Eleanor Roosevelt cleared it out. And there was a great hue and cry.

HARTNAGEL: Now when you say, cleared it out, do you mean people moved ...?

BREEN: Well, she was, everybody out of there and cleaned out, just cleared it out.

HARTNAGEL: And then what got built, did something get built instead?

BREEN: Well other things were built, and the Botanical Gardens on the edge of that. There were government things that took over. Right now I think the Department of Education is in that spot, where a lot of that was. And of course that stretch that I talked about, the market, from Seventh and Pennsylvania to Tenth, was not great. And Ninth Street, I'm sure you knew, was a whole prostitute area. Are you aware? ...

HARTNAGEL: Ninth Street NW?

BREEN: The Gaiety Theater from F Street down to Pennsylvania Avenue. And also Mary Jo had mentioned something about Pennsylvania Avenue, was it commercial. Pennsylvania Avenue was beautiful. It had the streetcar tracks in the middle with ...

HARTNAGEL: Now which, which ...

BREEN: This is in Southeast, over by the Capitol, not downtown. Right at our street, at the foot of our street. And it had hedges and the streetcar, where did those streetcars go? One went ...

HARTNAGEL: Well, what was along that stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue?

BREEN: Well, now on this side there were homes, before you crossed over.

HARTNAGEL: On the south side?

BREEN: On the north side.

HARTNAGEL: On the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue.

BREEN: And on the south side were shops. Now this is for the blocks between First and Third. Those were homes. There was no commercial. On the other side there was, I wish I could remember the name of it, trying to think of it, really, an old fashioned coffee, not to serve coffee, a coffee shop, with big bags of coffee and the grinder was red and the store thing was red and the name was in gold. And I didn't think I'd ever forget the name of that. And next door was Sherrill's Restaurant.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, Sherrill's restaurant was there until fairly recently.

BREEN: Recently. Now Sherrill's Restaurant I went to, I remember going there before I ever went to school. My father would take us on Friday evenings. Mother and Julia and I. And there was a very picturesque gentleman. He looked like a southern colonel. He had the bay window; he had the beautiful tailored gray suit; he had the mustache and the longer white hair. I don't know that he was Sherrill. I'm not sure. And there was a woman who was his friend and companion. She was not his wife and she was called Miss Daisy. And Miss Daisy was little and plump and dark-haired and wore glasses. And she always made a big fuss of Julia and me when we came, although we were dressed in pink and blue and I remember she said, you should be wearing the blue and your sister should be wearing the pink. Your mother's got this wrong. I will never forget that.

HARTNAGEL: Who was wearing blue and who was wearing pink?

BREEN: I was wearing pink and Julia was wearing blue. And she said your mother has this wrong. Julia was very frail, big eyes, tiny little, my sisters are tiny, they are tiny little people, tiny little feet, everything is tiny. And I was always this round little girl with brown hair and brown eyes and she said, you should be wearing the blue and that child needs the pink. And she was right. And I always wanted the pink and never got it. So that's why I remembered that. Isn't that funny?

HARTNAGEL: Now what do you remember about ...

BREEN: The heat. The heat and the smell. The heat in that place was torturous.

HARTNAGEL: Inside Sherrill's?

BREEN: Inside Sherrill's. And it was much smaller. I mean it wasn't big like it got to be. And the smell of cooking oil, French fries, it was a delightful smell, the place was perfect. It was as clean as it could be. I'm not saying anything unpleasant. But the cooking was enticing and the heat was unbearable. I remember the ice ...

HARTNAGEL: And was the heat because of the cooking that was happening?

BREEN: I think that was part of it. And also the fact that it was summertime and it was blowing hot and my father used to take us on Friday evening for supper. We went when we lived on Fourth Street long before we moved to Third Street.

HARTNAGEL: And your mom would come too?

BREEN: All of us would go on Friday. It was a big thing that we went out to dinner and we went to Sherrill's. Of course, I don't ever remember a babysitter growing up. We either went with them or we stayed with my grandmother. There was no such thing as a babysitter.

HARTNAGEL: Do you remember what you would have there at Sherrill's?

BREEN: The only thing, I remember the smell of those French fries. And the heat, how hot it was.

HARTNAGEL: What else do you remember about the seasons in Washington?

BREEN: And also the Ark and the Dove?

HARTNAGEL: The Hawk and the Dove?

BREEN: Yes. Oh, is it the Hawk and the Dove?

HARTNAGEL: There's a place now called the Hawk and the Dove.

BREEN: See now, I corrected Ann. I thought it was the Ark and the Dove, named after those two ships that came, when Maryland was first settled. And I know at one point it was the Ark and the Dove. I'm sure. And I corrected Ann recently when she called it the Hawk and the Dove. We were talking about it because Brianna and Morton went there. Anyway, and Ann said, "Mother, it's the Hawk and the Dove," and I said, "It is not. It's named after the ships."

HARTNAGEL: Well, there is a pub now, Ellen, called the Hawk and the Dove.

BREEN: I don't think it's the same, then.

HARTNAGEL: It might not be the same, but you went to a place called the Ark and the Dove?

BREEN: Ark and the Dove, that was the name of it. And the day that Kennedy was killed, I was in a restaurant, can you name a restaurant, very popular.

HARTNAGEL: Along Pennsylvania Avenue?

BREEN: No, it's down farther. Oh, my. Oh, I didn't think I'd ever forget the name of that.

HARTNAGEL: Is it in Southeast, Ellen?

BREEN: Yes, it's right by the Court and it's down, oh its name ...

HARTNAGEL: Mike Palm's?

BREEN: No, not Mike Palm. It's a name like the Magnet or the Crescent or the something. Oh, isn't that awful that I can't remember that. I was having lunch there and Justice Burton was having lunch, Mrs. Burton was having a group of women for lunch in the court and he went down to say the grace and that's where he was when he got word of the assassination. And I was not even in the Court building; I was off having lunch with Margaret Kerr.

HARTNAGEL: Now what was it like?

BREEN: And see, coming out from that, that day, the man who did valet parking was a black man and said, oh, said the President has been shot. And it wasn't a black man that did it. Oh, the segregation was ridiculous. And I remember as little girls on Fourth Street, we lived in an apartment, and we were on the second floor and we had this big porch in the back. And when we played out on the porch, along A Street, it was all A and B Streets, C Street was too far down, there were these funny little houses, two or three. There was a black family. We could look right into their kitchen. And there was a black lady and she took in laundry. And she would be there ironing and we'd be playing on the porch. And she'd be singing Sacred Heart, how was that, (singing) "Oh, Sacred heart, so sweet divine, do keep us near to thee, and make our souls so like to thine that we may holy be." I will never forget that woman.

HARTNAGEL: And she was singing this while she was ironing. Well, Ellen, I'm even surprised to hear that your neighborhood was somewhat integrated.

BREEN: Oh, but it was different. It was, I mean, that neighborhood on Heckman Street, there was a black preacher who lived right at the corner of the alley. I mean our houses were here, and his house was

there. Absolutely, you would not want a finer person anywhere. A wife and two beautiful daughters. The quality of those people. And to think that when children came down there in a raucous way, running and making noise, and in a wagon and with ... (sighs)

HARTNAGEL: Could the children go into Garfield Park, the black children?

BREEN: Oh, there were no black children at Garfield, not on that playground, no. It was like me and the Depression. We just didn't think of it. It wasn't even thought of. Those children never came to that park.

HARTNAGEL: They understood they would not be welcome there, was that? ...

BREEN: I don't know, all I know is that they weren't there. And Garfield Park was beautiful.

HARTNAGEL: Do you remember segregation at St. Peter's?

BREEN: Yes, I certainly do. And I remember my mother saying, I remember her saying once, what was it she said. I remember two things about this. One was Monsignor Connelly in a sermon talking about a woman that he saw with a beautiful diamond ring. He saw her from the altar and the diamond was so beautiful and it caught his eye. And he said he thought then he hoped her soul was as beautiful as her ring. I will never forget that. And then I remember mother talking about the black people having to kneel in the last two pews, and she said, who knows, nobody knows, their souls are probably better than anybody else in that church. Why do they have to kneel in a segregated place? Yes. And the schools were segregated. I don't even remember where the black children went to school. I remember the public schools: Dent at South Carolina Avenue and Brent at North Carolina Avenue. And the one at South Carolina Avenue was a beautiful building and I skated past there every day going to the library. The other I didn't see quite so much. But they were public schools and they were for white children. I don't know where the black children went to school. And Justice Burton wrote the decision for Brown v. Board of Education.

HARTNAGEL: Did he really? Were you there when that decision ...

BREEN: No, I was not there but he wrote that decision. It was ...

HARTNAGEL: Ellen, give me the, for a frame of reference, what years were you at the Supreme Court?

BREEN: I wasn't there very long. I was only there about five years. In the '60s. In Kennedy's administration.

HARTNAGEL: What do you remember about working at the Supreme Court?

BREEN: Oh, it was a beautiful place to work. It was a wonderful experience. I wouldn't take anything for it. Absolutely the most beautiful, pristine, clean place I've ever been in. And one of the interesting things was there were very few bathrooms for women. Now every justice in his chambers had a bathroom, and once you worked for a justice, that was not a problem. Beautiful, with white walls, the linens were beautiful, ah. Well, when I was interviewed for the job, we had lunch in his chambers, it was served, it came up ...

HARTNAGEL: With his wife, as I recall.

BREEN: Yes. And he had a black man who drove him, Mitchell. And Mitchell would serve the lunch, and unbelievable. And of course he was getting very infirm at, when I was ...

HARTNAGEL: Justice Burton was?

BREEN: Yes. And he died while I worked for him.

HARTNAGEL: When did he die, Ellen, do you recall?

BREEN: I'm not sure. It was in the '60s.

HARTNAGEL: What do you do after you left? Did you leave the Supreme Court at his death?

BREEN: I did not do anything for a while. After he died I was not really in good health and I thought I cannot go back to the stenographic pool. That was really hard, and I wonder today, I'd love to go back. I keep thinking I will go back and see what the girls are doing now, if they even have a stenographic pool with the computers. We typed, the stenographic pool ... Now when you were a justice's secretary, you didn't do this. You took care of his bank and his, I mean all these other things, social things. But the basic work of the court to type up every clerk, there are nine justices, each one has, boy even the Chief Justice has three clerks, everybody else has two, and they all write opinions on every case that's accepted for *certa rea*. So you see all these things have to be typed. And the papers came in boxes, there was an original and nine copies, it was all set up. And you put this thing in your typewriter and it was a proportional space typewriter. In those days there were not very many of them. And it had to be perfect. Absolute perfect perfection. Margin and no erasures, nothing. And it was hard. It was very demanding work.

HARTNAGEL: Were you typing from notes, Ellen?

BREEN: We were typing from handwritten notes, we were typing from whatever the clerks turned in. They might say insert so and so and you have to find where the insert was and put it ... Yes.

HARTNAGEL: Wow.

BREEN: It wasn't dictation, no. And it wasn't even this kind of thing. It was all handwritten. It was very interesting and they were certainly superior young men. The intelligence level was something I will never ... My son is a lawyer, and he is a very fine lawyer, I'm very proud of him. But I wish he'd gone into constitutional law. It is really a marvelous, wonderful field.

HARTNAGEL: Well, there's been some excitement with the new Supreme Court justice, John Roberts.

BREEN: John Roberts. And I'm so glad he was approved because he was a clerk. And I see those, and they were, just dear. I mean every one of them. Darling young men. Smart as the dickens. And they worked hard and they put in long hours. And there is a sense of family in that Court. Paula had a horrible automobile accident while I was there. That was another reason why I had to have a break when it was over. John, I needed to be more with John. I had to spend a year with that child and I just took a year off.

HARTNAGEL: This is your son.

BREEN: Yes. Paula had the accident. You would not believe the kindness, the thoughtfulness, unbelievable, from Earl Warren who was chief justice. And he was criticized by a lot of people but I was very fond of him. And the big decision, the big case that always stands out for me is the Miranda decision. And now you know they are about to put it aside.

HARTNAGEL: Well, there's talk of that.

BREEN: Talk of that.

HARTNAGEL: Do you remember excitement when that decision was being announced? What was it like, could you recreate the mood?

BREEN: Oh, yes. I mean it was just ... I know, and then the other thing was, and there was more excitement about the one man, one vote, that thing where they redistricted all those Southern states and when you, you know, you take a special oath when you go in there, there are certain things you don't ever discuss. You know, you don't hear any gossip about the Court. And also the, we were paid, everybody was paid ten percent of their salary plus ten percent because you're on 24 hour duty, you could be called at any hour.

HARTNAGEL: This was during the key decision ...

BREEN: Well, it was when I was there. I don't know what they are doing now. And I also, there was only one time when I was called and that was, well, we were all called, if one is called, they're all called, but that was when, for that redistricting thing.

HARTNAGEL: Ellen, when you were working at the Supreme Court you were not living on Capitol Hill, you were living up in Northwest or maybe even Bethesda.

BREEN: Yes, I was living in McLean Gardens. And I have a little poster of it there.

HARTNAGEL: McLean Gardens up in ...

BREEN: Wisconsin Avenue.

HARTNAGEL: How did you get back and forth to work then?

BREEN: Well, I drove. And you had parking in the building.

HARTNAGEL: In the Supreme Court?

BREEN: There was parking for all the secretaries, all the stenographers, all the people who worked there.

HARTNAGEL: And was the parking garage under the building?

BREEN: They had a parking lot across in the back from the court. What street would that be? A Street. And it isn't there anymore. But when I became, that was when I was in the pool. When I became a justice's secretary, it was in the building.

HARTNAGEL: What kind of security was there?

BREEN: Marvelous. They had their own police.

HARTNAGEL: And did you have to go through some secure checkpoint every day?

BREEN: No, in the morning you drove in and nobody ... I was thinking about that, too. I wasn't aware ... You'd see the justices driving in. There was this driveway. What street is it on?

HARTNAGEL: It might be Second Street.

BREEN: Second Street. And you've probably seen it. It's in the back. And that's where they go in and come out. And the court only had one limo. And I remember, I was sworn in in February. And the day I was sworn in, I had a temperature of 104. I had pneumonia and didn't know it. You have no idea where I

was in my life at that time. I was holding on by my fingertips. And I was sworn in the fourth of February, I'll never forget ...

HARTNAGEL: Would this have been in the '60s, 1961?

BREEN: '61, I guess. And they sent me home. The nurse sent me home in the limo. I was sent home the day I was sworn in.

HARTNAGEL: [laughs] Did you have to be sworn in because you were going to be a justice's private secretary?

BREEN: No, because I was going in as an employee.

HARTNAGEL: This was when you went in the steno pool?

BREEN: Yes, and believe me, and the steno pool was just as important as it could be.

HARTNAGEL: How many were you in the steno pool?

BREEN: Four.

HARTNAGEL: Only four?

BREEN: Only four. It was hard. It was a big job. And then, they had, let me see, they have a wonderful dining room. They have a bakery. They serve meals. There were three teas while I was there, where I was asked to serve, to be the one who poured the tea. Beautiful parties, every detail, everything absolutely gorgeous.

HARTNAGEL: And would they have a cook from inside the court do that?

BREEN: Oh, they have a whole slew of cooks. Not a slew, but they have, it's a corps of people who work there. And there's also a public dining room in the court. Have you been to that?

HARTNAGEL: I haven't.

BREEN: Well, there used to be. I don't know if it's still there.

HARTNAGEL: I don't know if they do now or not. It would be interesting to find out.

BREEN: It's not elegant. It's not elegant like the one in the Capitol, but the food is elegant.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah. Now, Ellen, what do you remember about the seasons of Washington. You mentioned how hot it was in the summer as you would go to Sherrill's.

BREEN: Well, I can tell you this. If there had been no air conditioning developed in the, when would that be, I guess the '50s, I would never have survived. I cured tuberculosis. I had hematogenous TB which is a rare form. It's in the blood, not in the lungs.

HARTNAGEL: And when did you have that?

BREEN: I've learned only recently, only in the last few years I've had two doctors tell me that that's what Eleanor Roosevelt died of. But it was kept a secret because they didn't want it to be known. Now my little Burke grandmother, my little Irish grandmother, died of the same thing. And they say it isn't inherited, but I also have a cousin who's a Benedictine nun and we had no contact with each other, and we both had it at the same age. She's dead now, but she was nine months older than I, and she lived in California. And we both had it at the same age as our grandmother.

HARTNAGEL: And what age was that, Ellen?

BREEN: 33.

HARTNAGEL: 33. So you had it in the 1940s, huh?

BREEN: Uh-huh.

HARTNAGEL: Wow, during the war?

BREEN: No, it was in the '50s.

HARTNAGEL: It was in the '50s.

BREEN: In the '50s.

HARTNAGEL: OK, Wow. And how long were you sick?

BREEN: I was in a sanitarium for a year. And I had ... The thing was

HARTNAGEL: This must have been a terrible hardship for your ...

BREEN: people died of it. There was no cure [someone coughs], there was no surgery. You can't remove a lung or anything. But it was right at the time they discovered streptomycin and that's what saved my life. And I've really truly ... These are all wonderful experiences. I don't regret any of them. I really don't.

HARTNAGEL: Well, to go back to my one question about the seasons. Do you remember, like, any monumental snowstorms that closed ...

BREEN: I remember hearing about Crandall's theater when it collapsed. [ed: The roof of the Knickerbocker Theatre, at 18th and Columbia Road NW, owned by theater magnate Harry M. Crandall, collapsed Jan. 28, 1922, after a blizzard dropped 26 inches of snow in a 24-hour period; the movie "Get Rich Quick Wallingford" was playing to a house of 500 when the roof collapsed; 98 people died and 136 were injured.] That was when I was too young to even remember, like, two years old. But I remember hearing talk of it for years and years and years. We did have big snowstorms, yes. I remember the snow, looking out at the snow from First Street. But I don't have any real sharp memories, or any personal memories. The heat was very significant, yes. Another thing I remember about the summertime was sweeping the pavement. I mean, that was a big occupation for people who lived in Washington. You went out in the morning and swept your porch and your steps, and your terrace, and your front sidewalk.

HARTNAGEL: Every day?

BREEN: Every day, that I remember. And I remember horses, horse-drawn garbage trucks. They were funny little trucks that looked almost like coffins. They were dark and tin and the covers went down, and they were drawn by horses. I don't remember trash, but I remember the ash trucks. I remember that Holmes Bakery had a horse that drew the bake wagon. And, of course, George Keiler delivering with a little wooden cart that he had. And I remember Wonder Bread. I remember when Wonder Bread came out. That was a big advertising thing. And they had all these ...

HARTNAGEL: Was that because it was the first time sliced bread was offered for sale?

BREEN: Sliced bread. And I remember the little gaily covered paper. And I remember all the little loaves of bread about as big as a roll that they gave away.

HARTNAGEL: As a promotion?

BREEN: The first store on First Street was way up. It was in a funny block. You had to cross North Carolina Avenue and there was an apartment building and a furniture warehouse store. It was a mixed, funny neighborhood. And then, Safeway. Not Safeway, Sanitary. It was Sanitary Market.

HARTNAGEL: And Piggly Wiggles I think were around, too.

BREEN: Piggly Wiggly and A&P.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, where was the A&P, Ellen?

BREEN: I don't know where the A&P was but A&P was ... There was an A&P over by Stanton Park. I think that's the nearest one.

HARTNAGEL: OK.

BREEN: But we did not go to those stores very much.

HARTNAGEL: No. Keilers?

BREEN: Keilers. And Keilers which isn't there anymore.

HARTNAGEL: Could you get fresh meats at Keilers?

BREEN: Yes.

HARTNAGEL: Yes, OK. How about, did you shop at the Eastern Market at all? Did your family ...

BREEN: No.

HARTNAGEL: No?

BREEN: NO! NO!

HARTNAGEL: Why was that, because your father didn't approve of ...

BREEN: He didn't approve of that, no, no.

HARTNAGEL: [laughs]

BREEN: And the thing is, it's a historic place.

HARTNAGEL: Yes, very popular now.

BREEN: Very popular now, but it wasn't like that then. It really wasn't.

HARTNAGEL: OK, OK.

BREEN: I don't know. Well, I don't know. Now, you asked about Pennsylvania Avenue and the commerce. When a dime store was built at Seventh and the Avenue, or maybe it's Eighth, and what is the name of that high school?

HARTNAGEL: Hine Junior High.

BREEN: Hine Junior High. Black people went there. I have some memory of that, when that happened. But that was, oh, that wasn't for, uh-uh, no ...

HARTNAGEL: But you remember when the Kresge's went in?

BREEN: I remember when that opened. And I remember Avenue Grand Theater. Is it still there, the Avenue Grand?

HARTNAGEL: No, now it's ... at some incarnation it became the Penn Theater, and now it's not a theater at all. It's a medical building, but they're retained the marquee that says Penn Theater. But it was the Avenue Grand Theater? You remember going there as a kid? Or ...

BREEN: Yes.

HARTNAGEL: What would you see there?

BREEN: We'd go on Saturday. And go to the Stanton Theater and see Jackie Coogan.

HARTNAGEL: Now, where was the Stanton Theater?

BREEN: Over by Stanton Park. Maryland Avenue and Fourth Street, over by Lee's Funeral Home.

HARTNAGEL: OK.

BREEN: See, we walked that way. And we walked, we walked, from wherever we were living on Capitol Hill. We walked to H Street NE—H not Eighth. There was a big store there called Wahl's, W-a-h-l-s, a big store. There was another store ...

HARTNAGEL: What did Wahl's sell?

BREEN: They had everything, clothing.

HARTNAGEL: It was like a department store?

BREEN: A department store.

HARTNAGEL: Would you shop downtown?

BREEN: And I remember I had a little pink rose tweed cape that my mother had made. I remember getting dressed, and my Aunt Anne, who was my mother's older sister, not Dot, not Dorothy, the one who outfitted me for the tea at the White House, but the older one. Now she was very good to us. And she adored my brother, Michael. Oh, she really loved him. Now, she was a maiden lady. She got married late in life to a farmer from Southern Maryland. But she devoted her life to the nieces and nephews. She worked for the Treasury, and the Treasury has an office right across from Union Station. She also worked down at the controller's office at 14th Street NW, down near where—

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

TAPE 2/SIDE 2

HARTNAGEL: OK, as soon as, oh, it's picking up my voice alright. So, I think we're good to go. Tell me about the Shrine.

BREEN: Well, the Shrine goes back to my grandmother, too. Now, she's living on R Street NW, which is ...

HARTNAGEL: Tell me this grandmother's name, again.

BREEN: Mary Ellen Tennant Neitzey. And I don't like the Neitzey. And that name was corrupted when they came to this country. It should have been Nietzsche, N-I-E-T-Z-E. And it turned into Neitzey. And there are very few people named that, even in Washington. And if you come across one, they're all related. Anyway, bless her heart. Holy Thursday we always went to visit churches. And I remember, usually it was cold and I wanted to wear something that was new for spring, and I had to wear my winter coat. But I always could wear my Easter bonnet. And I remember going with Grandma, we would get on the streetcar at North Capitol and R and the streetcar went up North Capitol to Michigan Avenue and turned and went around by Trinity College and then we came to the Shrine and we got off. And years later, when I worked at the university (The Catholic University of America), it was all so familiar. Anyway, the Shrine, you'd walk quite, maybe the distance of two blocks, but it was a road into Catholic University campus and the Shrine was level with the ground. A wooden walk, like a boardwalk with things on either side, banisters, and then there'd be a concrete thing, and that was the door and you went into the basement.

HARTNAGEL: And this is probably, what, in the '30s maybe?

BREEN: Oh, no, dear. This isn't '30s yet. I was probably, oh I don't think I was more than eight.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, OK. So this is in the '20s.

BREEN: We would go to St. Anthony's also. We'd go to St. Anthony's because I had two cousins who were in the procession there for the Holy Thursday procession. Moving the Eucharist. Then we would go back down on the streetcar and we would go into the Shrine. I never ever thought that I would see the Shrine completed. It was just out of my consciousness. And to think that I was so pleased that I lived to see it completed.

HARTNAGEL: I think it was completed in the '50s, Ellen.

BREEN: Yes, and my children made their first Communion there. John was an altar boy there.

HARTNAGEL: Were you living near there then?

BREEN: No, see, they were, where were we living then? No, we were living on Allison Street then. They were, you see the thing was, they were students at Campus School. And they drew on Campus School for the altar boys.

HARTNAGEL: Was Campus School like?

BREEN: Campus School was built before Providence Hospital on part of Louie's farm up at the end of Varnum Street, up at the end of Bates Road. It was Bates Road then. And Dr. Jordan was head of the department of education. And Monsignor Radigan was his successor. When I worked for him it was aside from the fact that he was vice rector for academic affairs, he was head of the department of education at the university then.

HARTNAGEL: And Campus School, was it like a training?

BREEN: Campus School was the student-teaching school for the education department at CU. And they had nine nuns with master's degrees. And that was another thing that came about through the riots in Washington. They were attacked from a black neighborhood beyond South Dakota Avenue. Do you know where St. Anselm's is?

HARTNAGEL: Yes.

BREEN: Well, on the other side there, I guess it's, is it a black neighborhood now? I don't like to say ...

HARTNAGEL: I think it's mixed, I think it's mixed.

BREEN: Well, I remember there was a horrible to-do and Monsignor Spence I remember giving a sermon once. And he said, "If you people would stop moving every time the neighborhood gets a black tenant, we would be able to hold onto our parishes and our neighborhoods." And that was part of that segregation thing. It was horrible.

HARTNAGEL: You mean that people would move when?

BREEN: You see, the kids. There was real enmity. And that order is from, oh dear it's Justice Burton's. What is the elegant neighborhood in Ohio? Oh, can't think of the name of it. That's where their motherhouse is. Oh, dear.

HARTNAGEL: The Sisters of Providence?

BREEN: Well, he was mayor of Cleveland, and then he was senator from—

HARTNAGEL: Who? Justice Burton?

BREEN: Justice Burton. And he was the senator from Ohio. And Truman appointed him; he was a Republican, but the Democratic senator appointed him to the court. And he's the only justice that ever, that the president ever came to the court for his swearing-in. And nobody was ever sworn in at the White House until this week, and it makes me very provoked.

HARTNAGEL: (laughs)

BREEN: I think it's horrid. I think it is dreadful.

HARTNAGEL: You mean, the swearing-in should be always at the court?

BREEN: Well, it should be in the court. It should. But, anyway, Justice Truman, I mean President Truman, they put a special chair and he came for the swearing-in. But, now where was I in this whole thing?

HARTNAGEL: Well, we were talking about the Campus School and that your children went there. And that was a new thing to me. And we were talking about

BREEN: I was thinking about the nuns. Oh, what is the name of that city?

HARTNAGEL: Columbus, Ohio?

BREEN: No, no, no, no.

HARTNAGEL: You're talking about an Ohio city? Cincinnati?

BREEN: Ohio, yes, but it's north. It's not any

HARTNAGEL: Toledo? (laughs)

BREEN: No. Ohhhhhh.

HARTNAGEL: Well, maybe it'll have to remain shrouded there, Ellen.

BREEN: I'll try to think of it. Isn't that awful? But, anyway, those nuns were. Nobody will ever mean to me what the Notre Dame de Namurs meant. I am absolutely, thoroughly dedicated to them. They gave me—

HARTNAGEL: They were your high school nuns?

BREEN: —everything. But those nuns were pretty good too. And they were also Notre Dame nuns.

HARTNAGEL: The ones who were?

BREEN: Notre Dames of whatever, but I can't think. They were wonderful teachers.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah, yeah. These were the ones who ran the Campus School?

BREEN: Yup.

HARTNAGEL: Ellen, I'm wondering what you think about, like, the monumental core of Washington?

BREEN: You mean the monument and all those monuments down there?

HARTNAGEL: And do you remember the Tidal Basin from your childhood?

BREEN: Oh, sure. I remember my father taking me as a little girl in that Model-T. And there used to be gorgeous rambling roses growing over fences. That was too, it wasn't sophisticated enough. That's gone now.

HARTNAGEL: And they were where? Where were those roses?

BREEN: They were down there on that drive to the Tidal Basin around the monument, around all that. I remember when the Kennedy Center was built. Oh, it's a beautiful memory.

HARTNAGEL: Do you remember Fourth of July celebrations from your childhood?

BREEN: Yes, I remember that.

HARTNAGEL: What would they have been like?

BREEN: I remember that they would put ... a lot of those fireworks. We could see fireworks, but then there were things, I don't know what they were; they put things up in the air that floated and they lighted up the whole neighborhood. And it was eerie. It would float over our neighborhood, all the way from the monument, up to the Capitol. And we had a neighborhood incident on the Fourth of July, where a man barricaded himself in one of these houses

HARTNAGEL: Oh.

BREEN: in the block above us, which was not as refined as our block.

HARTNAGEL: (laughs)

BREEN: It was awful. And the police, it was horrible. And my father went out to investigate what was going on. We thought it was fireworks. It was the Fourth of July. It wasn't fireworks. It was a man who'd

barricaded himself and the police came and he killed a policeman. He walked out and shot him right in the head.

HARTNAGEL: Wow. And did you ever find out what it was, why he had barricaded himself in?

BREEN: Well, he was upset about something. We never did know, of course. He was removed from the neighborhood. And it was frightening, because we had this thing coming over lighting up, maybe that frightened the man, I don't know. And, my father, you know, it was something going on. He went out to see what it was, and he didn't come back. And all these fire engines and police and all this confusion. And we were a wreck.

HARTNAGEL: But he came home safe.

BREEN: He came home and said the policeman standing next to him was shot dead.

HARTNAGEL: Wow.

BREEN: That was the Fourth of July.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah, yeah.

BREEN: Now, I know that my son takes, used to, his children have grown up now, but he used to always take them to the Capitol ceremony. Now, we did not have that, there was nothing like that.

HARTNAGEL: No big fireworks?

BREEN: It was at the monument they had fireworks. But there were no seats; there was no entertainment or anything. It was just fireworks going off.

HARTNAGEL: Do you remember inaugural parades?

BREEN: Oh, yes, I remember. The first one I remember is Hoover's. And that was a big to-do because there was a naked Indian. He had nothing but a loincloth, and that was a big to-do. And the reason he was in the parade was because the vice president had Indian blood. And I remember, not only was it shocking to those who saw it, but it was made a big, a big brouhaha was made about it.

HARTNAGEL: I mean, do you remember seeing?

BREEN: And the only person I ever went to see as a result of World War II, they had parades for all those men when they came home, was Admiral (Chester W.) Nimitz. And I admired him so much. And I just said, no way, I'm not going to any parades, but I went for his. I just wanted those men to come home.

HARTNAGEL: There were parades recognizing individual achievement like that?

BREEN: Yes. And the interesting thing is, when there were parades, and I can't always remember just why they were having parades, but the marines and the sailors, I don't remember soldiers, massed in front of our house in our neighborhoods. There were hundreds and thousands of these uniformed men ... that was where they gathered. And then from there, there would be a command, and they would all straighten up and march off and be in the parade.

HARTNAGEL: But this must have been when you were a girl, and still living—

BREEN: Yeah, not when I was grown up.

HARTNAGEL: No, no. So this would have been between the wars, actually. Maybe a veterans?

BREEN: Well, it wasn't all war-connected.

HARTNAGEL: Maybe a veterans parade? Or a Memorial Day parade or something like that?

BREEN: Well, we had firemen's parades for Memorial Day, not Memorial Day, what is, Labor Day. Big firemen's parades. I usually didn't go to them either. My family would go, and I would stay home to reorganize my drawers and get myself ready for fall.

HARTNAGEL: (laughs) [Mary Jo Hartnagel, Ellen's friend in Wilmington who helped arrange the interview, said, "Is she the oldest child?"] I think so.

BREEN: (laughs) Oh, gosh. Gosh.

HARTNAGEL: Well, Ellen, we've been through most of my questions, one way or another, except—

BREEN: I'm glad we talked about the Shrine. I do remember that.

HARTNAGEL: When did you leave Washington? That's a question I don't know the answer to.

BREEN: Well, I left Washington, let me see, what date would it be?

HARTNAGEL: I mean, it doesn't have to be a precise date, but, you know, is it

BREEN: I guess in the '70s.

HARTNAGEL: OK. [Mary Jo Hartnagel asks: "When did you retire?"]

BREEN: I can't even remember that. I can't remember the date of my mother's funeral. See, people think I remember so much, but I don't. And I stop and I can't

HARTNAGEL: Well, those precise details are the harder ones.

BREEN: I place Mother's funeral by Sarah. Because John and Carolyn and the boys were there afterwards, and there was no Sarah. So, that's how I know that she died one year before Sarah, and Sarah's 12. I mean that's how I can tell. I cannot remember when Johnny [her husband] died. I have to look at his Mass card. Isn't that awful?

HARTNAGEL: But did you, would you have left Washington, like, 10 years ago or longer?

BREEN: Oh, longer than that. There were many reasons for leaving. I was living in McLean Gardens. John was a freshman in college. John is 45.

HARTNAGEL: So, at least, probably 25 years ago.

BREEN: Oh, at least. I've been here 20 years. I lived 10 years in Wilmington, NC.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, OK, what were doing there?

BREEN: I was 58 years old, I guess, when, yeah.

HARTNAGEL: Did you go to Wilmington, NC, first?

BREEN: Before I came here, yeah.

HARTNAGEL: Two towns named Wilmington. What is that about, Ellen?

BREEN: Isn't that interesting?

HARTNAGEL: Yeah.

BREEN: I can't figure it out.

HARTNAGEL: (laughs)

BREEN: There's a lot I can't figure out. As Mary Jo knows. (laughs) There's a lot I'm not saying, too.

HARTNAGEL: Well, we've covered. I mean, but are there any other things that you remember. Like, what did you do for entertainment as a young person in Washington?

BREEN: We didn't do very much. We went to my grandmother's. We went to Aunt Dee's. My father long ago stopped taking people out to dinner on Friday evening. My sisters and brothers moved away, and they would go and visit them. Not very much social life. Mostly work.

HARTNAGEL: Even as a young person, like, a high schooler? Did you live at Notre Dame school?

BREEN: I lived at home and walked. And we had school tickets, did you know that?

HARTNAGEL: No, what were school tickets?

BREEN: To ride on the streetcar. The fare I think was 15 cents. And the school tickets were three cents apiece. And you got a ticket signed by your principal or your teacher and you went down to Woodward and Lothrop's ... that was another shopping thing. That was a big thing to go to Woodies. I used to meet my Aunt Anne there a lot. And she would come from work and we would meet her. And I would go with the girls after school to Woodies tea room. And why I did that, I was thinking about that because, and when I went on the streetcar, you see, that First and E Street car is going up Massachusetts Avenue. It's not going, it's not going up North Capitol Street. You got off at the Post Office, the city Post Office at North Capitol and what is that?

HARTNAGEL: Massachusetts?

BREEN: Massachusetts. And that's where you transferred to ride up to K Street. And the school tickets were three cents apiece, but many times I've walked.

HARTNAGEL: Yeah, yeah.

BREEN: If the weather was good.

HARTNAGEL: Well, what's your overall impression of, like, your growing-up time in Washington? I mean, you mentioned almost at the very beginning of our conversation, Ellen ...

BREEN: I don't know how you remember all this.

HARTNAGEL: how you as a child could see the dome of the Capitol from your bed in your Northeast house. What kind of significance did, did that give you a special feeling for—

BREEN: It always gave me, and it's grown. I mean, as I've grown older, I've really appreciated it. And I really look back at that connection. I really do treasure it. Because in Washington, every other person is from somewhere else. And if you say you were born and raised there, people ... And there were 26 girls in my class who graduated from Notre Dame and there are 10 of us left. And a lot of them died within the last year. And I have wonderful connections and memories with those girls. Wonderful. Unbelievable.

HARTNAGEL: Alright, anything else you'd like to say.

BREEN: Can't think.

HARTNAGEL: (laughs)

BREEN: Can't think.

HARTNAGEL: Well, thank you very much, Ellen.

BREEN: Well, I thank you. I hope it's helpful.

HARTNAGEL: Oh, I think it's a wonderful interview.

BREEN: And the lady's name is Ruth what Overbeck?

HARTNAGEL: Ruth Ann Overbeck. I'll write it down for you and then you'll be able to, in case your, you know—

BREEN: I have no computer, but Ann would go on the computer.

HARTNAGEL: I'm going to shut this off now, so we'll be done taping.

BREEN: She would love to know what the Web (address is).

END OF INTERVIEW