



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Emily Guthrie

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

DEUTSCH: Stephanie Deutsch on January 28th. I'm with Emily Guthrie and I'm at her office. OK, Emily, you ready?

GUTHRIE: Yes, sure.

DEUTSCH: Where did you grow up?

GUTHRIE: I grew up all over the country. I was born in Connecticut, and when I was six and a half I moved to Houston, Texas. Did elementary school there and then just before eighth grade I moved to Alexandria, Virginia, where I was until I was 15 and then we moved to northern California.

DEUTSCH: Oh my gosh.

GUTHRIE: To Menlo Park.

DEUTSCH: Why did you move so much?

GUTHRIE: I was the fifth daughter of a father who was a chemical engineer and so we moved when all the oil companies moved their headquarters from the New York area to the Houston area, and then he retired and had several different careers, including political appointments here, which brought us here, and heading Stanford Research Institute's Energy Center in the—

DEUTSCH: Political appointment here, when was that?

GUTHRIE: Under Ford.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. And then to Stanford to do research?

GUTHRIE: Head of the energy center at Stanford Research Institute, then SRI International.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

GUTHRIE: And then we also moved during my college years. They moved to southern California and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

GUTHRIE: [laughing]

DEUTSCH: So what was that like, moving around all the time?

GUTHRIE: I got really good at meeting new people. And, although the only really difficult move was during high school. But I had a sense of there wasn't any place that I lived that I didn't learn something or meet someone or be part of a community that I didn't learn from. So that's sort of been—that was part of my journey. It also impacted me to want very much to be part of a community for a long time, later in life.

DEUTSCH: I had that experience, too

GUTHRIE: Which is how I fell in love with Capitol Hill. And why I've been here on and off for 20 years.

DEUTSCH: We'll get back to that but I want to follow your path a little more.

GUTHRIE: Sure.

DEUTSCH: So you went to high school in Virginia?

GUTHRIE: Yeah, I went to St. Agnes.

DEUTSCH: St. Agnes? Really?

GUTHRIE: Episcopal school, when it was a girls' school, which actually shaped the way I learned and learned how to think because they had the ironically named "Ages of Man" program, at that point.

DEUTSCH: What was that?

GUTHRIE: Which integrated history, literature, art and music in a chronology so you learned it synchronistically or something. It affected how I studied and thought about the world. And it also integrated religion into academic pursuit.

DEUTSCH: Was your family Episcopalian?

GUTHRIE: Yes. We were, which was another constant in the moving around. And then I went to the Convent of the Sacred Heart in California.

DEUTSCH: You're still in high school now?

GUTHRIE: I'm still in high school, my junior and senior year. And became close to the nuns there.

DEUTSCH: So that was Catholic.

GUTHRIE: That was Catholic. And actually the nun who was headmistress was one of the first persons who talked to me about becoming a priest.

DEUTSCH: Really?

GUTHRIE: She and all her brothers, five of them or six of them were Jesuit priests, and she had a sister who was also

DEUTSCH: Wait a minute—oh her brothers were all Jesuit priests.

GUTHRIE: Uh huh.

DEUTSCH: And she talked to you?

GUTHRIE: Uh huh. Which was pretty extraordinary, at that point.

DEUTSCH: What do you think it was that she saw in you that—?

GUTHRIE: Well, I was the leader of the school and, even after a year—I often look back Stephanie and, at 17, which was when I graduated from high school, I was much more together than I am even today.

[laughing] I was confident in a way that—

DEUTSCH: Well maybe ignorance is bliss? [laughing]

GUTHRIE: Yeah, absolutely! [laughing]

DEUTSCH: OK, so here you are a 17-year-old graduate of high school. Your nun—your headmistress—thinks you'd make a great priest and off you go to Princeton?

GUTHRIE: Yes.

DEUTSCH: Why Princeton?

GUTHRIE: I fell in love with it, sight unseen. I had no idea it came with all of this sort of historical, social baggage, as it were. I had no idea. I just liked the academic portions.

DEUTSCH: Yeah. There was no family connections.

GUTHRIE: [laughing] None whatsoever. In fact, my family gave me big grief about going there. It's strange. I mean, at that point I was still living my life like it wasn't my own, like it was sort of given to me. So in some ways—this is odd for Overbeck, but what the heck?—in some ways I went not for my

own intellectual purposes, although that happened, but to be part of that community. And to minister to all the wacky people who went to the...and minister in the sense of just taking care of people.

DEUTSCH: To be with.

GUTHRIE: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: So, what did you study when you weren't ministering?

GUTHRIE: I studied history, and the women's studies program had just started up while I was there at Princeton, so I did a—it wasn't quite a minor because it started while I was there—in women's studies and I wrote, I found my niche in social history and in history of women and religion so that was my primary focus my senior year.

DEUTSCH: Did you write a thesis?

GUTHRIE: I did. It was on the intersection of public speaking and women's—ironically, not ironically—so—women's public speaking and that intention or in concert with their religious beliefs. And I focused mostly on a woman named Phoebe Palmer, who there was nothing on at the time but since has some airplay, who started the holiness movement. And so the tension was that her own religious beliefs really ascribed to women very limited roles and yet her voice and her inspiration started a national, even international movement. So I sort of traced that development. It was actually fascinating.

DEUTSCH: What period was she?

GUTHRIE: 19th century, so 1870s, 60s, 70s. And then so I had traced all along the development of women's place in 19th century primarily American religious history.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. So were you still—were you thinking about being a priest at this point? Or was that—

GUTHRIE: No, not at all. That was just all unconscious work. [laughing]

DEUTSCH: So, you graduate.

GUTHRIE: I graduate. But I think the other piece is that all along in high school and in college I did a lot of theater and a lot of music and singing and that was a big part of my life. And a, you know, a really delightful part.

DEUTSCH: I know.

GUTHRIE: A great deal of fun.

DEUTSCH: So you did that at college?

GUTHRIE: Uh huh.

DEUTSCH: Favorite roles?

GUTHRIE: Oh, I did a lot of crazy musical theater. I was Geraldine Ferraro at one point. Ruth Westheimer was great. [laughing]

DEUTSCH: These would be student-written musicals, I guess?

GUTHRIE: Yes, yes, they would be.

DEUTSCH: I don't remember the Dr. Ruth on Broadway. [laughing]

GUTHRIE: No, no, no. So a lot of comic roles. And then a week after I graduated from college, I went on a teaching fellowship to Indonesia, to central Java.

DEUTSCH: Oh my gosh.

GUTHRIE: And went primarily because I knew nothing of Islam and wanted to learn more in the sort of the mix of religious traditions that were present there and primarily because it also had an accessible language that I knew. It wasn't like Chinese, where it would take me five years to master.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. What is the language?

GUTHRIE: It's actually the national language is called Bahasa Indonesia and it was formulated in 1927 or 1928 to be the revolutionary language.

DEUTSCH: Oh—so it's a created language?

GUTHRIE: It is. There are 14,000 islands and 200 languages or so and so they literally, a group of people sat down and took—it's based primarily on Malay but it has Arabic, Dutch, some English influences.

DEUTSCH: What's it called?

GUTHRIE: Bahasa Indonesia.

DEUTSCH: B-A-

GUTHRIE: Oh. B-A-H-A-S-A.

DEUTSCH: So these people just kind of created it?

GUTHRIE: Created it and then it was taught in the schools eventually when there enough schools so that people from the different islands could coordinate, communicate and eventually overthrow the Dutch and the Portuguese and Japanese.

DEUTSCH: So did you learn it?

GUTHRIE: I did, I did. It's great. It has no tenses.

DEUTSCH: Oh I like that!

GUTHRIE: [laughing] So I taught in university there—English as a second language, primarily—did a little directing in the theater, which was fun.

DEUTSCH: Under what program was it?

GUTHRIE: There's a great program on Princeton's campus called "Princeton in Asia" so they send people all across Asia and I was there for two and a half years.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

GUTHRIE: And lived in a small village just north of the center of the city sort of underneath the middle of Merapi [ed: a volcano].

DEUTSCH: North of Djakarta?

GUTHRIE: Yogyakarta, which is one of the ancient cities in the middle of central Java. And it's a center for art and music so it's a great city—

DEUTSCH: Did you come home at all during that time?

GUTHRIE: I did not, uh uh.

DEUTSCH: Two and a half years.

GUTHRIE: Uh huh. I got to travel some and I started a children's library in my house with another housemate and that was really fun. That was sort of the start of my grant writing and we got a little Rotary grant to buy books and it was just a hoot. Three times a week we would have anywhere from 15 to 30 children coming in our door and sitting around reading, drawing.

DEUTSCH: So this was in—so the books were in English?

GUTHRIE: No. They were in

DEUTSCH: The books were in—

GUTHRIE: Indonesian, yeah.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

GUTHRIE: It was a wonderful time actually.

DEUTSCH: Oh, I bet.

GUTHRIE: So I definitely became part of that community and was assigned the role of local masseuse. Even though that was ubiquitous—everybody had one. But in my village I became—because in the community—meals and different. I couldn't cook very well, but I could give massages [laughing] to the little ladies who were—

DEUTSCH: Right, to the people who could cook.

GUTHRIE: [laughing] Right. To the women, only the women.

DEUTSCH: And was there an Episcopal church there? Did you go to church?

GUTHRIE: Oh no, no. I think I went to Catholic services, if I went to services. And otherwise I learned from my primarily Muslim neighbors.

DEUTSCH: Which must have been fascinating.

GUTHRIE: It was. Had all the spectrum of primarily our neighbors were Javanese, which means they had a synchronistic understanding of religion—a little Hindu, a little ancient polytheism, a little Buddhism. You know, everything run together.

DEUTSCH: Wow, great. So two and a half years.

GUTHRIE: It was a great time, yeah. And then I came back—oh gosh—I came back, did maternity leave for one of my sisters, ran her shop for just about a year—

DEUTSCH: When you say “ran her shop”?

GUTHRIE: On the Eastern shore she had a little business down there. And I came back really realizing now I knew sort of some of the social programs and the international development initiatives overseas and

I realized I knew very little about what was going on in the United States and so that was looking around and eventually I applied and went to live at the National Cathedral in their Cathedral volunteer program.

DEUTSCH: This is incredible, but I don't know about that program.

GUTHRIE: It ended probably five years ago but they for about ten years invited people from across the country—six of them—to come and live in a house across from the Cathedral that they owned and to explore what it was to live in a Christian community and to be full time volunteers in the city. And we always thought we'd write a book that was "How to Live in Christian Community: Whose Turn is it to Take Out the Trash?" [laughing]

DEUTSCH: So you were volunteering?

GUTHRIE: I was a full-time volunteer and my placement was Sasha Bruce Youthwork, which is how I came to work—

DEUTSCH: Capitol Hill?

GUTHRIE: On Capitol Hill.

DEUTSCH: What year are we now?

GUTHRIE: We are in 1988 or 9.

DEUTSCH: And, Sasha Bruce was founded when? It was already a well-established program by then?

GUTHRIE: It was. And so I worked with Debbie Shore and Vera Johnson, who are still—

DEUTSCH: Still there?

GUTHRIE: Still there.

DEUTSCH: Remind me to tell you about Keisha when we're off tape.

GUTHRIE: I will. And so one of the great treats in my adult professional life was to reinvigorate those relationships now.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. In a different context.

GUTHRIE: In a different context. So we were all in the basement of what is still Bruce House. But that's where their administrative offices were.

DEUTSCH: On Eighth Street?

GUTHRIE: On Maryland and 11th.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. Which is now the emergency shelter.

GUTHRIE: Right. And it was then. We were just in the basement. So I did everything from run summer programs with their kids in the shelter program to representing Sasha Bruce in community meetings and eventually running their volunteer program, and then after I finished my volunteer turn they hired me and I did various things, including—they started—oh now I'm going to blank on the—they started a program, it'll come to me in a second—where you can, kids can go to primarily fire stations and get help, connected to help in a safe way.

DEUTSCH: Safe place.

GUTHRIE: Yeah, whatever it is. And at that time I also started working part-time at St. Mark's on Capitol Hill as their youth coordinator. But Sasha Bruce was great. They have a wonderful—they still do—one of their primary strengths is they do amazing training. They train young social workers and case workers in strength-based family therapy and some of them stay on and otherwise they train them to go across the city. It's really quite a gift to the community. But Vera Johnson was my mentor at that point.

DEUTSCH: And you were also at this point being in plays at St. Mark's?

GUTHRIE: Yes. [laughing] Yes, I was. Part of the St. Mark's Players.

DEUTSCH: And...

GUTHRIE: Which was very fun. Oh, do you want roles or something?

DEUTSCH: Yes, well of course I know you played Emily in Our Town.

GUTHRIE: Yes, that's right.

DEUTSCH: And the very memorable—

GUTHRIE: Little Mermaid, Hans Christian Anderson

DEUTSCH: Right, right. What was the name of the show? Hans Christian Anderson, yeah?

GUTHRIE: It was Hans Christian Anderson.

DEUTSCH: Was the lead the mermaid? Were you the mermaid?

GUTHRIE: I was. [laughing.]

DEUTSCH: I remember the show but I can't remember the details. I remember Wonderful, Wonderful Copenhagen. [both laughing]

GUTHRIE: It's true. I did both of those, which was just a hoot. I was working with many wonderful people in the community, like Stephanie Deutsch. But also Louis Bayard, who had been my friend since I was 17.

DEUTSCH: You met him at Princeton.

GUTHRIE: Uh huh.

DEUTSCH: And did you act together at Princeton? Were you in shows together at Princeton?

GUTHRIE: We did, we did. And we're good friends.

DEUTSCH: Were you living on the Hill at this time?

GUTHRIE: I was. I was living in various places and then I ended up in Dolph Sand's basement for a while. [laughing] And then really I shifted my focus more and more to working at St. Mark's and being part of that church community and eventually, gradually went from half time to three-quarters-time to full-time.

DEUTSCH: And the idea of being a priest, I think was rocketing around in there somewhere?

GUTHRIE: Was rocketing around, it's true. And one of my other mentors at that time, Jim Adams and Susan Flanders, we started talking about that and how to be a representative of the Christian faith while still wrestling with the doctrines and belief systems but being able to be a voice for that struggle and in a public way that was helpful to the community. But I loved working with the young people and their families and learned a lot about the dynamics of family and congregation and what played out in that setting. And I think grew more, in the sense of recognizing that people would naturally come and talk to me to work through—in large part some parenting issues at that point—or in terms of the young people working through their family conflicts and some of their sense of purpose in life. And then just learning what it was to be authentic in a community and still be loved. In spite of them knowing me.

DEUTSCH: Of course, another way to look at it would be *because* of their knowing me!

GUTHRIE: Well, there's that, too. [both laughing]

DEUTSCH: So the St. Mark's community played a big part in your life at this point. I mean—

GUTHRIE: Oh, absolutely. It was the centerpiece of my life—the place where I learned, encouraged me to reflect more deeply on all that had gone before, you know, I'm in my twenties.

[Some fumbling with microphone and laughter]

DEUTSCH: Yes, you're still in your twenties.

GUTHRIE: Yes, this is going slowly.

DEUTSCH: That's ok.

GUTHRIE: Yeah, I was in my twenties. So I was reflecting and processing all of my family experiences and really thinking about my vocational calling and what that might mean. And it was also good because the reason I was hired full-time was really to be the front person during St. Mark's renovation, with all the—which was really great—so I was the complaint runner. Talking to neighbors, talking with the contractor.

DEUTSCH: Wow, that's a huge job.

GUTHRIE: It was, it was great because Jim Adams knew he was too much of a curmudgeon to handle any conflict on a daily basis. I mean, the lay leadership was definitely handling all the details. But all during this period, you know, I was living, working, breathing Capitol Hill. And I loved the fact that you would meet neighbors at the Market, you would meet neighbors walking or eating and that the neighbors ranged from folks on the street to the occasional Congressperson and mostly the phenomenal, incredibly diverse—not in race or economics—but diverse in interests, sort of work-life, folks living on Capitol Hill. But they all seemed to be committed and intense and really engaged for the most part in creating community and wrestling with neighborhood and city and world issues, frankly.

DEUTSCH: So then you went to Yale—

GUTHRIE: So St. Mark's sponsored me for ordination, which is a long process in the Episcopal Church and it was then, there's many, many aspects of it. So I went to Yale Divinity School, which is a three-year master's of divinity program and, again, I went there primarily because I could have an Episcopal/Anglican education but also be in an interdenominational setting.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

GUTHRIE: And they had an institute for sacred music, worship and the arts, which also appealed.

DEUTSCH: Sacred music—

GUTHRIE: Worship and the arts. Eventually, they cut out the worship and arts part. [laughing]

DEUTSCH: So it's just sacred music?

GUTHRIE: It's now the institute of sacred music, yeah. [laughing]

DEUTSCH: So you studied there for three years?

GUTHRIE: So I studied there for three years, got my master's, came back and thought.

DEUTSCH: It must have been an interesting transition about this—after this really intense involvement with community and people and social work to then kind of be back to the academic world.

GUTHRIE: It was.

DEUTSCH: It probably almost felt like being on vacation.

GUTHRIE: No, it felt like being uprooted. It felt like being uprooted and I had been surrounded by people who were irreverent more than they were self-righteous and it put me right into a place where many more were—I mean, there were some irreverents—but heavily self-righteous.

DEUTSCH: Lots of self-righteousness?

GUTHRIE: Which, I did not tolerate very well. But I learned a great deal, I think. So then I came back and I thought to myself I wasn't ready to be in the middle of a congregation and was still processing so much of who I was in the world. And so I took a job at the AAAS, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in their international directorate.

DEUTSCH: Here in DC?

GUTHRIE: Here in DC. So I moved back to the Hill initially and started doing international science.

DEUTSCH: That seems like sort of a weird –

GUTHRIE: It was. It was sort like “and now for something different.” Most of my family, many, many of them are scientists so in some ways, the job of gathering scientists—

DEUTSCH: So it wasn't so weird.

GUTHRIE: —wasn't so weird. And was fascinating

DEUTSCH: Let's stop here, I'm going to turn the tape over.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

DEUTSCH: Ok. We're working for the American Academy for the Advancement of Science.

GUTHRIE: [laughing] Yes. Having organized international science diplomatic conferences in Beijing. Yeah, it was very odd going from divinity school to meeting with the premier of China. So I did that for not quite three years and realized when I was writing about German science and editing books on science in the Pacific Rim that perhaps this wasn't my best use of my skills because what ended up happening was that everybody in international directorate would find their way to my office, close the door and sit down and talk through their life issues. [laughing]

DEUTSCH: [laughing] Yes, that was a key.

GUTHRIE: So, that was a key to something needs to change. And during this period the other major thing that was going on is I started mentoring a young person, Lakeisha when she was 14, through Capitol Hill Group Ministry's mentoring program, and it became hugely transformative process and relationship for me. It got me in public housing, in Coolidge High School, in an extremely dysfunctional family that was still trying, still trying to be loving in spite of mental illness, drug use, you know—

DEUTSCH: Did she live in Potomac Gardens?

GUTHRIE: No. She actually lived in—oh, what was it called? 501? It was the building that's not been demolished on the corner of—what is that?—was it Fifth and I? Just on the other side of the freeway.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh. Yes.

GUTHRIE: And at that point I mean, there was a reason there was—

DEUTSCH: [cc: unintelligible, guessing at name of building]

GUTHRIE: It actually, it may well have been part of Arthur Capper I wasn't—

DEUTSCH: It doesn't matter.

GUTHRIE: It doesn't matter. It was so run down that there was a reason they demolished it eventually. It was infested with rats, mice and roaches and drugs at that point. And Lakeisha was my window into the reality of that experience, what it was to be growing up essentially without parents, taking care of her mother who was very ill, in so many ways. Taking care of her nephew at a young age—beginning at a young age—had a sister who was using and people were hurting in her family for good reason over a generation. And yet, she just had all these interests in going to school and trying to live a normal life—

quote unquote—and we hit it off. She was quite mad at me when I left AAAS because she said “why would you leave such a nice office building?” [laughing] Because she loved coming up and being in that professional environment and she and I—it’s been a huge part of my life now. I’m still—

DEUTSCH: Where is she now?

GUTHRIE: She lives in Northwest with her husband and three children and she was married in Capitol Hill United Methodist Church and I was present at the birth of all three of her children. The last one her husband could not make it literally because he had to be with their eldest child and I got to Providence Hospital and the head of maternity, at the door of maternity I rang and she said “Well who are you here for?” and I said Lakeisha Rivera and they said are you a relative and I said “Yes, I’m her sister.” And the nurse got to the door and said “uh huh.” And then after Jinaya was born she said “Yep, uh huh, you are her sister.” [laughing] I cut the cord and went right through. So she is—she is part of my family and we continue. She’s working full-time as a child development kind of coordinator and wrestles still with the residue of—as we all do—residue of family issues. But so that was my initial connection to the Group Ministry and a powerful one and an introduction to how the Group Ministry was in very intensive, often individual ways connecting people indeed across race and life experience and how that was transforming both and all involved’s lives.

DEUTSCH: So that’s how you became part of the Group Ministry?

GUTHRIE: So I came—Lynn Kneedler, who was then the executive director, realized I was casting about and studying for general ordination exams and invited me to assist with the then 30th anniversary festivities in the Fall of 1998.

DEUTSCH: OK, Fall of 1998, 30th anniversary.

GUTHRIE: Uh huh. So that grew and eventually I was her deputy director and it was a wonderful time. In 1999, primarily because of the enthusiasm and vision of Lynn, we started three or four new programs. We started Mission Possible with the resident council of Potomac Gardens. Lynn had been formative in the establishment of the collaboratives across the city and was a founding member of the South Washington Collaborative and so through that we started a family resource center. And I guess the third thing was that we were the organizational administrator for Strive D.C., which also started that year.

DEUTSCH: Wow. That’s a lot.

GUTHRIE: [laughing] It was crazy but we worked really, really well together. She’s a wonderful, dedicated leader and we—she taught me so much about everything from grant-writing to capturing

passionately the nuts and bolts of what a community-based nonprofit does, about calling forth leadership from community members, and those community members being neighbors in public housing to neighbors on East Capitol Street. So that was extraordinarily formative and she was so encouraging of me that I felt like I'd landed in a place that mirrored who I was and was in need of some of my gifts. It also is an extraordinary place in terms of the staff itself. Primarily African-American, now entirely African-American except me but that in and of itself has been a continuing project, looking—for me but also for the organization—look at how race impacts our work, our individual professional lives, and how we view city politics, gentrification, the staff's connection or lack thereof with the Capitol Hill community, their perceptions of church and community and the families they serve. So in one sense, what goes on within the staff of Group Ministry in some sense mirrors what a lot of the issues that are central in the community at large.

DEUTSCH: How many staff members? How big is the staff of the Group Ministry?

GUTHRIE: Now we have 11 full-time and seven part-time, soon to have 12. We're hiring, so 12 full-time and either seven or eight part-time. So it grew tremendously and then when Lynn started—she still—she had one and a half staff people. So the 90s really was a time of programmatic growth entirely. Entirely programmatic and in fact, probably when I took over as interim director and then continuing as deputy and then eventually as executive director in late—in 2002—part of the early stage was in a sense recovering organizationally from such a large expansion very quickly. So, grounding all of those programs, helping them stay—stay and in a sense figuring out what the long-term trajectory of those programs were going to be. And how they worked in the community and how they played out and the impact of them.

DEUTSCH: What has been the major—so sort of adjusting to that huge growth is one of the major things during your time. Anything else?

GUTHRIE: And I would say, in that sense, and Lynn is to be given great credit. She is the visionary of, you know, what or who the group ministry could be and needed to be in the community. She truly, truly was that visionary and in some ways I just carried out her vision. And so I think, in terms of my leadership one of the key things that I feel proud about is that during this last decade I've moved the Group Ministry from being a traditionally Christian organization to an interfaith organization that has encompassed the Jewish community on the Hill, the Buddhist community on the Hill, those neighbors who aren't necessarily involved in congregations but now feel like the Group Ministry is open to them as well. In terms of working out their ethical principles, we've reached out the Seventh Day Adventists and

the Latter Day Saints and there's just a much more diverse group of participants in addition to our core founding members.

DEUTSCH: I know the interfaith Thanksgiving service is something. Was that your baby?

GUTHRIE: Uh huh. It was, it was. And with the Board, sort of always wanted to do it and we just started and started small just to get it going and it really has grown into a wonderful annual celebration of the religious diversity and acknowledging now—and this is primarily because of Sig Cohen—of acknowledging the volunteer efforts of members of our congregations who are nominated, such as yourself, for their volunteer leadership and gifts to the community. So it's a really wonderful celebration of Thanksgiving on many levels.

DEUTSCH: That's been going on for three years, right?

GUTHRIE: We've had four.

DEUTSCH: Oh, four?

GUTHRIE: Yeah, so 2008 will be the fifth one. I think organizationally, one thing that's happened over my tenure is that the Group Ministry has developed a very strong Board of Directors and that is crucial to the ongoing health of the organization and has brought in, shifted from being only representative of our congregations to inviting members of the community who have specific things to offer—who might be leaders in different ways—in business, Capitol Hill business, or long-time neighbors who support the work but aren't necessarily part of any particular religious community and it is what will carry the organization forward and gives it strength in a way that individual executive directors or personalities couldn't do because they come and go. So in that sense, probably because I'm, I work collaboratively and allow others to lead, I think that's definitely been a powerful piece of this. And that means that we've developed the golf tournament and expanding— [laughing]

DEUTSCH: The golf tournament?

GUTHRIE: Oddly.

DEUTSCH: Is that a big fundraiser for you?

GUTHRIE: Well it's our single fundraiser.

DEUTSCH: How much do you raise with that?

GUTHRIE: This year we raised \$38,000 so not huge but it's still growing—

DEUTSCH: Lots of fun, I'm sure.

GUTHRIE: And lots of fun. It's certainly the time when you never knew how many clergy on the Hill secretly play golf or think it's really fun. So it's a hoot. You know, you have the Capitol Hill press team and the St. Mark's teams and the Lutheran church team. It is a hoot, it really is. And now they're working to get more corporate interest, which is fun, too because we've never been corporately supported. Except for the corporate congregations. And I think also it has been a wonderful labor of love to renovate the day center which we acquired again right about when I came on in late '98 which became increasingly run down and so, in the last four years, a marvelous group of volunteers and I set about raising the \$250,000 to renovate the building in honor of Shirley Smith Anderson. And throughout that process it was just an extraordinary experience with these powerful women, especially Barbara Black and again Lynn and several of Shirley's friends from out of town who had a clear sense though this was a woman who lived on Capitol Hill the last ten years of her life, hugely believed in the significance of the Capitol Hill community and this just coincided with her total commitment to children and to anti-poverty measures and to encouraging everyone she came in contact with, so that was fun.

DEUTSCH: And Shirley's Place is now the day center.

GUTHRIE: Yeah, the day center. And continues to serve as the offices and the locus of the case management support for families in our congregation-based shelter. And will probably expand a bit in the future. We've started to receive some of the folks who are staying in D.C. General just during the day as someplace to stop by and check in. I think—that's the other piece, the programs is what I was heading for—the programs have shifted a bit, deepened in their focus in the last six or eight years and that is reflective of city-wide changes in part but the family resource center, for example, started out being essentially a kind of community-based outreach program to do preventative work in the neighborhood supporting families to prevent child abuse and neglect. And it has grown into a primary arm of city government that is providing straight-ahead family preservation and family intervention social work. And in the best sense—but it's no longer outreach. It is intervention, it is—

DEUTSCH: What's the difference?

GUTHRIE: The difference is in the sense of outreach going out, connecting with families, helping them connect with services and make sure they're taken care of, I would say, but it's moved into being highly accountable—

DEUTSCH: Moved into offering those services—

GUTHRIE: Internally and the increasing carrying the weight of child and family services so that they're working more closely together, that there are cases of neglect particularly where the collaboratives are taking those on. They have also taken on case management of formerly homeless families and, you know, there's a much more concerted effort to providing home visits on a regular basis. And intensive case management, you know, family team meetings and family development and it's grown into—because we are a primary arm, we do a subcontract for the South Washington Collaborative, we are essentially doing the work of the collaborative and that will necessitate an expansion to continue on what we think is important in terms of outreach and advocacy as well.

So that program has deepened significantly both in impact and in breadth and then, too, the shelter program by necessity over the years grew to being a—almost a transitional housing program for a period of time where we were shepherding families from homelessness to being prepared to be self-sufficient but with a community where significant community support had been created. Kind of helping them create networks of support so that they could move forward. In many cases, at least with some tools to fall back on and, you know, one of the major things that I have taken away is now my visceral knowledge of the complexity of issues that primarily the families face but the women who—the majority of our families are single female heads of households—and they come to us or we come to them and the complexity of the issues they face is just extraordinary. They're often doing the work of multi generations of their family. They're trying on their own to wrestle with issues of mental health or physical health, recover from trauma in many cases, you know, our statistics mirror national statistics and at least three-quarters of our families wrestle with domestic violence.

And so how do you encourage young mothers to get the support they need to not feel badly about that and, in some cases, to feeling entitled to public support to realizing they have more potential than that and they have great gifts that they could draw on and imagine lives beyond that, uh, small circle of dependency and limitation. And it really has been an incredibly eye-opening experience to the gap between communities in this city of ours. The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute just did an incredible study about the economic gaps and employment gaps in the city and often I am sitting just seeing the gap, I just see it, between the third of people who are living in poverty and those of us in the city who have quite a good, you know, way of living, quality of life. And so that's one of the places that the Group Ministry straddles those worlds and attempts to make connections between those two worlds and increasingly to be a voice for those families and individuals who haven't risen with the recent growth in the economy in D.C. and who are *stuck*, really often stuck. Actually, could we stop for a second?

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

DEUTSCH: This is Stephanie Deutsch talking with Emily Guthrie, Capitol Hill Group Ministry, January 28, 2008.

GUTHRIE: So I guess how I would sort of summarize is that the organization, yes, tries to meet with best practices of social work and family preservation, etc. but we're still holding onto that niche of seeing all of us as children of God or as good people with potential in the community, however you want to phrase it. Whether we're housed or homeless, whether we have a \$100,000 job a year or we're working full-time and still only make, you know, \$17,000 and don't have enough to pay rent and food and gas. Whether we're—oh I'm just laughing—whether we are an 80-year-old senior who owns her own home but refusing to have that help her—that equity help her live her daily life which she's trying to get along with \$256 a month. And just totally disapproves of all these young people who are taking the system on. I mean, it really varies and I guess I would say that part of the reason I've stayed here nine years and that I will really miss this place is seeing the individuals and families who really take on their—look their issues straight in the face, you know. Like the gentleman who lived on the steps of this church for a year who was able to eventually, with our help, with Fran d'Antonious' help as defense attorney, with CAG's [Community Action Group] help for treatment, with pretty much—Mulumba House, which is Catholic Charities, um—

DEUTSCH: He lived on the steps of this church?

GUTHRIE: He lived on the steps of this church and now he makes more than I do. He's a driver. He got his certified driver's license. He got clean. He got his pending charges taken care of and resolved. He was reconnected with his two sons and now is very involved in their lives and working with his mother, with her various issues as you might imagine.

DEUTSCH: He's a driver for who?

GUTHRIE: He drives for DPW [ed: DC Department of Public Works] and occasionally he'll drive his either snow plow truck up here, which now he is very faithful to make sure Fifth Street gets plowed, or his trash truck or the leaf blower around and you can hear it humming, he'll come up and visit.

DEUTSCH: What a wonderful story.

GUTHRIE: Oh, he's extraordinary. Just extraordinary and the lesson there was that I did not believe him when he first told me who he was. I really didn't. And I came to know when he was clean and on his way that, in fact, that had been his story, that it was all true. Some of it was, you know, not true in terms of

what he was saying, but that he had a powerful story and he has a vision which I will continue to be involved in for a place where chronically homeless men can go and find what they need to find out again, rediscover who they are.

So that's extraordinary and then, you know, there are several moms who just stand out in my mind as being able to conquer and just be courageous and reconnect their families and parent. And in one case, I think even getting to know and understanding the moms who can't really quite make it without the community's ongoing support. And so if you have children who we as a community want to see make it, make it either live—literally live—or make it sort of find the education they need or the skills they need to grow up on their own that unfortunately or fortunately we have to wrestle with what it means to provide either permanent supportive housing or permanent support and it's not something we like to admit. We don't want to admit that for some the American Dream isn't possible at all. That there are those who are too ill, too wounded to live in our current society without public support and that just is true and I think coming to grips with that—as our staff wrestles with. You know, we're trying to be empowering and yet—

DEUTSCH: And they're tough. The staff is.

GUTHRIE: They're tough! They're really tough, but then to say at some point, you know what, we've done all we know what to do and still for the sake of these children, this mom, who's trying her best to be a good parent, cannot ever work enough to support the children. Who without support may in fact be a danger to her children and so, in order to keep that family together which is best for the children, everybody agrees, we're going to have to step up—all of us—and provide that support. So it runs the gamut between that person who can do it against all odds, you know, the Michael story of his—that's the American Dream, right? coming from against all odds, to the other side of the coin, which is there are those who we just have to learn. We have to learn what it is to learn from and grow from or grow with—

DEUTSCH: All kinds.

GUTHRIE: Yeah. And perhaps even the most vulnerable individuals in our community still have much to teach us about what it is to be dependent, what it is to receive help, what it is to give help and have it not, ultimately, in some cases make a difference what you do. OK—one more story, which is that one of the most powerful things that happened was that there was a gentleman who was chronically homeless who—did I tell you this story?—who was ill and had a big following, had a big community of guys and was occasionally known as the mayor of H Street because he cruised over there and he cruised over here. But he developed a relationship with Nancy Connolly and Fonda Allen for years. And—

DEUTSCH: Nancy Connolly and Fonda Allen being the social workers over at the—

GUTHRIE: At the social service office.

DEUTSCH: At the social service office, yes.

GUTHRIE: And he became very ill and Fonda and Nancy really helped him navigate that illness when he was willing to get medical help, but in the end, he put Fonda as his next of kin and when he went to hospice to die he, Fonda was his next of kin. And she walked with him through that process and, when he died, Christ Church offered their sanctuary and we had a memorial service for him. And some of the guys from the street came and said things in the sanctuary that probably hadn't been said before but we gave thanks for his life and all that it was and sent him on his way. And there again, valuing his life as part of our community and there was a lot of laughter and a lot of tears in that memorial service. And in fact we had a wait a while to have it happen because there was no next of kin officially and so it took a while to keep the remains.

DEUTSCH: That's a lovely story.

GUTHRIE: It is, it is.

DEUTSCH: Let's get back to you for a minute.

GUTHRIE: [laughs]

DEUTSCH: I know you got married two years ago.

GUTHRIE: I did. A year and a half ago I got married, I now have two wonderful stepchildren. I had to move unfortunately out of the District [laughing] —after 20 years—to Northern Virginia because of those wonderful children and in the past year my father also died. So life is rich personally and, you know, I have to say that part of—I used to laugh and say—when people are in religious communities, say as nuns, and they take a vocational vow to be present to those communities—I sometimes used to laugh and call myself the nun in the neighborhood. Because I didn't have a major relationship [laughing] so I could really focus on my family here on the Hill.

DEUTSCH: [laughing] Right.

GUTHRIE: And so I now have other family obligations and I guess the other thing to mention is that I was ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church in 1999, can you believe that?

DEUTSCH: Wow.

GUTHRIE: And fully anticipating that I would move into a congregation at some point pretty shortly after that but what I found was I had an ongoing ministry here and I had a great deal to learn about the movement of the spirit and my faith and so this was, you know, in some ways the perfect deaconate role for me. I still may be ordained a priest. And that'll—

DEUTSCH: You still may be ordained a priest? Who knows?

GUTHRIE: Who knows. But this has been that role. And I would say this: one of the best things about being in this position is that I get a bird's eye view of all of these congregations and faith communities and sort of what they're up to and the various issues they're wrestling with and all of their outreach. And part of what we have struggled to do and will continue is to somewhat coordinate those outreach efforts. But it's such a privilege to be able to know what the Brethren are doing with their 30 regular members.

DEUTSCH: 30 regular members and they run that soup kitchen?

GUTHRIE: Yes, and they run a soup kitchen that feeds, you know, 100 people a day. To know that Capitol Hill United Methodist Church has—this is on tape—has a wonderful relationship with the bars on Pennsylvania Avenue and has welcomed anybody to come in, regardless and that has come in concert with their outreach to the homeless, that one of the gentleman—they also have a connection to the American Legion because of some congregants and that they are actually—the Tune Inn supported entirely the Christmas dinner this year. The Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner for the homeless. You know, that is—

DEUTSCH: Christmas dinner for the homeless here at this church?

GUTHRIE: Yeah, yeah. To know, you know, just kind of what's cooking at Lincoln Park United Methodist Church, um, to have a sense of Ebenezer having a funeral every week because their membership is, you know, is older and very dedicated to that historic building. To have a connection now, a deep connection, which I've fostered with Calvary Episcopal Church and being aware that there is again an older community there of professional African-American folks who have been—who are retired Howard University professors, who are, you know, have been lawyers and real estate magnates and it's a world that many of us don't know if we are white middle-class, you know—unless you're there you don't see it. So that's a huge privilege and watching Hill Havurah grow from zero to exploding to Shabbat. It's just, it really is a privilege to also be in services and to be asked to speak at St. Paul's AUMP over here at the corner of Fourth and I which is a Pentecostal church on Capitol Hill and.

DEUTSCH: What was the name of the church?

GUTHRIE: St. Paul's AUMP. And if you ask me to name –

DEUTSCH: African United Methodist Pentecostal or?

GUTHRIE: Pentecostal, I think. Joyce would have me.

DEUTSCH: So you were invited to speak there?

GUTHRIE: Oh yeah, I spoke there totally welcomed.

DEUTSCH: What does Mike—I know Michael's a lawyer, but where does he work?

GUTHRIE: He works primarily in Fairfax County and Prince William County, a majority of his cases are court-appointed so one of the things we have in common is the population we have the privilege to work with. So—

DEUTSCH: So he's a court-appointed attorney?

GUTHRIE: Not fully. He's also, he has a sole practice—he's a defense attorney.

DEUTSCH: OK. He seems so nice. He seems too nice to be a—

GUTHRIE: Well, he's also a musician and was a software engineer and game designer for the first part of his entrepreneur—

DEUTSCH: Really? What does he play?

GUTHRIE: He plays guitar, banjo, piano.

DEUTSCH: Ah.

GUTHRIE: But he's only come to law recently, in the last few years.

DEUTSCH: So that's another thing you guys have in common, is sort of—

GUTHRIE: [laughing] Different careers, that's right.

DEUTSCH: Many, many paths.

GUTHRIE: That's right, that's right.

DEUTSCH: And your stepchildren I know are Noah and—

GUTHRIE: Noah's 13 and Jamie, who is 9, little girl.

DEUTSCH: J-A-M-I-E?

GUTHRIE: Uh huh, uh huh.

DEUTSCH: So what's next?

GUTHRIE: What's next? Is the good question. A bit of a break, a little sabbatical to reflect on what comes next and to probably to identify the next community to bring my gifts to and to learn from. And that could be back in another nonprofit setting or it could be in a congregation or something I can't quite imagine yet but all along in my life I have done this. Sort of as you can see, whether in a school community or, you know, a congregation or a nonprofit or, so—that's not a new phenomenon for me, but it'll be a challenge now to do that. But it's wonderful to do that with support at home.

END OF INTERVIEW