Interview with Dallas Read
The Town of Chevy Chase History Project
Interviewed by Stephanie Brown on January 25, 2004

DR: Kathleen Williams has been my next-door neighbor for fifty years now. [Laughs]

SB: Isn't that wonderful?

DR: And she's so bright, you know. I'm not bad, [laughing] except I have no memory, but never mind. I put these notes all over the house.

SB: Your post-it notes.

DR: Oh yes. Then the next morning I tear them all off, then reorganize my day because I've gotten to that age where my memory for the past is very good, but my memory from three weeks ago is fuzzy. So I write everything down, you know. Then I throw them all out.

SB: Well, there you go. It works.

DR: Yeah, it works. But anyway--So, when we came here the pool was already a reality.

SB: The pool in the backyard that you share.

DR: The pool in the backyard was already a reality. It had been dug after prohibition came in. Or before. At any rate, the two men who lived next door decided to celebrate by having a big beer party for all their friends, you know, on the back slope. So they had their beer party. I wasn't here at that time. That was before my time. But they had their party, and it was a wonderful success. And everybody at the party got very enthusiastic, and they among them said, "You know, this place would be perfect if you had a pool. And you could drain right down into the stream," which is right below, "and you could go swimming." So then they said, "well, why not?" So everybody went home and got their shovels, and the next day they came and they dug the beginning of the pool. And there was the hole in the ground, and you can't just leave a hole in the ground sitting there. So the owners got a contractor or somebody to come in, and--Well, I don't know whether I should say line it, but do whatever a contractor does in a situation like that. And pretty soon they had to have the same contractor come in and put cement in it, and whatever contractors do to make a pool.

SB: To make it a usable pool.

DR: To make it a usable pool. And there it was across the party lines. It's been there ever since, you see. So the pool, that's why the pool is owned by two houses. And that pool--it almost came to grief at one stage, because Kathleen got air conditioning and she didn't really need the pool anymore. Because the pool was widely used in summer. We would go down and dip at night, you know. We had wild things on the back of our hill. So—

SB: So at one point she got air conditioning and she didn't need it.

DR: Air conditioning, and didn't need the pool anymore. But I didn't have air conditioning.

SB: So you still needed it?

DR: Well yes, and I like it without air conditioning. We have fans. We have an elaborate series of fans. One up in the attic you know, [laughing] and you turn on the fans. And it's really delightfully cool, and you close this door and it sucks the air up and it cools all—when I say all, I mean there are only three bedrooms, but it cools the rooms. So it works very well. But it caused a little dislocation, however we managed to get through that, Betty and I.

Her original name was Betty and her middle name was Kathleen. But she kept the Kathleen and discarded the Betty. Well, I've done somewhat the same thing. My original name was Helen Dallas, from California. Kathleen was Betty Williams from England, okay. And when I began to be a journalist, which I've been all my life it seems to me. I married—I've been married twice, but my first husband's name was Johnson. I suddenly found I was Helen Johnson, and I thought, "Who is Helen Johnson? I don't know her." So I thought, well I'll just change my first name. So I went downtown and I could change my first name for something like $2.75 [laughing]. It was very simple to change my first name, and I became Dallas Johnson. It was a great idea, because it's a good name for—they may forget everything about me, but they remember it's some city in Texas. [Laughter] No, it really is true.

SB: Oh, of course. It's like being named Stephanie Brown. I mean it's not like being named Stephanie Brown. There are hundreds of us.

DR: Well, yeah. I'm sure. Well, that's what happened to that. Now where was I before I got there?

SB: Now let's see. You moved in, and Kathleen moved in, and you had the pool in the backyard that you shared. You moved in here with your second husband. Is that right? Mr. Read?

DR: Well, Mr. Johnson didn't live here.

SB: Well tell me how you came to be in Washington. You were from California. Where in California?

DR: Well I was from a little town. A little, tiny town called Coalinga, which had a population of five thousand. It was right out in the middle of the desert. There is a desert in the middle of California near Fresno and Bakersfield in the San Joaquin Valley.

SB: On the way to Sequoia and Kings Canyon.

DR: Right. Right. Sequoia was well known to us. Right. And lots of people say "Sequoia? What's the west side like?" and so forth.

SB: Where did you go to school?

DR: Well I went to—first of all, I was born in Los Angeles. I went there to be born. I was one of those early cesarean babies. They couldn't do it in Coalinga, so I was born in Los Angeles. Later in life I went to Los Angeles Junior College. California has a wonderful system, you know. You could go two years, and you could just graduate. You could either become a college-aimed person, or you could finish your college profession, or whatever it was, in journalism after two years. And I went from Los Angeles Junior College to Oxnell College, which of course is a very good college. Although it was more limited then. It had--religion and English were its two big subjects. But it was a good college, and it had all the right people going there, [laughs] from Pasadena and Glendale, and so forth and so on, you see. Whereas Los Angeles Junior College was of course very mixed already. [Laughs] I mean not a lot of Negroes for example there, but enough so they were a presence on the campus, you know.

SB: This was in the 1920s? Or the 1930s?

DR: And in the 1920s. I always have to remember that. When was it? It was before '29.

SB: Before the crash?

DR: Yeah. Before the crash, or about that time. Anyway, it was about that period of time. And then I went to Occidental College, which had good ratings even then.

And then I got a job, in the depression, which is terribly exciting you know, because nobody got a job in the depression. I remember going to—my mother sent me to San Francisco, where she had a twin sister who was active in women's clubs and so forth, to look for a job. You couldn't look for a job in Coalinga. [Laughs] There weren't any jobs there, or even in Los Angeles. Anyway, I went and I applied—oh, I know. I applied for a job on the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I wanted to because it was not a Hearst paper. The other paper was a Hearst paper, and my father was an avowed enemy of William Randolph Hearst. You would have thought that my father, in a little town of Coalinga, who was a civic leader up to here you know. But never mind. He was very much against Hearst. So I couldn't of course get a job with a Hearst paper. But I didn't know how to apply for a job. So, I went to the Hearst paper to practice. [Laughs]

SB: [Laughing] To practice your interview?

DR: [Laughing] To practice, yes. And when I got there I didn't know what to say. So I said to the office boy, "I guess I really wanted to apply for a job, but I guess that isn't your department." He said, "Oh, yes it is." I said, "It is?" Well it seems that he was a man who took all the bets from the newspaper reporters. You know, he was really central. Everybody knew Joe. And he helped to run the paper from his desk. He said, "Well, maybe I can give you a hand." I said, "Oh, I wish you would. I'm just eager to—" [Laughs] So he said, "I'll go talk to Miss Whitmeyer. She runs the women's department." Of course at that time, they wouldn't have thought of hiring a woman to be a reporter. She could be a fashion editor, or a food editor, or whatever, you know. So he went in and chatted with Miss Whitmeyer, who happened to be a cousin of William Randolph Hearst, and he came out with a job. And there I had a job when I was only practicing. [Laughs] But I had it. And I didn't turn it down in the depression you know. So I went to work for *The Examiner*. I didn't tell my father for a long time. [Laughing] I just said I had a job at a newspaper. I was afraid to. Because he so disliked William Randolph Hearst so much, you know. I was stuck with the job, so I just went ahead and in due time I explained to him what happened. [Laughing]

SB: What did he say?

DR: Well he said that was the right thing to do during a depression. [Laughs] No one was getting a job, you know. Terrible.

SB: Of course. And you couldn't have been more than twenty-one or twenty two.

DR: Exactly. I was twenty-one.

SB: And you were handed a job.

DR: Not like that, no. [Laughs] So I stayed there at *The Examiner* for about, I guess two years. But I wanted really to—my secret ambition of course like all young journalists—was to work on *The New York Times.* That's what I thought. So, I kept thinking toward that and then I discovered Columbia School of Journalism, which was--for that time, offering a master's degree, it was the first year that it did that. It had formerly just offered an undergraduate degree. But this was now a two year program you could get a master's. I wasn't really after the master's necessarily, but I wanted to get to New York. And they had very low tuition. Oh, when I think of what people pay now. [Laughs] And they had lots of little scholarships. I know I—what I did, I waited on tables, I think, for my meals, or something like that. Well that was fine. And I was there—

SB: So you took the train across the country?

DR: Well, no. [Laughs] It was too expensive.

SB: So how did you get across?

DR: Well, I just—I didn't hitchhike, but it almost came—Whenever I would go anyplace I would ask anybody if they knew anybody [laughing] who was driving to New York City, you know. [Laughing] And pretty soon I found someone who was driving to New York City.

SB: [Laughing] So you just asked around San Francisco?

DR: I just dropped the information, you know. And so pretty soon, [laughing] I caught a fish in my net. And he was—he was a good one to catch because he was going to New York City because he wanted to see his girlfriend who was there. So that was fine. And I signed on with him. But I didn't tell my mother and father that I was just going with one man. That might have been too hard to explain, you know.

SB: Especially after *The Examiner*.

DR: So I made up a second one who joined us. I was going with someone, and he had a friend who possibly would be going to. But I made this—I spread this very thin. [Laughing] And the friend stayed with us the entire trip. [Laughing] And the entire trip of course was very, very—you know, Norton—it was a fine trip

excepting at the very end. I was driving and I slid off the road, and I slid into a patch of poison ivy. How I managed to—then we both had to crawl out through this poison ivy. We were only about three or four days away from New York. When I got there I was covered with poison ivy. [Laughing] The man who took me was covered it with too, I might say. So I went directly to the infirmary [laughing].

SB: At Columbia?

DR: At Columbia, yes. [Laughing] For treatment of poison ivy. And the managed to get rid of this. And then I looked for a job. I answered an ad in the paper for a department store. Because I could only work on weekends, you see. So, I answered this ad in the department store, but I got in the wrong line. There were, oh hundreds of people were in that line. And I was at the end of it because I was always late at that time, you know. Well of course you don't know, but I was always doing something else on the way. And the line turned around and I was at the beginning of the line. [Unclear, laughing and talking at same time.] Instead of coming back late in the afternoon, I came back early the next morning, you know. So you see, they turned the line around. It was very helpful because I was the first in line.

SB: Because you were the first. And what did it turn out to be?

DR: It was a department store, some kind of department store. Where you had to punch a time clock, you know, which I did obediently. But I only worked there for a little short time because I found out in the meantime that the *New York Times*—because I'd applied there too. And you know, you have to laugh at the absolute innocence [laughs], and I'm awfully glad I was awfully innocent, because it helped. It helped to no end. [Laughing] People felt a little sorry for me, you know as I wandered around discovering all these lovely things. So—because I had gone to the *New York Times* of course, and talked to the office boy there. But he wasn't like the one in San Francisco. He had no power. But at least he managed to tell me he didn't know of any jobs like that, except the religious editor. Her name was Rachel McDowell. Oh, and it had to be a weekend obviously. She wrote the Sunday column on churches. My father--You know, I came from a non-religious family entirely—who himself made a statement very shortly before he died. My dad, he said, "Well, if there is a God, I'll meet him on

the record." [Laughs] And he meant it. You know, he hadn't gone to church himself, but he was a very civic minded man. He'd done all this good, so "I'll meet him on the record." [Laughing] I thought, "Well—" If it's alright, I'll do that too. So, Rachel McDowell, a funny little lady. They paid three dollars I think it was, for covering a sermon. Very cheap. But also you really didn't have to cover them because they didn't—they never said anything. I got one story when the plate, for passing the—getting money, was robbed. Oh, I was so excited! I reported to both *The New York Times* and *The Herald Tribune*, and it got in both. Then I always thought, "Oh dear me, I shouldn't have done that." But anyway, it made a little tiny mention or so. But that was a good job, and it got me in the papers. I found other departments of *The New York Times*. Sunday is travel, food—*The New York Times* did not bow to popular requests for cooking food. No, no, no, no. They called it a food economics column. And the big news was about scallops. My first information that—I didn't know what a scallop was. I was—I was not prepared for any of these jobs. [Laughing] So I first of all had to find out what a scallop was. Scallops were coming in from, I don't know. Boston? Wherever. I don't know where they came from then. But that was the kind of column it was, you know. If I were a woman cook, I wouldn't have read it, you know. But I wasn't a woman cook either [chuckling], so I seized these little pieces of information. Then I got into another part of the department. They also took travel stories. Took care of travel and recreation, you know. It all went into the Sunday section of *The New York Times* and was usually done by people on the list who were really working freelance. They paid you by the inch, or something like that, you know. And I was there for a couple of years. I lived in New York. I lived down in the village with--other people from Columbia School of Journalism, you see, that had graduated. So I had friends. I wasn't alone at all.

SB: This was in '35? 36?

DR: Yeah. '35? '36, exactly. My goodness, you're smart. [Laughs] And I saved my money. Because of course what I wanted to —and I began to do travel stories. I wanted to go to Europe. So I saved my money carefully, and put it away. I had five hundred—I finally had five hundred dollars saved, and then I was going to go to Europe. So then I went around to see if I could find some way of going to Europe, you know. Now I—No, I didn't. I went around to get a free map. That's

what I—I found a—I didn't have an up-to-date map of Europe. And how could I say where I was going when I didn't have an up-to-date map—well you remember things were changing very rapidly at the time.

SB: Yes, that's right. Boundaries were moving.

DR: Oh, what a marvelous memory you have. I would have forgotten it.

SB: I have a degree in history. It's what I know about. [Chuckles] There are a lot of things I don't know about.

DR: Well believe me, there are many times I wish I'd taken my degree in history and not in English, you know.

SB: But English is a useful thing too.

DR: I know, but you know you can learn it on your own more or less. I mean if you work at it. If you write, you pretty—

SB: If you write and you read. So you were going to—you needed a map. You needed an up-to-date-map.

DR: Alright. So I went to drop the German travel office to get a map because I was going to Germany. Now why was I going to Germany? Oh, that's where the news was. Remember? A jaunt [laughing] following the news to Germany. Anyway, they gave me a map and a whole lot of other literature, and—I can't remember how I found some of these things out. But I did know that I also could—how did I know that I could get—I can't remember. [Laughs] You pick up these things, you know. Well, I had to get to Europe and—I just can't remember how I discovered it, but I did discover that you could get passage on a boat to Hamburg for very little if you had some kind of travel connection. Well here you see I was a travel writer [chuckling] for *The New York Times*. So, I got my passage.

SB: As a journalist.

DR: Now I can't remember, but anyway I did my passage. I guess I knew people in San Francisco by that time who knew people in Hamburg. And they welcomed me. They wanted me to come, because they had a family, and the woman in Hamburg was from San Francisco. So they just took me in. And from then on, you know, I wanted to go down to Austria of course, and the center of where all these things were happening. And they had a son, and he was going on a trip with his friend. His friend was a fascist, a nazi, but he wasn't. So I went with them. But they spoke only German, and I thought they were—you know you are very

isolated when you don't know anything about the language. I always thought they were talking about me, you see. You get very paranoid. [Laughing] I didn't know why I thought they were, but I couldn't say anything. So I went to Austria, as far as Austria with them. And anyway, from then on—oh, I learned a wonderful thing is if I would go into any *New York Times* office, and they were all over, and just say what I was doing, they would always—I was a pretty young girl—and they would ask me to lunch. Somebody would. So I ate my way across [laughing] through the *New York Times* offices. I wasn't sure, because you're not supposed to take advantage of *New York Times*, of your affinity with them with anything. [Laughing] I certainly ate good. [Laughter] And also, so many funny things happened looking back. They weren't funny then, you know. But it makes for a happy old age. [Laughing] I can lay awake at night and think of the look on my face when—I must have been talking to the man who covered Italy for *The New York Times*. What was his name? Not Brishell. Well I must have been talking to him. Anyway, he said to me, "I'm going back. I'm going home to *The New York Times* tomorrow. Anything I can do for you? I'll be back in about two weeks." And you know what I said? [Laughing] I said, "Oh, you could get me some stockings." You remember at that time, stockings were—and I was down to my last runny pair, you know. I'd been wearing them constantly. And he said, "Oh, well that ought to be simple." Of course neither one of us thought what it would like when Arnoldo Corteze himself, when he went back to *The New York Times* [laughing] and his mission was to get stockings for Dallas, for Helen Dallas. [Laughing] I don't know what they thought, but he and I were absolutely innocent. [Laughing] He brought me back my stockings. Mission accomplished. [Laughing]

SB: So how long were you in Europe?

HD: I was there, probably about four months. Something like that. And I went from—You know you could get one of those wonderful passports. All kinds of passports where you could get on the train in one location and go to another. I learned about that quickly too. [Chuckles] It was a really exciting trip. And Germany of course was right at that time when Hitler was taking over Austria, and—it was—things were—and you as a young woman, I was only bothered by this once or twice when—well for example, the Germans, all of them are very tidy people.

They pick up their parks. They do what they're supposed to do. Which is probably one of the reasons Hitler was able to take them over. They're so used to obeying what they're supposed to do. Anyway, the trip was very successful. And then I came back, and I went on working for *The Times* for a year or so. But in the meantime—this meant that you worked in the women's department. There was no other place to work. But there was a woman who was the only woman executive besides—there was one who was very well known. I can't remember her name, but she was a model for all of us because she covered big things, you know. You don't know, but she did. [Chuckles] But the lady was the education director. Well, she just got into education when no one else wanted to pick it up. And she was very smart, and she kept going on, and pretty soon she was the education editor. And she looked down—and she was my friend. She was sort of a feminist in a way I remember. I didn't know what a feminist was at that time. [Chuckles] But at any rate, she said, "You know, you ought to get off *The Times*. There's no future for you here. They just don't give women jobs. That's all And I happen to be here because, you know, it went that way." And she arranged for me to go to Columbia, Missouri. Now I know nothing about the Midwest—to teach classes as a college called Stevens College. Stevens College was really a kind of a prep school. A finishing school they called it.

SB: Was it a woman's college, or was it--?

DR: Woman's. Woman's college, yeah. But there was a man's college in—A general big college in the same town. A collegiate town. But I was there for about a year. I didn't like it there at all because I had to eat with the girls. [Laughs] Well it was very sensible on there part.

SB: But not much fun.

DR: Not much fun. It inhibited me. But I met some very smart girls there, too. I'm glad I—it was a good experience for me. I was rather intolerant of it, you know. But sometimes I think I was in love with someone in New York at the time. So I spent a great deal [laughing] of time in New York

SB: So you were there. This is in the late '30s now.

DR: I was there a year or two. I think maybe a full year, maybe two. I don't remember. And then—

SB: It was almost the war.

RD: It was almost the war, wasn't it? Oh, I know what it was. I got interested in the Spanish war. And at the end of the Spanish war—I don't know how I—oh, I'm so fuzzy these days. I'll sleep on them. I'll get it all straightened by tomorrow morning, but it isn't all straight now. [Chuckles] I went to Mexico. I know why I went to Mexico. It was because the Mexican government was the only government that had a welcome out for Spanish war veterans. They encouraged them to come back to Mexico. Did you know that?

SB: I didn't know that.

DR: Well they did, and so they were all coming, you see. And so I went down to welcome them. [Laughs] Well I thought this is kind of exciting, you know. And down there, of course, I met a lot of return veterans. And a lot people from Hollywood got into this and went to Mexico too. Was a great invasion of Mexico by people who were sympathetic to the Spanish War. And in that trip to Mexico I met my first husband who had been in the Spanish War. And you know, it was interesting that in Britain the young men of that time, lots of them were going over to fight the Spanish War. I mean you met a very good class [laughing] of English usually because all of those that could afford to go joined up. And that's where I met Michael.

SB: And he was British? He was English?

DR: He was English, yes. He was English, and a very nice guy, you know. But of course another thing, I was from a little town. I didn't know what private schools were. I know I resented that job on *The San Francisco Examiner* because they paid attention to whether people had gone to Princeton. Why would anybody want to go to Princeton you know, I thought. I was convinced that people sent their children to private school when they couldn't control them. They put them in a private school when they couldn't control them. I did. I know it's a terrible thing, but it's true. [Chuckling] But I kept that feeling for a long time. I went to Columbia School of Journalism. And if you think I would go out with those boys that just went to Princeton. Princeton! What was that? [Laughing] I was a true small

d-democrat from the beginning. It has made for a funny life. But I mean I'm glad it was that way now. I can look back and laugh so hard at some of the things I did, you know. I was convinced—

SB: You had no time--

DR: No siree. I wasn't going to—

SB: For those Ivy Leaguers.

DR: No. I wasn't going to desert the public schools. The public school system was my background and I've gotten quite a long ways. Of course you have a good background having been a history major. And how often I wished I'd been a history major. But I wasn't. Yeah, I had to pick that up as I went along.

SB: So you went to Mexico and you met your first husband.

DR: Right. And when he came back to—When we came back to this country—Oh, and he had come out of the Spanish War--he had a military father, and a mother who had inherited a lot of diamond money from South Africa, as I remember. His mother was interested in music and dance, and art and all kinds of things. He was well-educated. And I might say he helped to educate me, you know. It was a real rich period in my life.

SB: Did you go to New York when you came back? Did you come to Washington?

DR: No, I went back to New York. I went to *The New York Times* and my little, you know my travel articles and so forth and so on. [Chuckles] And you know, just to show you what—Lester Markel was a very famous editor of *The Sunday Times*. I met him sometime years later at some kind of a reunion. I've forgotten what it was. And I said, "Well you probably don't remember me, but I was Helen Dallas." And he said, "When you were at *The Times* how far up did you get?" He meant how far up in the magazine was one of my articles printed. You know, in *The New York Times* magazine.

SB: How close to the front.

DR: And I said, "Oh, well I think—" Well I knew! On page 19!

SB: Because it mattered.

DR: I knew it mattered. And he said, "Well it must have been a very thin issue." [Laughs] That's how he remembered me. Of course he didn't ever deal with me. He had an assistant named Charles Schwartz who took the articles you see, and so forth and so on. I was there—and they had a big room for all the people who worked on *The Sunday Times* and you had a desk. So I even had an address on *The New York Times*. [Chuckling] It was a very small desk, but it seemed very big to me. It was my office. Excepting that while I was there, I took the elevator to the

wrong floor one day and got off. And here was this whole empty floor. You know, just empty with lots of desks, but I mean no people. And so I said, "Who lives here," you know. Well, *Current History* was a magazine that *The New York Time*s used to put out at one time. *Current History.* But then they'd abandoned *Current History* and they'd left the desks, you see. Just the people went. And so I said, "Are these desks occupied?" and they said, "No." I guess I didn't have a desk at that time. I said, "Well, I've been writing food material downstairs." So I just adopted the title of the Food Editor of *The New York Times*. Just for the telephone operators, you know so they'd send all calls on food to me. It wasn't an official adoption, or anything like that. So I sat in a huge office, with all these desks [laughing]—

SB: No one on the floor. Just you.

DR: [Laughing] Elevator operators knew me. That was about all. And that was my office. It was bigger than anybody else's office at *The New York Times*. [Laughing]

SB: You had the whole floor.

DR: The whole floor. [Laughs] And I was there for about a year, a year and a half. I don't know how long. But it was quite—and it was a good time for me to be there, you know.

SB: The war must have just—the war broke out in Europe. So where were you during the war?

DR: Well Michael, whom I'd met in Mexico and married--

SB: You married down there?

DR: I married up here. I married in Ocean City, as I remember. Justice of the Peace. [Chuckles] But Michael went back to the RCA, and then he had to join—he couldn't get out of this country, because by that time they'd put constriction in. The only way—when he went across the border he had to be joining something. So he joined the RCAF, the Royal Canadian Air Force. So for about a year, I went to Canada and lived in these various places where they were training people. Soldiers, you know. Kind of in the—most of it was in Quebec. And I remember how shocked I was at the state of Quebec, because Quebec was very backward. You know the school system was entirely in the church's hands. And no one had books in their homes. They might have something else [laughing] but no books at

all. I remember how I felt about the school system. You know, nobody knew anything. But I'd learned to know a lot about Canada just from going to these various camps, you know. Living in someone's upstairs rental room, or something like that.

SB: So you were with your husband? Were you able to stay together, or did you--?

DR: No, no. Well I went where he went. And it was always easy to find a room. So that's what I did. And I spent a lot of—I think got as far west as Vancouver I remember. So my memory tracks—[chuckling].

SB: You covered Canada.

DR: Yeah. Well, that's where he went you see, so I went and joined him.

SB: Were you working?

DR: I always found a job as—well no. Only at times I could work. When we got as far as British Columbia, where he was stationed for quite a while, I got a job at the University of British Columbia correcting papers. You know you can always get—there's always a professor who needs this, so--[laughing]. So that wasn't hard. I got a job. So, I was in British Columbia for, oh I'm sure, probably a year. And in the meantime Mike had—what had happened, Mike came out—it's very interesting his—well it was to me at the time, because I couldn't believe it. Here he was very well educated. I know because I had—you know, he had already read the books. He would get a list of books to read, and he would say, "Well I don't know which. I've read them all." And he wasn't bragging. He was just saying that this was a problem. So I said, "Well pick the one you like the best, and do that." Well, you know. Because I really was married to a man who was quite insecure. He had this excellent education, but he had been told what to do by the military ever since he—so when there was no one there to tell him what to do, he didn't do. So in the end, I think Michael bought a [unclear]. He knew how to navigate from the Air Force, and he knew how to sail a boat because he had gotten one out of the Spanish War. He'd been left some money by his mother, I think, and he bought a catch. A fifty foot sailing catch. And he took a lot of his friends from the Spanish Civil War, [laughing] and they went exploring across the ocean. It was a beautiful boat, you know.

SB: Across the Atlantic. Is that how he got to Mexico?

DR: Right. And through the Canal Zone you see, and up the other side. I wasn't with him on that.

SB: It was before—

DR: That was before we were married. [Chuckles] But it was a lovely boat. I remember it had mahogany inside, and all kinds of things. I think it had been used in one of those polar explorations by somebody where they really had a beautiful boat. I saw it in Mexico of course, because by that time—that's where I met him. Got to know him—

SB: So you were in British Columbia for about a year, and that was '42 maybe? '43?

DR: Yeah. After the war, in British Columbia and probably everywhere, anybody could get into a college. As long as you'd graduated from high school, there was no problem about getting in.

SB: You were in British Columbia after the war when people could get into colleges.

DR: And I got a job correcting papers. And Michael then couldn't decide—well he really couldn't make decision about what to do. Which is—you know I make my decisions before I was married. I make my decisions very fast about what to do. But I didn't want to be bossy, so I didn't think I should make decisions for him. And later on he told me, "Well of course I thought you'd handle all these things and you didn't give me any help at all." [Chuckles] And I said, "Well I didn't. I didn't want usurp your territory, you know." Where he really wanted me to, but—

SB: But you didn't, huh?

DR: No, I didn't do that. And that was a long time where we lived with that. He finally bought a fishing boat. He did. Michael. Because—I don't know quite why. But he—well he was used to boats I guess. He bought a fishing boat. And so then I fished with him for about—well through one season. Let's say from January to the next January. And I was on the boat, and it was—that was a fantastic experience because you had to cook on the boat. And we had a dog that we'd taken along named Pedro. Pedro our dog. [Laughs] We went to all the fishing ports where when you caught fish, you unloaded it. And I went through the whole series of going into these places with Mike, who really didn't know what he was doing. I mean he'd never had that as part of his training, and neither did I of course. And we had a Ford engine to get started, which was constantly breaking down. There we were headed for the cliffs or something like that, and the engine

would stall. [Laughs] I thought, "Well I can swim." [Laughter] And we had the dog Pedro. And I became known as a—well, we'd go into these little towns you know. Whatever we found we'd dock. And I remember the first time we docked. Well, salmon are a lively fish, but we weren't very lively. And we would drop the—the anchor had something to do with slowing the boat, and it—that was as you were coming into the harbor, which meant that your hooks would only catch bottom fish. And bottom fish are flukes, starfish, [laughing] and I remember coming into these—first time we came into a port we were loaded with starfish and flukes, and so on and so on. [Laughs] and the other fishermen were looking askance at these incompetents. Well we got a little more competent but not really very much. Not much. Not much. But I did get very competent about going into the village shopping. And you know, one thing you could get beautiful strawberries. Beautiful fresh food of all kinds. And I had an ice cream freezer. And the one thing you have on a fish boat is plenty of ice.

SB: And I bet you had salt too for the—did you use rock salt to freeze the ice cream?

DR: Yeah. You had all the makings of it. So I became known as the—[laughing] "Well go over to the Johnsons. They have pretty good food over there." With my ice cream freezer, you know. Well, who has an ice cream freezer? Well, we had one, and plenty of ice. And Mike had plenty of time to do this to turn the crank, you know. Oh it was a—I kept noticing that trip was very funny too. It was also a—you know I learned a lot. I also didn't learn a lot. I mean I'm not that bright you know. [Laughing] I picked up a lot about how to get along.

SB: So the war was over. It must have been '47? '46, '47 by then?

DR: It was about, yeah.

SB: Now you moved into this house in the early '50s. So how did you get from a fishing boat to the Town of Chevy Chase.

DR: Oh, I decided that I—Mike was a lovely man, but I felt that I couldn't—I mean I was unprotected in terms of my career. I wasn't ambitious, except that I had nothing to do that I was interested in. That was a handicap. After he bought the fishing boat, I decided that—my mother was teaching school in California in the depression, in a place called Muscle Slew. [Laughs] Muscle Slew. But she had been an old teacher from that part of California. And it was the depression. And her friends of course, from Muscle Slew, got her the job. You didn't get a job

easy at all. So there was mother in Muscle Slew, and she was having—she needed help, because as a new teacher—this doesn't hang together, but it does enough in my mind at this point. She had—it had to do with melon season. This was that part of California where you got melons and so on and so forth. So her children were children of foreign people, and mother was very good with them. She was a very good teacher. Well she was a warm-hearted person to begin with, you know. That helps, [chuckling] because they needed love among other things. So I said I would go down and help mother. I was with Michael, but I just thought, "I've got to get out of this. I've got to get somewhere where I can touch a typewriter again without having to go overboard, or something like that. So I went down to visit mother. And she needed help. As the new teacher on the block I discovered that too. Anybody new, they would say to the other teachers, of the fourth grade let's say, "You can each get rid of ten." Well you know what ten I got. [Laughs] And I knew nothing about teaching. I'd gone to teacher's college at Columbia University nighttime for a while because I didn't trust the journalist profession to get me through the depression. I thought, you know I have to have something like Muscle Slew to put my hands on. So, when I went to visit mother it was really to escape, to have some time for thought. And mother, as I say, certainly needed help. Now I remember when I—so I became the new teacher on the block, and everybody got rid of ten. [Laughs]

SB: Their ten worst. [Chuckles] The ten they didn't want.

DR: Oh, I know. Poor, little—so anyway, I did it but I remember the funny mistakes I made. The first day I was in class a little boy said, "Can I sharpen my pencil?" And I said, "Of course you can. Now look, let's not worry about questions like that, whenever you want to sharpen your pencil do it quietly, but go to the pencil sharpener." And the entire class got up and [laughing] went to the pencil sharpener. [Laughing] Well, I was overcome by this you know. Also, having been an only child, and quite protectively raised, I didn't know any dirty words. I didn't know any jokes. I didn't have any brothers. And here I had this class, and I suddenly saw everybody tittering. And the little thing was going around the class. I could see this little note being passed and passed around. So I plucked it out of the air. I said, "Now I don't know what good information this has on it, but this is what I just took out of the air." And it said, "Shit and Fuck." Well I wasn't quite

sure what shit and fuck meant [laughing] but I knew that this had bad connotations. [Laughing] So I said, "Alright now. Now we're just going to talk about these words." These were Anglo-Saxon words. I knew enough history to know that they brought it over from England, France—so I explained what the words were. They were brought by people who were unfriendly, and they weren't bad words. I said, "Is there anybody in this class that doesn't shit everyday?" [Laughter] Well just raise your hand if you don't. Well of course they all went home and told mother what their teacher said. And the next day my mother said, "well, you might have thought that was very clever," my mother said, "but you probably got us both fired!" I said, "why?" [Laughter] Well it was a liberal education I must say. I don't know how I could have been so innocent. Really that's what it was. But I was. [Laughs] And then as I grew older I realized I was very glad I had been so innocent. It had got me out of a lot of scrapes before I ever got in, you know. I always think of the funny story of going from *The New York Times* to interview to do a little tiny real estate story. And I went to see this man, and I talked to him and he said, "Well, it's about time for lunch. Would you like to have lunch with me?" I said, "Oh yes. I always want to eat with anybody." [Laughs] And I kept talking about—he said, "what are you doing?" I said, "I'm seeing New York." And he said, "Well, I'd like to show you New York." Well, I didn't know what he had meant. [Laughs] I thought that was fine. By the time we're halfway through the lunch, he decided he didn't want to go to the Statue of Liberty, and he didn't want to go around the island in a boat, and he didn't want to go to Coney Island. So he gradually disengaged himself from any sightseeing venture.

SB: I guess his plans weren't the same as yours.

DR: No. His plans were not the same as mine at all. His were unsuitable. [Laughing] Well, I learned a lot.

SB: How did you get here?

DR: I'm just trying to think how I got here. Well, of course I met Nick somewhere along the line here, you see.

SB: You were divorced from—?

DR: Well, right. After I went to visit my mother and so forth, Michael did a very nice thing for me. I mean, he was out there—I had come to Washington for a job of some kind, and Mike was in his fishing boat.

SB: In the Pacific Northwest?

DR: Right. British Columbia. And I felt—I really felt as though I had been a failure, because in our family no one ever got divorced. That was something. You might as well--

SB: It was a big deal.

DR: You know, so I felt that I had failed him. I felt terrible about it. I couldn't possibly have said I think we should be—well, I couldn't even think. I didn't think we should be divorced. I felt that I'd made some mistake. That something was wrong with me. And it was actually Michael who wrote to me after the separation had gone on for quite along—and I'd gotten another job in Washington. A good job in Washington that I loved. Head of Information for the National Cancer Institute. And I didn't know anything about cancer, but I knew a lot about how to make things work. You know, in journalism. And that was an exciting job. And I'd put together a book while I was on that job. Challenged science against cancer. And I was very interested in graphic arts. And the book was selected as—the only two books that I wrote along about that time—as one of the fifty best books of the year. Now they meant graphic arts. And they're beautiful books. They really were. Because one of the people I'd met in college had gone on to become one of the great book designers of the country. And so I sent it to Ward to design. I said, "Would you--?" And here was, by this time Ward was so important that he was designing books for a thousand dollars, or something like that. So he designed the book, and I said, "Ward, this is a wonderful design, but I can't use it." All it is is a book about Jenny Reed. You can see it I can give you a copy of it. It's a lovely book. Maybe it's here. It is. Because I was using it for something else. But it really is a beautiful book. But of course Ward designed it for me. But when he sent me the design. I said, "Ward, I hate to tell you this but you know I can't use this design." He said, "Why?" [Laughs] You're getting it for nothing. He didn't say it, but he could have. I said, "Well Ward, it has Jenny's drawings in it, and she has long slender drawings." She was very influenced by El Greco at that time. And so I said, "I can't just put one long slender drawing in the middle of the page.

It makes it difficult." We couldn't waste a whole page on that one little slender drawing. Well you see as you go through that they're long and slender. I said, "Couldn't you shift them around, or--?" He said, "I'll redesign it, Dallas." So he did. He did a second one. [Chuckles] And this was his second, his new design, but it was really to solve my other problem about what to do with the illustrations. And you'll see as you go through it, because it has a lot of them. But they were long, and we put them together.

SB: The design is wonderful. The design works.

DR: Anyway, it's a lovely book. And I'll give you a copy, because I have--In the inn, the person who—Antioch College, where Jenny went, took on the job of—they had printing presses in North Carolina, at another friend's school, and they took on the job of—at this friend's school, at this press—of printing the book. And at that, I met a young man named John Morgan. Gee, it's been so long since I've thought of these names. John Morgan, and he was related to the Morgan who designed TVA. Arthur? Was it Arthur Morgan? Anyway, he had come from that family, and he was a protectionist. And so he had--many of these pictures that I have in it were almost not reproducible, but he worked with them and he did a beautiful job, you know. I still correspond with John Morgan. I know what he's done with his life. But he was responsible for taking this design of Wards, and taking the pictures that I had, and putting it together.

SB: Well I'd like to look at it now.

DR: There's an extra copy of it right over there. I'll tell you why. Remember to get it as you go out.

SB: So, you know I'll think I'll have to come back and talk about Chevy Chase.

DR: [Laughs] I'm sorry.

SB: No. I wanted to know all about this. I think it's—I think that if we just came in and talked about Chevy Chase, then we wouldn't know who you were. And it will mean so much more to know who you are.

DR: Well I'll tell you what I did, because I was trying to prepare you for the fact that I was not going to fill out that questionnaire. I couldn't do it. I tried and I just fell apart. I'm having great problems with my own book right now. I'm going to win because I'm determined to win, but it's a really rough right now. And I should be

spending my time writing the missing part. We don't really have a complete manuscript.

SB: What's the book about?

DR: [Laughs] Well. Quickly, quickly.

SB: I know that's the hard part.

DR: No. Well the book—Nick, my husband's mother, or all southerners are would-be historians.

SB: I'm a southerner.

DR: Well you come by it naturally, I must say. [Chuckles] They are. You know. I know that because in researching various things I would call on a person I never heard of, excepting that he lived in that town. And someone else had lived in that town. And out of the blue, you know, "This is Dallas Reed, and I'm writing a book. Do you know anything about the family of--?" "Why yes." But had the same last name, so that's why I sought him out. "Oh you do?" "Sure" "Yeah, I have all his papers." And then he would send me this stuff that you can find in the Library of Congress, and at the public library in Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham is of course known as the racist, the most racist of the towns down there because of Bull Conner and all of that. But they had a great public library run by two men, one of who I know very well. I just love him. He's so wonderful. He's an old man of course by now. [Chuckles] He was even older than I. But the library, I found I could get things back faster from the Birmingham Library than from the Library of Congress. You know, you just wrote a letter and they'd send it right down. [Chuckling]

SB: And you were the only one writing to Birmingham.

DR: [Laughing, sentence unclear] So that was—well, that took a bit of time, but it was great. It was great. And I love that. I just love him, the man who is head of the Birmingham Public Library. He was the one who made that great collection possible. He and his boss, they just stayed in Birmingham and did their job well. You know, he didn't regard that as anything unusual. Anyway, he was a great find in my late life.

SB: Now tell me what your book is about?

DR: Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot about the question. Well, I inherited from Jenny Reed, Nick's mother, who was an amateur historian too. She was a very bright woman.

She was very well read, and she had a marvelous library. And she saved letters. She must have stolen some of them. The letters she had were—well I found, you know, one secret love affair that went on for a hundred years. Well, no. Fifty years. A murder, and people accused of doing it just because they were black, you know. I mean there was everything in those. These two sisters, from the time they grew up and then were separated, wrote a letter a week, each one to the other. Everything.

SB: So it was a full chronicle.

DR: Full chronicle. And the one, Nick's mother, kept a lot of letters she didn't send. Maybe she stole them. [Chuckles] Who knows. But she had them, and I found them all true. And this went all the way through their bringing up my husband who was sent north to school so he would have some education not from Montgomery, Alabama. A school called Kent School, which has become quite a good school. But it was good then. It was strict.

SB: But it was a private school.

DR: It was founded by the church.

SB: Is it a Quaker?

DR: Episcopalian. And Father Sill, that was his name, he was the head of it. And he was a very strict person, and he also in addition to —for example, all the students had jobs. I mean it wasn't for money. It was the fact that you needed discipline. And my husband was very slow. [Chuckling] So, they called him Speed Reed, because he took so long to do everything, and he was always late as a young boy. [Chuckling] He didn't turn out to be that way, but Father Sill no doubt put his stripes on him you know.

SB: So you're editing these--?

DR: I have edited them, and I've turned out the manuscript. And what I'm faced with—I got the manuscript out, and I even got a grant from a foundation because one of the people, who happened to be my husband's best friend, but also he's a brilliant documentary film-maker. He's well-known. He's done marvelous things. He headed the department at New York University. I called his sister here in Washington, and said, "Can you tell me when George is--" George Stony his name is, "is he coming down from New York, because I want to see him about a book I'm writing." She said, "Dallas, you can't very well see him. He's in a

hospital off the coast of Ireland." And I said, "What's the matter?" And she said, "He doesn't have anything to read. He's got to read. He has to stay in bed. He has to be withdrawn for—" let's say three weeks. "Absolute quiet. And the hospital is off a little island on the coast of Ireland, and it doesn't have a book!" I said, "Oh he doesn't? Well I can take care of that," I said. [Chuckles] Because normally someone like George would only be reading books about the area in which he was researching, but there he was with nothing to read.

SB: He's trapped.

DR: [Chuckles] So I sent it to him. I was a lifesaver. He read every word of it, and he fell in love with it. And he came back, and out of his income that he—because George is like a little younger than I am, but not very much. But he's been very successful. He's constantly being asked all over the world to head something, or do something. But what he did was to set up a foundation to supply grants to get the books done. [Laughing] He put five thousand of his own money—or maybe he got it from somebody else, but never mind, it was from him. Five thousand for the original grant and maybe more coming later. So I'm producing this book for George. But I didn't know until I got—I almost broke through several times, and then something would happen. And that's a story in itself, but I will not get to any of those. I will only tell you the most recent one. When I really had everything set up to put it with a private book publishing company, because then of course he does everything. You give it to them and they do the distribution and so on and so forth. And that's an awful lot. Well by golly, I already had it too, and I called George to tell him. I said, "George—" "Dallas," he said, "Is it a non-profit?" I said, "No. No. Book publishers are not non-profit." He said, "That's what I thought. This is coming from a foundation, and they can only give their money to other foundations that are non-profit." Well that was a big blow. [Chuckles] That was just last week. I'm still getting over that news. Or the week before. These things are happening every day, and they happen so fast, you know. Well, I was pretty shocked at George telling me that, but I knew it was true. If it's true, it's true you know. So I told the man who headed the book publishing company down in Montgomery. And the reason I wanted him, is he's a subsided person. He isn't just doing it because the book will sell. He's doing it because he loves the book. And turning the financial matters over to someone else on his staff. He's not

interested in that. But I have a—just four days ago—this is happening right now, you know. The man's name is Williams. Randolph Williams. He's a sensitive person, and a very intelligent guy. And I interviewed him five years ago when I thought—when I was down there. He was the only book publisher. He was brand new. He had too much to do. He had no staff. And I said, "Well—" and I called him five years later. I keep telephone numbers. I can always find them if you give me enough time. And I said, "You may remember me." He said, "Of course I remember you." And he said, "How's the book?" And I said, "Well that's what I'm calling to tell you about." So, he loves the book. He wants to do it. I don't know why this has happened to—but now when someone loves the book I become suspicious. [Chuckles] I think something's going to stop it. [Laughs] But he does. And he said, "Now don't react too quickly on this, Dallas." He said, "There are people down here in Montgomery, Alabama—" It's wonderful that it will be done there, because the book's about Montgomery. It's by a Montgomery—you know. It's all tied in. And it's the capitol city. "There are people who are very interested in getting that book out." And I said, "For example?" And he said, "Well, this is where the archives are, the head of the archives." Well I said, "I know him. He's given me quite a bit of information for the book." By now I've met so many people [laughing]—And then he mentioned an organization that is very well-known down there that is there for improving the cultural life of Montgomery. So all the academic people, and all the people with brains, are supporting it, in back of it. And he said, "I perceive the possibility—" I said, "You mean there are non-profit organizations?" And he said, "Yeah, of course." And he said, "I perceive the possibility—now don't count on this, but you can come—" By the time he got all through, I was counting on it completely, because he said, "They are eligible, and they want the book. Through the series of circumstances that I've described to you, the book publisher wasn't going to do it. Well, we're non-profit. What's wrong with us? I mean they can do it, and I'm sure it's going to work out. You know of course at the same time I always think this has almost worked out so many times that maybe there's some kind of curse on it. [Chuckles] I think it's going to go.

BROWN: Now what have you done here?

DALLAS READ: Well I'm giving you just a draft. I did this because I thought you needed some help in making this shorter. I mean, Kathleen Williams is a book all herself, and so am I. [Laughs] Well you know, I mean this is exciting stuff to us.

SB: It's good stuff.

DR: Well, as a writer, and as someone who knows Kathleen very well, this is not final because I couldn't talk to Kathleen about it. I had to see whether I was going in the right direction. But I'll read it to you. Okay?

Draft: *Two of our*—this is for you to use if you want to. *Two of our oldest and most active women residents, Kathleen Read, Dallas Read, 91, a journalist, and Kathleen Williams, 92, an artist, have lived next door to each other at 4303 and 4305 Elm Street for fifty years. Dallas born in California, and Kathleen in England, came to Chevy Chase in the '50s with their husbands, David Williams a political writer and Nicholas Read a filmmaker, and have lived here ever since. Each family had three children: Pamela, Ian and Michael Williams, and Nash, Jenny and Rebecca Read. Both Dallas and Kathleen are still active. Dallas writing and editing books, and Kathleen a sculptor*—this could be said better, but—*designing personalized necklaces and doing big pieces for outside gardens.*

That's not good. I have a question mark. I'll improve it later. You'll improve it later. *They have also been involved in civic activities including the preservation of the land behind their houses for a trail instead of a light rail and commuter train, and the creation of the Elm Street Park to discourage developers who are intent on an invasion of the neighborhood with more of downtown Bethesda zoned high-rise and commercial. Both are still actively opposing the effort to keep a light rail and commuting train from demolishing their backyard gardens, and putting it all underground to achieve the same connection between Silver Spring and Bethesda.*

SB: This would be good for *The Forecast*.

DR: Or something. I don't know. Well, if it's what you decide on, you know. But I thought—

SB: I'll take it to the history committee, and we'll figure out—

DR: Well there's lots of words in there that—you don't—for example, when I introduced the fact that these are women, I faced the fact that when you look at the background, well

they just happen to be women. I mean I'm not stressing that, but I'm identifying them as women because we have to identify them as something. Anyway, it's open to you.

SB: Okay. I'll mess with it. I'll tweak it and after—before we do anything with it I'll show you where it is, and—

DR: Well I'm sure some of it could be improved. I think I'm being shallow when I introduce Kathleen as a sculptor. She is one you see, but doing necklaces, that doesn't sound very big. But it is, you know.

SB: We'll have Kathy Wolf and Carol Levin, who interviewed Kathleen—

DR: Well I will also ask Kathleen. We'll just ask Kathleen. You want to make this sound big. Now to say she's a sculptor is the first identification. And maybe we don't say much more than that, you know.

SB: That may be enough. I'll look at it and I'll—I edit some at work.

DR: All yours.

SB: Okay. [Chuckles] Now, you moved here in '51ish?

DR: Yeah.

SB: And what was it like then? How did you come to—How did you find this house?

DR: Well, I didn't find it. Nicholas Read, my husband, found it. He was looking for a place. He had had a bad brain operation. Oddly enough we both had brain operations. You'd think it was connected, but it's not. [Laughs] But he had had one, and it left him—well, he really was—what do they call it? It leaves my mind at the moment. It sounds as if it were inherited, but it wasn't. But it's something that they can't really pin down so they call it inherited to try and give it some name, you see. That's known as the legal business.

SB: How did it manifest itself?

DR: Well, he, for example, had seizures. And he had seizures for so long after that because it was a bad brain operation. He had it down in Atlanta. It was a very difficult one, and he helped, as a matter of fact, his experience helped to diagnose it, and really establish a center in Atlanta for this kind of thing because it happens to quite a few other people.

SB: It's not epilepsy?

DR: Well it acts like epilepsy, but it isn't. Now it was interesting, today, that just today my daughter was describing a situation that one of her sons has who is head of the ski team and all kinds of things, you see. But every once in a while he has a seizure. And I said, "Becky, see a doctor about this." And she said, "Well, I just hoped that maybe he'd outgrow it." I said, "Well, he's pretty old to outgrow it. I think you ought to because he

can take Dilantin or something like that, or a different form." You know there are all sorts of things. However, that said—

But anyway, here were Betty and I living next door to each other. I got to know her very well, and was a very good friend of hers. I mean we had lots of funny experiences together where she wanted to write a letter. [Chuckles] Kathleen is timid. Well, she's not timid but I mean she wanted to write a letter telling a man—you see she was divorced by then—telling a man she'd met that he was just taking too much of her time, that she had a lot of art to do. [Chuckles] I remember saying to her, "Well Kathleen, I'll write it for you." [Laughing] So I wrote it. Kathleen sent it. It achieved its end. He realized that she had to have time to herself and so on and so forth. [Laughing]

SB: That was the end of that.

DR: It didn't end it, but it was very funny. I laughed at it. Every once in a while when I wake up laughing it's over something like that, you know. What a writer is, a journalist is asked to do. [Laughing]

SB: So you came here. So your husband, after his surgery, came and found this house for you?

DR: Well one of the reasons he found this is that he was told that since he was having those seizures, that he had to be near a hospital or a neurologist who he could go see. He had to be checked up. And I didn't realize until the other day what that meant, because for part of it I wasn't aware. But that meant that the doctor who did my brain operation—you know they simply cut, cut. [Chuckles] Would you like to feel the holes? I have little holes in my head. [Chuckles] But I thought—

I called up to find out when that had happened, and his assistant or nurse said, "Well—but that isn't the last time you saw him." I said, "That isn't?" She said, "No. You saw him for five years after that." I said, "Oh, that accounts for these parts of my life that I couldn't remember what happened." And she said, "Yep. Because when someone does a brain operation, the brain doesn't sit still for it." It's not like the rest of your body. [Laughs] It isn't cured until the doctor says you're cured. And so for five years I went back to this doctor who has big offices down on Friendship Heights.

But the only thing I can remember about them is there was a period in my life where I keep having x-rays, and yet I had had the operation. He would send me over to—I don't know—Silver Spring Hospital or something, because they had special x-ray material. I thought what in the hell was I getting all those x-rays for? I knew that I'd

gone. [Chuckles] I'd spent time going to various—they have a different system you know. But that was it. Because when you do a brain operation on somebody, you don't know that you really have been successful until you watch happens later.

SB: Isn't that interesting though?

DR: Oh, I know. And I knew that I'd spent a lot of times getting a lot of x-rays, but I—I'd go, "what was I getting them for?"

SB: Trying to fit the puzzle together.

DR: [Laughs] I guess so. Anyway, Nick at that point was supposed to [unclear] his brain. He was supposed to have a neurological examination every so often. And he could get it free at Naval Medical because he was doing work for the Navy. So he found a house to move us into that was near Naval Medical, because he could go right across the street here and get his caretakers. That's how we happened to come here.

SB: Because it was close to Bethesda Naval [Hospital].

DR: Right. Right. Where he had been given an assignment, you see. He had a connection anyway.

SB: What did you think of the house when you first saw it? What did you think about the house and the neighborhood when you first came?

DR: Well I was very willing to take anything. [Chuckles] I wasn't particular. But here it was across the street from the school. You know it had everything I needed.

SB: Were your children born? Had you had children then?

DR: Oh yes. Well they weren't my children. I got Nick and three little children.

SB: I did not know that.

DR: Well, it made a slight difference in some of my accommodations. [Laughs] But I didn't—I thought, "Well I've run an office." My fatal words, [laughs] I'd run an office. [Laughing] Thinking because I'd run an office, I could run a family. NO.

SB: [Chuckling] It's not quite the same. You don't get to go home at the end of the day.

DR: [Laughing] No. No you don't, but I did have an advantage in that the work that I was doing kept having—I was organizing women who'd come down here from New York with their husbands who took Washington jobs, and they were professional people too. But here they had all this time and nothing to do with it. So I happened upon starting Working Wives and Mothers simply by meeting people. How did you get into what you're doing? Could I join you? [Chuckles] I said, "Oh yes, but you—"

So we organized ourselves. I guess I organized it, but they were quite willing, quite willing and eager. And they were—another thing that was wonderful about them is that nobody ever asked about "why do I have to do that for her?" What can I do now? That was the question. And one of these people was asked what she did [laughing] in Nick's Howard University class. Who she worked for? She said, "Well, I worked for a whole lot of women, all of whom are executives." [Laughter] And we were you see.

And remember we got someone from the government who thought she was coming to kind of a retirement situation, you know. Well we got rid of her fast, because she asked the question, "Well why do I have to do it for you?" [Laughter] End of conversation.

SB: [Laughing] Not in the spirit.

DR: [Laughing] Didn't have the right spirit, no.

SB: So what kind of work did you do?

DR: Well, we did all kinds of work. We did many assignments on—you know when you do a job for the government on the outside, you either are a contractual employee or you're working for a company. And so what we did depended on where the assignment came from we did anything that we believed in, and that was a wide range of things, as long as we were paid. But we also—our main authority, or our main focus was on doing things for—everybody worked together. It was the most beautiful cooperative situation, because we all had the same goal. Fell in line. [Chuckles]

SB: And was it part-time work, or was it full-time work?

DR: Well, it was—I got offices first, down at the American Council on Education because—really because I could get cheap offices there. And they had taken over a building that had been—during the war had been occupied by families of people who came down here. They were rather rich families. It's that beautiful building on the corner of 18th and Mass, I believe.

SB: Near the Carnegie Institution and the Brookings Institution?

DR: Yes. It's right next door. And it was a lovely building to work in. What we took over were the servants' quarters, you see.

SB: In the back?

DR: For the servants. For whatever we were doing. I don't know. And each of our people came in—they signed up at the beginning for three days a week, let's say. And between certain hours we had free parking because that went with the building more or less. I

think we had six little offices that had been servants' quarters. They were these high buildings, and so there were two floors of them, you know, a marvelous place to be. You were not bothered by anybody. [Chuckles] I mean people didn't come around trying to sell you something. They had to find the servants' quarters first, you know. But it was a—and everybody—it was just a happy situation.

Eileen would work three days a week, but she had to work those three days. She couldn't say call in and say, "Well I don't feel like coming in today," because she was being paid. And that was—and so we had absolute discipline without being disciplined, you know. [Chuckles]

SB: Now it was all contract work for the government. Did the women have benefits? Or was that all through--?

DR: Oh no. They didn't get any health benefits. Nothing like that.

SB: That was all through their husbands presumably, right?

DR: Exactly. And all their husbands had them.

SB: What about childcare? Did people have little children? Or did the women have children who were school-age?

DR: Well they had to work that out.

SB: They had to work that out. So the hours were 9:00 to 5:00? They were ordinary business hours?

DR: No they weren't. They were a little different. We opened at—we gave people time to park, and we closed a little bit earlier, you know like 10:00 to 4:00. But you worked—when you signed for a half a day or a day, you know, you came. You didn't call in and say, "Well I don't feel like coming in today."

SB: It wasn't volunteer work. It was serious work.

DR: Yes. And they were being paid.

SB: Absolutely. Was it hard to have a business like that in the '50s?

DR: None. How did I recruit? I would go to a party and someone would say, "What do you do?" "Oh. I am an excellent bookkeeper. I'm from New York. I can't work full-time because I have children." She said, "But I would love to work. I'm driving myself crazy. I'm learning French only—" [Laughs] Anything to keep occupied. All I had to do was open my mouth.

SB: It's a wonderful thing. It should still exist.

DR: I know.

SB: It's a service. It's a wonderful thing.

DR: It did exist until we grew out of it, or—I've forgotten what happened, but everything went smoothly, really marvelously. The world was our oyster. [Laughs]

SB: And you were the center of it. It was your organization. What was it called?

DR: It was called Health and Education Resources, Inc.

SB: So you were incorporated?

DR: Oh yes. We got incorporated. Well someone—I had been sued at one time for a large amount of money by--[laughing] certain members of my staff were married to lawyers, and they felt that I was a very precarious person to be working for. I said, "Well let's be incorporated then. We can be incorporated."

SB: So that it's not just you.

DR: Right. It wasn't just me. That's right. So we became incorporated. And Health and Education Resources spelled HER, H-E-R. [Laughs] And we get some contracts to do—other things. I mean things that didn't necessarily need women. We had some men who joined us from time to time. So I said, "Let's call the other organization HIS." [Chuckles] Well that was too much. [Laughs] The staff felt that that was reaching. [Laughter] They were all really nice ideas, and they had a home, you know. But trouble is I've forgotten so much. When I try to remember it, I have to go look at my notes, or something that says—that's age. [Laughing] It's not anything else.

SB: No, I understand. I really think I do.

DR: Well you do. You just—you can't remember—well look, when you live for ninety-one years, you know a hell of a lot has happened.

SB: It's a lot to remember.

DR: [Laughing] Mine is all sliced into little pieces you see. And I like it that way, but trying to remember back at ninety-one isn't quite as good. [Chuckles] I sometimes have to sleep overnight, and in the middle of the night I'll think, "That's it," and I have a pencil, and a piece of paper, [and I write it down, so I remember it in the morning.] [laughing].

SB: So you can keep it straight. Well that's good. So, you were working downtown everyday. So were you full-time? You must have been full-time?

DR: Well I didn't count any more time than—well, yes of course I was. I was full- and night-time. Some of my best thinking happens—if I had gone to bed with a problem—and that's true now—I'll wake up with a solution. I've always said I should be paid time and a half overtime [laughing] because I grab my pencil and I write it down. And then the

only problem the next morning is can I read it? You know. It's very hard writing down something [unclear, laughing]. Oh, but it was a time of—you know that post-war period was a time of—well, people—a lot of rules had been broken then, and ways of doing things had been changed. You know, many, many ways. Anyway, it worked.

SB: It worked. Did you see yourself as a feminist?

DR: No, I didn't as a matter of fact. Because I've always avoided that issue. I simply got a job where I was not identified, you know, or—I wasn't identified with a feminist. And I remember—oh, what was it? A college girl from Massachusetts who was in the vanguard of feminists, and so she wrote me and she wanted to use me, or use my profession and so forth, in something she was doing. And I said, "But I'm really not a feminist." I said [Laughs]—she said, "Well, you sure look like one." [Laughter]

SB: [Laughs] You sure look like one on paper.

DR: Right. Right. No, I just avoided jobs. There were plenty of jobs where you didn't have to—especially writing jobs. I mean where I didn't have to go in and say, "I'm a feminist, therefore I'd like to work for a—" No I wasn't. I just sought jobs that wanted me.

SB: So you went downtown to work. Were you involved in the neighborhood? In the community? In Section—Was this Section 8?

DR: Oh yes. Yep. Right, right. Of course. My husband started the community. The Elm Street, Oakridge, and Lynn Civic Association. He was the first president of it. And we started by fighting to save the stream downhill. To save the stream, because people up toward Wisconsin were throwing dirt into it and, you know, ruining it. And so that was our first big neighborhood effort, was to save the stream. To save the pollywogs. [Laughter] Well, we saved it.

SB: How?

DR: Well I got—you know it's very easy to organize if you choose your—well it is easy for me to organize. It is. Because I thought, "What does all of our neighborhood have in common?" Well, they have in common keeping streams so children can wade it. All these lovely things that streams allow you to do, you know. So what I did was to pick one person in each block.

And it wasn't necessarily that I knew who to pick. He'd been active in something, therefore I had his name, or her name, you know. But once you give a job—get things like this and get somebody a job to do, they're your team. And they grow into it. They become it. They take over. It just happens.

SB: So you had the neighborhood association, the civic association, and was it all of Section 8?

DR: That was the beginning of it. Section 4 was—at one time Section 4 took us over, didn't they? Yes.

SB: At some point. I'm not sure when exactly.

DR: Oh, they did. They did. Well, we were good fighters. [Laughs]

SB: They needed you.

DR: I know. They—we were fighting for them too, and it didn't cost them anything. [Chuckles] It's one of those things. Human nature was on our side, you know. [Chuckles] We had some people who resisted us. I noticed the other day up the street, up toward Wisconsin, that—he's a Chinese gentleman I believe. He's right on the corner of Elm Street and the park.

SB: Yes. The house that's for sale?

DR: Yeah. Well, I noticed the other day that his house is for sale. And he was at that time an enemy because he had plans to—well, I mean I found out that he had plans to—really to begin to allow—this was a neighborhood, and it was called that. It was a neighborhood of course. But he had plans to—looking ahead to when he could divide his property and sell it. You know, and make money off it. And I remember very well my feeling about him for many years. [Laughter] And when I saw his sign up the other day, I said, "Well, there he goes." [Laughter]

SB: You've outlasted him.

DR: I've outlived him. [Laughter] But he was, you know—

SB: So what did it mean that it was a neighborhood? How did that feel?

DR: Well, it felt very good because everybody—we did things that everybody wanted us to do. We were fighting. One of our big efforts was to keep the town of the developers from turning our neighborhood into an extension of Bethesda, and having it zoned high rise and all those things that you don't want, you know. We got in fights about noise control. Some of the fights were very funny, but they were fights.

SB: Tell me about Elm Street Park.

DR: Well, Elm Street Park happened kind of as an accident, because that was the neighborhood where developers were beginning to come into to try to take over, to break over—you know, to get some of these nice cheap sites that would be going. And it—it occurred because—my husband was pretty active in politics too. I mean, not in politics

but in civic activities. But Elm Street Park occurred because the developers were beginning to break into this town, including the Chinese gentleman up the street, [chuckles] who was looking forward to selling his property. Well, so we were going to have a little thrash, you see. And then we thought, well—there was someone, a lady who was—I'm not quite sure how she got into it, but she did. She wasn't from our area at all, but she was somehow near the capitol—anyway, somehow the park department got into this.

SB: The Maryland and National Capital—

DR: Park and Planning Commission. Right. And she was active in that, and she—well she was active in getting more parks. And so she had this particular meeting. And someone said, "Well where would you put it?" And she put her finger down on the map and said, "There." [Chuckles] I've never known whether she knew where her finger was lighting or not. [Laughing] But it landed right up there.

SB: Now what was there before?

DR: Houses.

SB: Really? From the same era as these houses? From the late '20s?

DR: Yeah. Yeah. And she put her—well there ought to be a park somewhere. This doesn't have any parks at all, you see. So somehow out of that suggestion, why we of course took hold, [chuckles] and said we'd be very happy to have a park. [Chuckles] And did, you know, all those things that you do and we went to all the meetings.

And we seemed to have a really good organization, because I had picked someone from each block in this area to be the person we communicated with. And I didn't even know most of them. I didn't know what side they were on. I figured if they all live here—And so we had to telephone—you know, call up and say, "You know what's happening now? Can you come to a meeting the county council is having on this such and such?" And, you know, meetings of course were the way you got into it.

And I remember we had a—I had another project going, teaching my girls Spanish. They were going to learn Spanish, a language to speak. [Laughs] So that was my motherhood. [Pause] Oh yes. I know what it was. We had one girl. Her name was Carolina Zimmermann. She was from Argentina. And this was my little project. They would come here to spend six months and go to school. Schools didn't keep them out then. They took them in with no extra tuition. They don't do that anymore. But at any rate, Carolina Zimmermann was and is so pretty. And she said when I said, "are you

going to get a new bathing suit?" I mean the pool was open then. We had a neighborhood project to clear the neighborhood pool too. And she said, "But I don't like to buy a bathing suit. I am too voluptuous." [Laughter] I said, "Well you look pretty good to me."

SB: Was she in high school? Was she at B-CC?

DR: Well yeah. But B-CC was not what it is now. I mean it was a very suburban high school. But here was Carolina, too voluptuous. Well Carolina had her own comeuppance later, but that was—not a comeuppance. I love her. I talk to her all the time. But she fell into hard times. Not into hard times, but people would keep falling in love with her you see.

SB: Because she was so voluptuous.

DR: [Chuckles] But she—I started to tell you about the park.

SB: About the park and about teaching your daughters Spanish.

DR: Yeah. Well the teaching of the Spanish was—I mean, she just lived here. Carolina lived here for—

SB: She came to live with you as an exchange student.

DR: Right. A whole succession of them did. I have an exchange from almost every country. And the wonderful thing about them is whereas your own children go to a point—or at least even if they think they're your own children, they criticize you. None of my Spanish girls could ever criticize me. And you know, when Mother's Day comes I get these telephone calls. I don't believe in Mother's Day. I never have. I thought it was a fraud, but never mind. I just lean back and say, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it." [Laughing] Well you know, always it was used to get someone to buy boxes of candy or flowers, or whatever it is.

SB: A greeting card holiday.

DR: Right. Right. And so Carolina—I started to tell you this funny story. Nick was giving a slide presentation to the county council, and we had to get the county council in on this you know.

SB: For the park. To support the park.

DR: Yeah. Right. For the park.

SB: Because the county had to support the Parks and Planning Commission purchasing the land and—

DR: It all tied together. So Nick was going to the County Council meeting. We always had someone at every meeting, and I usually had two or three. We tried to have one old person and one young person [laughing]. We'd take our pick. And one person who liked

to play tennis, you know. We had a wide selection of do people. At any rate, Nick was going to this county council meeting to show slides, and he had a seizure. I told you that—and he had a seizure. And therefore he couldn't operate the machine. He had to do that.

So I said, "Carolina, you help Nick this time, and you just—" I gave her a big sign that had a map. She had a big map that represented—which she had to have because I had to show things. And so I gave it to her and she put it around her neck, and it hung down on her like this. "Now Carolina," I said, "just go up there since we can't use the slide with the map on it because Nick is having a seizure [laughing] and he can't operate it. Now you just go up and walk in front of the council." Oh, and she said, "Oh, pretty." [Laughs] Well I'm telling you, Mr. Hozepian, that was his name, Hozepian was the chairman of the council. Well when Carolina walked in front of them, every council member went [showing what they did]. [Laughing]

SB: Their eyes got big.

DR: But Carolina just walked on. And Nick said, "You just go and walk in front of it when I say Carolina is going to show you—" I guess I said it. Anyway, it's not on the machine. You're going to see it. Well I tell you [laughing] when they did they'd never seen anything like that before. And it was really very funny, very funny. When I see her now, I say, "Well you're still pretty voluptuous." [Laughter]

It was the way everything worked. It was very simple. Much smaller, you know. One crisis at a time. [Laughs] And I swear I still wake up the same way. Well first of all I have to look at the front page of the paper, then I get so mad that I'm awake. [Laughs]

SB: It gets you up. It gets you going for the day.

DR: Gets me going for the day. Then I make a list. Now I make a list. I did then too. But I say you can only do one thing today. Now take your pick. [Laughs] I think if I said all of them—because I know that you can't do all those things in one day, so pick one.

SB: You can't get it all done, so just pick one.

DR: Just pick one. And that is what I did then. It's a lifelong habit. And it comes from my desk that I use here because I write everything on these little pieces of paper. I have a little pad of post-its. And then I sort them out the next morning. And I say now which one do you choose for the day?

SB: That's a good way to do it. That way you don't drive yourself crazy trying to get it all done.

DR: Oh, I know. I picked the one I thought I could do best and easiest.

SB: And then the next day you have a different list and you—

DR: That's right. And the next morning, first of all, if I have something I can tear off my list, oh that's wonderful. Lovely. [Laughs] And once you get as we did—and Nick my husband was very active too you see. And once you get going on this you're recognized. They have good fires over there on Elm Street. Pretty soon people want to [laughing] be friendly to us.

One of the problems with the stream—the stream in rainy weather would overflow. And it became quite a problem. I got on the list of something the county was going to do about it. With that part of the county that worries about streams, whatever that was. Then the problem, for some reason or other, disappeared. Years later someone from that department called me back and said, "Well I think we have a solution to your problem." I thought, "What problem is he talking about?" [Laughs] Well he identified his problem, and I said, "Well that's fine. That's wonderful." But so years later we were back on the front. [Laughing]

SB: You were still on his list. Now after the Elm Street community became part of Section 4, did you all continue to be active?

DR: Well yes. We had a neighbor up the street, Dean Cress who was an officer or something. I forget what he was. But never mind. Yeah, we became—we sent a representative to Section 4. Yes, we continued to be active, and welcome you know.

SB: I'm sure. What sort of things did you do with Section 4? You know, now we have the July 4th party. Were there events like that then? Neighborhood wide block parties, or picnics, or a parade?

DR: Oh yes. Once a year we had a picnic. That was for a while. You know I can't—you know we did everything. Of course someone was always there who liked to give picnics, you know, who enjoyed that sort of activity.

SB: Did you?

DR: Well I went to them. [Laughs] I lent my backing and support. I always went to them. [Laughing] Well it's a nice thing to do. And you get to see your neighbors and talk to them casually and that kind of thing. No, I think that the time was right, and I think we had a good neighborhood. There wasn't—it was just a pleasant neighborhood and we wanted to keep it that way.

SB: Now what was it like living here during the ‘60s? I see on your desk you have the book about the Montgomery bus boycott

DR: Oh my goodness. Well that’s part of my project now. [Laughs]

SB: But I wonder what it felt like to live here in Chevy Chase when so much was happening in the rest of the country. Did you have a sense of upheaval here, or was it relatively calm?

DR: Well I’m sure we did, but I don’t really remember. We just took part of whatever came along.

SB: You took part in what way?

DR: Well, we would be there to begin with. That was our main thing. We went to all the civic meetings. I mean anybody had a meeting and they allowed someone to come and testify we were there. And we were there not just in one age. I always tried to put an old person it, a young person on it—[laughs] you know, it was good. But it was a small enough area where you could do that. You couldn’t very well do that for San Francisco, or for—you know.

SB: But you could for from East-West Highway to Bradley Boulevard, to between the Avenues. Did your children go to Chevy Chase School, and Leland, and BCC?

DR: The girls did all of those things, my two girls. Nash, who was the oldest of the three children—you know I told you I acquired them when I married Nick. Nick had gone to being in—

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Tape 2, Side 2]

SB: So Nick had been in Montgomery, Alabama—

DR: Well since he came from Montgomery, Alabama—and his family was a very unusual family. I mean in that they weren’t typical—well, they weren’t rednecks, to begin with. You know, they treated their servants properly. Of course they had black servants. All that was true, and at one time they had slaves in the family, but they were treated as people. Therefore they, of course, appreciated that. But they sent Nick to outside of Montgomery, Alabama to get his education. Because [the private] education [there] was limited to one private school, and it was a military school. And they didn’t want to have him go to a military school. They wanted to have him—you know. And they sent him to Kent School in Connecticut. It was run by the Episcopalians. I remember the head of it

was a man named Father Sill. And Father Sill—all the boys that came there had duties to do, and if they didn't do them they had to make it up by coming earlier or something obnoxious like that, you know. So it was a very democratic society, and they took a lot of boys that were—scholarship boys let's say. It was a very democratically run institution. But he also was very good at educational atmosphere. Father Sill ran a tough school. "Oh I can't possibly. I have a paper due." [Laughs]

SB: So you sent Nash—Nash went to the Kent School the way that his father had?

DR: He did, yeah. This was kind of a family tradition you see. And the girls went to the public schools down here?

SB: And what was that like then? Were you all involved at Chevy Chase, and at Leland?

DR: Well you always are. You're on the cafeteria committee or something, you know. Wherever you are. Or you want to get Spanish taught. Not just Spanish I or II. You wanted it conversationalist. So I remember being very active in that.

SB: So what did you do?

DR: Well I went to see the teacher you know of course. And she was of course very anxious to have this done. And then I got in touch with—I remember an occasion when we had an elementary teacher here. Her name was Mrs. Phillips. I can show you her picture. I happen to have it right here. That is Mrs. Phillips. Well the reason I have it there is to remind me of a time [chuckles] when Mrs. Phillips—a wonderful teacher—dressed up in a Halloween costume and led the Halloween parade. She was under a very strict old-line lady principal who disapproved—who felt that Mrs. Phillips was stepping out of bounds. She couldn't control her. And so I know Jenny came from school and said, "Mrs. Phillips isn't going to be there any more." And I said, "What did you say? She's just taking a vacation." "No. She said that she was not coming back." Well I said, "I can't believe it."

SB: This was at Chevy Chase School.

DR: Chevy Chase Elementary. Right. And there is the lady that lit the fire. But I said, "Well," I also had a list of telephone numbers and so forth. I said, "I'm just going to call a few people and we'll have a meeting." And so I remember this house. This meeting, every family in Mrs. Phillips' grade came to the meeting excepting one who worked for the school and she felt she couldn't work [against] the school. [Laughter] And then they began to give their testimony. And I thought poor Mrs. Phillips, because every family almost said the same thing: "We had a terrible time with—" Jonathan, or whatever his name was, "and I worked to get him in Mrs. Phillips' class. And he changed over night!"

So we had this band of furious parents who had counted on her to get them all straightened out. [Chuckles]

SB: To straighten out their children.

DR: That's right. Well believe me, they all but one, the one who had the job at school, came to the meeting that night. And you know, one of them at that time in their private life was negotiating something between the Arabs and the—they had big government jobs, you know. And here we were having to negotiate the fourth grade [laughing], but they came and they played their role. And we actually never—the sad thing was we never did get Mrs. Phillips back. Of course she was offered a job immediately. Her reputation had spread. And she had to [consider] her finances, so she took the jobs. We lost Mrs. Phillips, but in the course of it we got the school principal fired, and we got the school superintendent on the run. I mean he was changing jobs just rapidly. We had the whole town.

SB: The whole town up in arms. So the principal had to leave because it was a vote of no confidence really.

DR: That's right. That's right. [Chuckles] And then we didn't get Mrs. Phillips back. That was terrible. But on the other hand, you know—oh, and the school superintendent, I remember going up to see him with somebody. And he was very much on the defensive. Was that an elected position? I can't remember. Anyway, we were solid. The whole [chuckles]—all the students had problems, had been problem students. [Sophia enters the room.]

[Tape turned off]

DR: My husband's mother was like all southerners, a would-be historian. You know, you can call any southern family and they just happen to have the same name, and they say, "did you know about…?" And they start telling you. And it is a southern disease. [Laughs] Do you have a little southern in you?

SB: I have all southern in me.

DR: Oh well, you're perfect. [Laughter]

SB: I'm hopeless.

DR: No. I so often wished I'd majored in history instead of in English, but never mind. That's past. Where was I?

SB: Your mother-in-law.

DR: My mother-in-law, Jean Read, was a native of Montgomery, Alabama. Came from a rather amazing family. I mean, one of her nieces and sister was a Communist, a declared Communist during the—

SB: During the Depression or earlier?

DR: No, during the Depression. And they were organizing the farmers in some county and they were—because a Baldwin in Montgomery could be anything. He could be a homosexual or a communist, but you were a Baldwin. [Laughs]

SB: You were a Baldwin first. [Laughs] But you couldn't be arrested for it.

DR: No. They were—oh, incredible. I couldn't believe it when I went there, you know. But the town really owed much to the original Baldwin who had—well, first of all, right after the Civil War, he was a doctor, and made considerable money. And he didn't put it in confederate money either. He had it in some other [chuckles] operation.

SB: So he still had it?

DR: So he still had it, yeah. And what the town needed to revive itself, it needed money. I mean people couldn't open a business. They couldn't, you know, do all those things that you do. So he got together with some of his friends who also kept their money out of confederate money, and they formed a bank. And this was—the only place you could get money after the Civil War to start anything, was this bank. And it was—actually they were very liberal people in the South.

And the bank was successful, because one of the reasons being that—the man who— a black man who had been freed before everyone else was freed, probably by his boss whom he loved, and he loved his boss. But anyway, they needed housing at that point. They freed all these blacks. No place to go. And this black man was a marvelous carpenter. He went downtown and opened a carpenter shop. Everybody went to him because he was honest and good. And as his fame grew—

SB: So he set up his carpentry shop?

DR: He moved downtown and started a carpentry shop. And everybody went to him because he was well trained, you see. And his carpenter shop grew, and so did his reputation. Then he became—he hadn't done anything about being a civic leader. He was just a good carpenter. So everybody accepted him for his ability. They didn't disregard him because he was black. He knew how to do something. So he was widely used, and he became sort of the jumping off point for lots of would be republicans after the end of the civil war, really. And they would go to him for backing.

SB: Because he was an important person in the community.

DR: Right. And he was not criticized for this, because he was important to everybody. He and Mr. Baldwin, on the Baldwin plantation, which was no longer a plantation—but on the Baldwin plantation, he had learned so much about carpentry, and knew so much, that he was just a born leader. When he moved downtown, the houses of course were very cheap then because the economy was in terrible shape. So he moved into one house, and then he bought a second house because he needed to take care of his out of town customers and people who had come to spend the night, you see. So he actually at one time, had three houses. They were very cheap, and he got along very well.

But when people really needed houses, he and Dr. Baldwin were such friends, such close friends that Baldwin says, "I tell you what you do. These people are going to need an advance in money to buy these properties and I'm head of the bank." Well, he said something like that. "You pick the place and get the candidates who want to buy a house, and I'll line up a loan situation with the bank to loan the money to do it." Well, here they were hand and glove. [Chuckles] And it worked wonderfully.

SB: So the letters that you have, the book that you're writing—

DR: In the mean time, it was that particular family, the Baldwins were a remarkably liberal family. Well, they were educated and—

SB: And it's hard not to be liberal if you're educated.

DR: Right, it really is. [Chuckles] No, that's what they found. And they had all sorts of, I told you, anomalies, in the middle of the Depression. Two of the family members became active communists, but they were Baldwin communists. [Laughs] They could be homosexuals, but they were Baldwin homosexuals. [Chuckles] You know what I mean? It was amazing to me of course, coming from my little town in California. So he—Dr. Baldwin, who was, as a doctor was named the first—well came the Civil War. And it cut the lines [words unclear]. But after the Civil War [started], Baldwin was offered—In the southern ranks they wanted to make him what would have been the equivalent of a surgeon general.

SB: Of the Confederacy?

DR: Of the Confederacy. And he said no because—well, he consulted his fellow doctors. He was a very popular man in the town of Montgomery. Montgomery wasn't very big at that time. But he decided to stay at home. Well first of all, his eldest son joined the Confederacy. He didn't know what he was doing he just joined the—what was it called?

The Montgomery 22nd. Early, right out of college, and didn't tell his father he was doing it. And his father nearly—what chance did he have?

SB: So he joined up--

DR: So he joined up, and he was—gosh, seventeen? Something like that. And he joined up, and he went through the entire war. And he was killed at the Battle of Franklin in Tennessee at the end of the war, at the end of the war fighting for the Confederates. And his father refused the surgeon generalship because if he did that he'd have to swear to be—you know. And he didn't want to do that.

SB: He didn't want to support the Confederacy that much.

DR: No. So he said, "I will take care of—I want to stay right there in Montgomery." And the Montgomery doctors had some kind of a hospital that they ran. And he was president of the doctors association, so he was able to sway them. They'd all take the same stand. They would take care of any soldiers who came or were sent to them who needed help. And that is what he maintained all the way through. So when he came out, when the Civil War was over, he was already—he was quickly given a position of command. And it was really a remarkable family.

SB: Yes, yes. And this would have been your husband's great-grandfather? Is that about right?

DR: About right.

SB: So your husband grew up in Montgomery, and your husband's mother was a Baldwin?

DR: She married a Baldwin.

SB: She married a Baldwin.

DR: But she was from a family too that was very liberal. That's all you can call them, and they were educated. Jean Read, the mother, used to go to sleep every night—she read constantly—with a light, a stark light up there.

SB: Just above her head.

DR: Just above her head.

SB: So she could read.

DR: So that she could read, right. It was a wonder she didn't blind herself, but she didn't. But she had to be ready for the next day, because she was doing everything else. A very, very active woman. And in some respects, hurt herself. Nick was born rather late in life for her. She was thirty-five or something like that. And she loved him so much that she once

warned him, “Don’t ever ask me to pass judgment on any girl that you are going out with, because I will not be fair. I love you too much.”

[Visitors arrive. Tape stopped]

SB: Jean Read said never bring a—

DR: “No. Don’t ask me. I don’t think anybody is good enough for you, and therefore I would be prejudiced.” And that was true. So Nick really confided in his mother. She was his best friend really. And when I began to read her letters to him, I realized they were love letters. They were not mother to son letters. They were love letters. I mean they read, “my darling sweetheart” etc. which caused pain, because—In the end it caused pain because she really destroyed his first marriage. Nick was married twice. I was his second wife. Because she, the wife could really do no wrong. His first wife was a lovely person. But she was 21 when she married him. What do you know at twenty-one? When you have Jane Read for a mother-in-law. I was his second wife. I was thirty-seven. By that time I knew who I was. [Laughs]

SB: You’d lived on a fishing boat.

DR: [Laughs] I know, but I didn’t argue with her ever. I just sidestepped, because I wasn’t going to win an argument. And I got along very well. And also, I didn’t do—the terrible thing is his first wife was a very sloppy person. Here was Jean who dressed her mantelpieces every morning. When I say dressed them, I mean she put fresh flowers on them. The house was decorated every day you know. And here her first daughter-in-law left dirty diapers on the top of the mantelpiece. That ended Jeanie’s relationship with her. From then on she didn’t speak to her. She acted if she were not there.

SB: That would be hard on a marriage.

DR: Twenty-one. Well, but see I was much older. And besides I knew who I was, and I also knew how to sidestep. I didn’t confront her. I just did it my way and didn’t say what I was doing or did if I felt I had a righteous place to speak from. But it was quite a learning experience. But in the end, as I wrote the book, as I picked out the letters I just edited all the, I mean, Jeanie left me—

SB: All of the family pictures.

DR: Yeah. Well, I helped to straighten out the house. I didn’t know the difference between hollowware and—I didn’t know anything. I was an innocent. My first job with the New York Times was covering sermons. I came from a family that didn’t go to church. And

my father said in one very great moment, “If there is a god, I’ll meet him on the record.” I have it on his tombstone. It was too wonderful.

SB: Well, if somebody says something like that you have to put it on their tombstone.

DR: You had to. He’s in the Grainsville cemetery. My mother’s right next to it. My mother was a cheery, happy California girl and her favorite expression was, “keep your head up and your tail over the dashboard.” Well, you didn’t—you see, you’re ahead of your time. If you had a horse that you wanted to drive, you kept the horse’s head up and the tail over the dashboard, then you could control it. I put hers there too. Right next to [hers] it says “if there is a god I’ll meet him on the record” and under hers it says “keep your head up and your tail over the dashboard.” [laughter] I thought that would add something to the cemetery.

SB: So now you’re editing. You’ve written a book about the Baldwin family, your mother-in-law’s family.

DR: Yeah, but the trouble is, as a would-be historian, she kept all her letters to Nick. And Nick had to write her once a week when he went home from school. And he was a very good writer I admitted eventually. Poor Nick he suffered under my hands in some ways.

But she also had a favorite sister. There were the two youngest sisters of four, and I say really very civilized and liberal southern family. And they—one of them went over to World War I as an ambulance driver, or something. She always wanted to be a writer. And she edited a newspaper and brought it out in town and all of this makes—therefore, her letters were well written, and her sister’s were well written too.

It’s the letters I had to work with. I just strung them together in the right order to make the story. So the letters are really letters of a southern family because this reached back to the Civil War. Being semi-historians so they brought in the background. And they were not only between all the letters that Nick wrote his mother from the time he was nine years old and Nick was a very good writer. The letters that they exchanged, the last letters that she had a hand in were in ’72. That’s when she died. And then there were no more letters. And so those are the letters I’m working with.

And I’ve actually finished a long time ago that’s like four years ago. But so many things interceded that caused me to halt for a while, like my brain operation. And you can’t remember everything that happens when you get older though you may have your brains about you. But you all of a sudden one day—because I remember one day I thought, “I know it.” I called the doctor that did my brain operation.

He was actually Columbian, in the country as a wonderful medical assistant. And I called him to get a date when he did the operation. But for some reason I've forgotten. But he's still here and I have his phone number. And I found out that his nurse said, "well, do you want the date that you did the brain operation, or do you want the last date you saw him?" I said, "well, I want both."

The last day he saw me was the five years after he did the brain operation, but that accounted for something I didn't know. I was wondering one day why I had—I could recall the fact that I'd gone to all these places and had all these x-rays done. And I thought, "Why did you have x-rays done?" Because a brain operation is something the doctor doesn't know when he has it until the last time he comes to see you, and that was five years later. I must have been x-rayed five hundred times in that time. Well, he sent me—I didn't have to see him. He had to see my x-rays. And when I said to his secretary, "When was the last time I saw him? What were we doing then? X-rays? And she said, "yes."

SB: Just to make sure things continued—

DR: And she said, "you're clear now." [Chuckles]

SB: Why did you have surgery in the first place?

DR: Because I fell on my head.

SB: How did you fall?

DR: Well, I was sitting at this table. [Laughs] I don't know. I was having dinner here with a girl—woman. And I was coming in from the kitchen and I slipped on the rug and hit my head on the table. But I didn't know that I hit my head on the table because I also gashed my arm terribly. And so when I came to, well I didn't even knock myself out that night, it was very funny. I asked my friend, "Why did I go to the hospital?" She said, "did you look at your arm?" She said, "It was bleeding." I still have a scar here. [Chuckles] And if you thought I was going to have you around wrapping up my bondage—[Chuckles]

But the hospital, oddly enough, didn't look at my head because it didn't show anything wrong. That was Friday night, a Friday night. On the next Monday morning I woke up and I couldn't talk. Well when I can't talk, I know there's something wrong. [Chuckles] So I call this doctor and manage to say to her, [in hushed voice] "I can't talk." And then she [unclear.] I said, "What should I do?" And she said, "Call the ambulance and go back to the hospital. So I did, and that time the doctor looked at my head and said I had to have a brain operation.

SB: How old were you? When was this? Ten years ago? Fifteen?

DR: Well I can look it up. [Laughter] It was—had to be ten years ago, because it was—well I can't recall it right now. I'd have to look it up. But at any rate, it had to be—it was then when I called to find out when my operation had taken place and the nurse said, "but that wasn't the last time you saw him." And then I wondered why had I had all these x-rays. Because he was tracking my brain. And I remember one day, in the course of all this, he says, "I haven't got the water out." And evidently there's something that happens that collects water in that part of the brain. But this was all hard to recall. I really didn't even remember. I said, "Why do I know every x-ray." I had to go to—over here in—

SB: the Washington Adventist, or Holy Cross?

DR: I had to go to Holy Cross because they had some special kind of equipment to do x-rays, and no one else had it. But then I never figured out why I had to go until just recently. And for five years I was x-rayed. [Chuckles]

SB: Well we're almost out of the tape, so tell me—do you have anything that really stands out that you remember? Any favorite stories about living on Elm Street that you haven't told me that you want to make sure that we have on tape?

DR: Well, they're lots of little stories you know. For example, we had a swimming pool back here. One day the girls were coming home from—I didn't tell you this did I? They were in elementary school, and I heard another little girl—another little girl was behind them. This was springtime, and she said, "When are you going to open your pool?" I said, "My goodness. That little girl thinks that when we open the pool she's going to get to come swimming." My first thought was I don't want the children to think that, you know. But my second thought was, well what do you do about it. Well, everything worked perfectly.

I really have good ideas in terms of their working. Because if the atmosphere is right—[chuckles] you know—in that case I said to myself, "Well we've got to have—" We couldn't open the pool—the county would not permit to charge the people coming in, or for various reasons we had to avoid getting in trouble with the county. So, I conceived the idea of having the neighbors come for a meeting. But our purpose of our meeting was to keep the children safe. And so—and we just took this particular area. The children could then come to use the swimming pool, but we had to check them.

So they formed a group, and they collected ten dollars per family. And if it was a big family it was the same amount for a small family—to hire a lifeguard. You see we didn't [words unclear]. And we got Sonny Crawford, and he was only in the eighth grade.

You know they don't have a lot of pools around here. In California you could count hundreds of people, but no. But we had to take an Eagle Scout who had majored in water. I don't know what he majored in, but it was something that had to do with pools. We took him, and he was only in the eighth grade.

But Sonny was wonderful. He got—and he was paid by this neighborhood fund. But he had discipline. And he was handsome, and the little girls all fell in love with him. And the little boys wanted to be like Sonny. [Laughs] and Sonny was inventive. We had two or three summer festivities in which people were contestant. They contested for the—I have one picture of my little girl Becca who was only about three, and she won the inner-tube contest. [Laughter] And there she is. [Laughter] But it was just delightful. And I met women for years after, and they would say, "You know my little boys learned to swim in your pool." "Oh," I said, "Isn't that nice?" and I hadn't the slightest idea who it was. [Laughs] Never mind. It worked.

SB: That's right. It kept the children safe and happy.

DR: Kept the children safe and happy, and the parents.

SB: And the parents happy.

DR: And one little boy in this group moved away. He was moving away to Chicago, and he came to say good-bye, and he said, "We're moving to Chicago so I won't be coming anymore." And I said, "Oh, what will you do in Chicago?" He said, "Well, in Chicago, near there, we have our own pool." And I said, "Oh, that's nice. Are you going to open it up and have everybody come in?" "Oh, no," he said, "We own ours." [Laughter] Isn't that lovely? [Laughing] We own ours.

END OF INTERVIEW