

Interview with Grace Chase
The Town of Chevy Chase Oral History Project
Interviewed by Nancy Lemann on February 22, 2004

NANCY LEMANN: So, now, what year did you move to Chevy Chase?

GRACE CHACE: 1945.

NL: And where had you been before that?

GC: We had been in the District of Columbia for three years.

NL: Where were you born?

GC: I was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

NL: We're going to start with your parents a little bit, okay?

GC: Uh-hmm.

NL: Okay, so your father, where was he born?

GC: He was born right in Boston, in the south part of Boston.

NL: And what was his occupation?

GC: He was a salesman for the large firm of Swift and Company, headquartered in Chicago, and he was stationed in Boston as their representative.

NL: And so he was in Boston until he moved to the District of Columbia? He was in Boston and Dorchester.

GC: Yes, I thought we were talking about my father.

NL: Yes, yes.

GC: Yes. Well, I was born in Boston in 1907 and there I lived until I was twenty-nine. From then on I went to Virginia to become a teacher in Hampton. This was a school called Hampton Institute. It's now Hampton University and I was one of a few white people who taught in this school at that time, 1932.

NL: Is that near the District of Columbia, Hampton?

GC: No, it's way down near Newport News and Chesapeake Bay, but I went on the train from Boston, South Station, down to Hampton and there I began my career as a teacher.

NL: And so did you meet your husband there?

GC: Yes, I met my husband almost the first week I was there, and was invited to go on a picnic with the principal of the school. He said, "Miss Murdough," my maiden name, "I'm going to ask one of our teachers to call for you and he'll be there about five-thirty." So at five thirty Bill Chace hollered up from the dormitory hall

where I was living with the students, all black, “Miss Murdough. I’m here for you,” and so we went on the picnic.

NL: And he was also a teacher there?

GC: Yes, he taught history. I taught business subjects.

NL: Where was he from?

GC: He was born in Buffalo, New York and after his graduation from Princeton, he became a teacher at this school.

NL: So you went to school in Boston?

GC: Yes, I went to the primary grades. First kindergarten at the age of three, stayed there two years. Then went to the primary. Then to the middle school, only it was not called middle school. It was up through the fifth grade. Then to the senior high school and they were all in different locations in Dorchester. Then after graduating from the eighth grade from the schools I’ve just enumerated, I went by streetcar to the Dorchester High School, which was about three miles away and there I finished in 1924.

NL: And then?

GC: Then I continued my education at Simmons College, which is on the Fenway in Boston, not in Dorchester. So that meant a different kind of transportation, still a trolley. So 1928 I graduated from Simmons.

NL: And then you went down to Virginia?

GC: No. I didn’t go to Virginia until 1933. I stayed at home and lived with my parents in Dorchester and went on the streetcar again to various jobs in downtown Boston.

NL: Oh, anything interesting?

GC: Oh, yes, I had a very good time in those four years. I was invited to most of the institutions of learning, we’ll say, that exist in Boston. I went to proms and graduations and fraternity dos and also went down quite a long time to meet a man that I liked very much at Brown University. We had a good time. I had a good time there.

NL: Before Bill?

GC: Before Bill.

NL: Now, Dorchester is a suburb of Boston?

GC: It’s a part.

NL: It's a part.

GC: It's called Metropolitan Boston, so it's really not a suburb like Belmont and Wellesley and others that you've probably heard of.

NL: But I do know someone from Dorchester.

GC: Do you?

NL: And he's very brilliant. His name's O'Donnell. Anyway, his father was a lawyer—is still a lawyer.

GC: Does he still live in Boston?

NL: Yes, O'Donnell, O'Donnell, O'Donnell and O'Donnell is the law firm.

GC: Well, that's very interesting. I love Boston and for many years I would go back to visit because some of my family still lived there, you see. Haven't been back for a number of years.

NL: Did you have siblings?

GC: Yes, see that picture?

NL: Yes.

GC: I'm in it with my sister and the four brothers.

NL: Wow, I'm going to have to look at that. Which one are you?

GC: I'm the one with the bangs in sort of a cardigan sweater. The sweater I was wearing when I think I was about a senior at Dorchester High School thinking about where I was going to college.

NL: Did any of them stay in Boston?

GC: They did. Well, all of them were educated in Boston. Two went to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT. They both were civil engineers. One went to Harvard. One went to Amherst and my sister and I went to Simmons. So you see the only one that diverged from going on the streetcar again, was the one that went away to school to Amherst. So all six of us went to different institutions of learning in Boston.

NL: And then did the others stay in Boston?

GC: Yes, yes. All of—let's see. No, every one of them went to different places to work in schools. Two were in the first war and two died (1926 and 1938) on the way and one stayed in Boston and had jobs all around Boston. He was the one that I would visit a lot because he had a home there, but the others, the oldest one finally ended up in Texas. He was a professor at the Texas Technological College

and the next one taught school and the third one was the one that lingered in Boston.

NL: Can you spell your maiden name?

GC: Yes, it's Murdough-M-U-R-D-O-U-G-H. I think that's probably Scotch Irish.

NL: Do you know when your father's family came over to this country?

GC: My father's family was mostly from New Hampshire and he was one of the ones who diverged and came down to Boston to get a job. But before him, the ancestors were all eligible to join the big society of people that served in the Revolution. Went back all that way to somebody that was a private probably in the Revolution, and they're mostly from New Hampshire and Boston.

NL: Wow.

GC: But on my mother's side, of course, she was the heroine of my life and she was from New York state, and I don't think that I know much about her background because her father was a foundling. He came to work as a hired man on the farm of the Bennetts in East Homer, New York, which is a very small town, and there he met the daughter of the proprietor and at the age of sixteen—she was sixteen—they married. Anyway, that was the ancestry of my mother.

NL: And what was her maiden name?

GC: Her maiden name was Kitty Ethyl Mynard, M-Y-N-A-R-D, so we named our second son Paul Mynard. But my mother met my father when he was in South Boston. She had come down from East Homer, where she had been educated in the schools there. Do you want me to go talk on?

NL: Yes.

GC: Because she lingers in my mind, you know, with all the memories of my youth and she was quite an inspiration. Now, so she was very talented in music. She played the piano and the organ and had taken lessons from some of the eminent teachers up there in the Syracuse area and those towns up there. She became proficient with her lessons and so on, and so she came down to be educated at the New England Conservatory of Music, and she lived with an older sister whose name was Libby Mynard. They were all Mynard, but Libby Mynard married a minister in South Boston, where my father was the superintendent of Sunday School, and this minister, who had married Libby, and Libby invited her to stay

with them and their children, while she would be going to Boston for her education. So this is how the two met.

NL: And so she met him because he was working there?

GC: He was superintendent—

NL: Oh, right. Yes.

GC: Of the Sunday School and he was very eligible and he swept her off her feet, and that was the beginning of, you know, a totally different life because the education of a musician had to be bypassed.

NL: Did she regret that?

GC: Well, no, I don't think she did. I think she made every bit of use of her musical talent and every one of us benefited from her skills and her temperament as a musician and a very caring and really talented woman.

NL: Did she teach you all to play the piano?

GC: Well, she didn't teach us, but she let us have music lessons with other teachers. My sister and I were the key recipients of the lessons. But very soon in their marriage, my father bought a wonderful concert grand Chickering Piano and so that stayed in the house where I was born, where most of the six were born in Dorchester and she, my mother, would gather us around the piano while she would play to him and we would sing. So that went on for most of the years that I was living at home. I didn't go away from home until 1932, and that was the house I lived in and where most of the six lived.

NL: How old was she when she got married?

GC: Twenty-three. That was a pretty old age for that time. You know, she managed to stave off and have her career and then from the music with her very wonderful store of talent and inspiration and love and everything was part of her nature. She also became kind of an amateur actress and joined a club in Dorchester called Pilgrim Women's Club. It's part of the Pilgrim Congregational Church, it still exists. Not the club, that I know about, but the church does.

NL: Were you the oldest?

GC: No, I was the fifth. There were four boys and then there was Gracie and Lois, who was three years younger than I. So she and I are the remnants of that Murdough family, which is quite well known in some quarters, I think because my father was a joiner and an affable person, and as I said, he was a salesman. So I don't think

many people would remember us now, only because not many are living, but some do.

NL: So you had this very beautiful relationship with your mother?

GC: Yes, wonderful relationship with her. She was not only musical and liked to do things with her music, such as invite other people to come to the house and play duets and so on, but she was—now I've lost my train of thought.

NL: Oh, that happens to me so often. I was going to ask you, do you think you have the same beautiful relationship with your children that you had with your mother?

GC: Well, my children are all boys.

NL: All boys.

GC: I didn't have any girls.

NL: How many?

GC: Four.

NL: Oh, goodness. See, now if you'd gone on, you'd have had the two little girls, like your mother.

GC: No, but the last one was born when I was forty-five. He was a dividend, but I was going to tell you—you asked me about the relationship. I lived there in the house on Windermere Road, which still stands, the homestead. It's all those years, but I got the notion of conviction that I should not stay there with my parents, I would get some adventures. While I was always meeting—we called them 'fellows' then—had a date with a fellow. I met a lot of them. Went to Brown University and went to Tufts and Harvard and around to proms and so on, I wasn't meeting anyone that I was interested in, and besides, I was more of a career person. I had a pretty good job as secretary to the advertising manager of a newspaper and that collegiality was outstanding in the days of old, but I put my name in at Simmons that I would like a change of occupation and I was chosen to go down to Hampton and take the position in that school. So I accepted and plans were made and my mother said, "We're going to miss you terribly, but I think you should go." See, she knew that it wasn't up to her to put a crimp in my future.

NL: That's already a sign of generosity and a big spirit.

GC: She was a wonderful seamstress. She made things for my sister and me that you wouldn't believe, you know, the pains she would take. We were spoiled because we were permitted to go with her down to the snappy stores in Boston and choose

materials and then she would make up something for us. So supposing we wanted a dress, we'd go down and R.H. White, Jordan Marsh, William Filene, all these stores would have these wonderful fabric divisions. We'd get the material and the pattern and then she'd start, you know, cutting it out, making it and lo and behold.

NL: How lovely.

GC: Now, up there on the wall, the top picture is a picture of me and my sister and we're wearing two dresses that she made. They're made of wool challia.

NL: That is so lovely. Did you remain close to your mother after you did leave home?

GC: Oh, yes, remained very close and she visited us when I was married in Hampton. She visited us here after we finally found this house.

NL: Did she live to a long age?

GC: Yes, she did. Eighty-nine. That was pretty old for those days, but of course I'm beating her, ninety-six.

NL: So you met Bill Chace in Hampton.

GC: In Hampton.

NL: And you were married soon thereafter?

GC: 1936. We knew each other four years as teachers and we weren't married until '36. We were married from my home in Dorchester, in the Pilgrim Congregational Church.

NL: And so where did you first live with Bill?

GC: Well, Bill was studying at the University of Virginia to get a master's degree.

NL: In?

GC: In history, and so we went on the boat from Boston—the steamer—Boston to Norfolk and then ferry from Norfolk over to Point Comfort and from there we went on the train to Richmond and from Richmond to Charlottesville.

NL: What a wonderful way to get from Boston to Charlottesville.

GC: That was really nice, you see, and that was kind of a honeymoon, but he was absent from classes a few days and so he had to catch up. So that was that summer that we were in Charlottesville, and he studied and he suggested that I take some courses, so I did. I took a history course, which I enjoyed very much and it helped me to be in harmony with him.

NL: What was his specialty in history?

GC: American history. He finally got a Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina and that Ph.D. diploma is upstairs.

NL: And also in American History?

GC: Yes.

NL: At Chapel Hill?

GC: Chapel Hill.

NL: So you lived there, too?

GC: Yes, we went there—see, we had our summers and so our oldest son was two years old. He was born in Hampton, Newport News in 1938 and then in 1939 we started to go to Chapel Hill to get the Ph.D.

NL: How long did that take?

GC: 1941, summers. So after—

NL: Oh, I see. He was just getting the degree during the summers.

GC: Yes. He had his BA degree from Princeton and a master's degree from the University of Virginia, so he wanted to get his Ph.D. in two years, so from '39 to '41 we go to Chapel Hill and that was very interesting, but certainly frugality reigned, because Bill had received a small legacy from his grandmother. Actually, I remember perfectly it was only five thousand dollars and we figured out we would stay in Chapel Hill and get this degree in two years, and he did.

NL: What about the war?

GC: Well, that was the thing. After we finished it was 1941 and the war had Pearl Harbor in that year. So after getting the degree, Ph.D., we took a job in New York state in a small junior college where my husband had the job of being Dean. Cazenovia, do you know that?

NL: I have a friend who summers there.

GC: Yes, well, it's a beautiful place.

NL: Lovely.

GC: And the war broke out, you see, and my husband was too old to serve. He was thirty-nine and he wasn't suited temperamentally or physically or anything. He had no notion of enlisting, but he came to Washington and left me up there with my son Bill and my next son, Paul, who was born in 1941 in Cazenovia. So he came down to Washington and as I put it, he walked around until he found a job. It was very interesting. The office of one of the big war agencies. I'll think of it

in a minute. So with that we finished out that year as dean and then we came to Washington. The war was a part of our lives because there was hardly any place to live and we had two children and we wanted to find a place for them. Luckily, we found a rental in the District of Columbia. It was a very lovely home.

NL: What part of town? What street, do you remember?

GC: It was 34th Place and that's in the northwest part of Washington. Very, very nice home, lovely people and very near, of course, to the shopping down there at Friendship Heights. We also enrolled in the Presbyterian Church there on the circle.

NL: The Chevy Chase Circle?

GC: Yes, but then in that house, the realtors who had found it for us came one day all in a body, and I can see them yet in the doorway, saying, "Mrs. Chace. We want to look the house over. It's up for sale."

NL: Oh, dear.

GC: By that time, you see, we had three sons because Jonathan was born in 1943. So there I had a nice family of little boys, seven, four and one.

NL: So did you have to move then? They sold that house.

GC: So then we found this house.

NL: Well, now, when you were in Washington during the war was it scary or did you feel personally threatened with danger?

GC: As you can see, I was quite occupied with three little boys and trying to move around and furnish the house and everything. So I didn't feel a pressure, except for the rationing. Each child got a card and each parent got a card of ration books. You've probably seen them.

NL: I haven't.

GC: Well, it's your name and your address and then little coupons and you could tear out some of these coupons for all the food that was scarce. For a long time you couldn't get any sugar, so people learned not to use sugar. We used other things, you know, molasses and so on. Then there was rationing of meat, rationing of butter, so we learned to use margarine. There were many features of the rationing, and they were all in these rationing books and you had to have a coupon to even get any. Over there in Chevy Chase where we first lived, on this 34th Place, do you remember a store named Bondareffs?

NL: I'm not from here.

GC: Oh. Well, that was a very, very high-class store and the people in that area were, you know, professionals, and they had favorites. They would save things for people, good customers. So you had to make your way, you know, and kind of inch yourself in and get somebody that was interested in you to even get any of these things. When our third child, Jonathan, was born, a very lovely friend of mine that I had met at the University of Virginia, Frances Harris—I remember her so well. She was a lovely friend. Came from Winchester and she came to my aid. You asked the question, did I feel overpowered by the war and so on, this is another illustration of that particular facet. She found a lady up in Winchester that could come down and look after me when the third child was to be born. Had two and was ready to go to the Women's Hospital down in Washington and so Miss Harris was her name. It was always Miss Harris. She came down just at the last moment and took over the family, while I was in the hospital. At that time they only kept you five days. I had been used to staying in the hospital two weeks with the two other sons, but this time it was the war and so it was crowded and you could only stay five days. Furthermore, there was a shortage of everything in the hospital. There were no clean sheets, and so they woke you up at about five in the morning, to get changed, and you only got one clean sheet and the rest of it was a bedspread. So these are some of the things that the war brought back the seriousness of it all to this family. Miss Harris was a very able and nice, tall spinster lady and really didn't know much about little boys, but she did the job anyway and she once said to me, "Now, Mrs. Chace, I used the ration book and got a pound of bacon," that was the meat for three or four days. She'd gone over to this Bondareffs, you know, and had gotten some meat for the family.

NL: So this was the house that you moved into, that you've been in the whole time.

GC: This was the very house that we moved into in 1945.

NL: Had it just been built?

GC: Oh, it was built in 1926. So you see, it's quite an old house.

NL: What about the neighbors, were any of these houses here then?

GC: Oh, yes. This Oakridge Avenue was totally built with the present homes, and as you see, this block of 7000 Oakridge Avenue, only has about seven houses on either side. Other streets were not built up. There were many vacant streets, not

having reached the developers yet. During the war there wasn't any building, but these houses, having been built in '26 and '27, they were sturdy houses and were built by a wonderful group called—

NL: We probably have that somewhere.

GC: I have it in my mind, but anyway, they were all here and the neighbors were older people and none of the original neighbors are here now, only me. But many changes have been made in the houses on this block. Many additions to homes, but all around us were fields, woods. The boys, you know, when they got so they could roam around this neighborhood without anybody worrying about them, and they would find places to make an Indian tepee, you know the trees going this way, and sort of an odd woodsy shape. They'd ask for a blanket and go down and make a shelter for themselves. That was on Lynn Drive. Do you know where Lynn Drive is?

NL: Yes.

GC: That was where they made the Indian shelters. It was a very different area, and as I say, the houses have maintained their original charm.

NL: I still—

GC: Warren Brothers were the realtors and they still are in business, the descendents of Mr. Warren. He built some nice strong houses with plaster walls and hardwood floors and things like that.

NL: Do you think it's being overbuilt now, the neighborhood?

GC: Yes, changing.

NL: Yes.

GC: I think it's very hard on the people that have—I don't think anybody can build very close to me, because as you see, I'm up high. I read the Digest, don't you?

NL: What's the name of it? The Chevy Chase—the town newsletter?

GC: Yes, and I think that the town of Chevy Chase is doing extremely well at governance to try to stem the tide, but see, it's the county that makes the rules for zoning and unless Chevy Chase town can get it's own—

NL: Well, the village of Chevy Chase has—at least there's a historic district, and they're not allowed to tear down the old houses.

GC: Well, I don't know how they got around it, but I think that this governance on this, the mayor and the council and all the committees are working to get our own type of zoning, but not before almost all the blocks, all the bungalows have—

NL: Exactly, so they can't be—

GC: Almost every bungalow has been torn.

NL: So they can't be a historic district anymore because it's not historic anymore.

GC: So I guess it's a good idea to see what's still here. This was here some years ago. You know, there was a very good magazine printed—do you know about it?

NL: A book? A history book about Chevy Chase?

GC: The town of Chevy Chase. You've seen that?

NL: Yes.

GC: This very house is in that book. The book is on that little green sofa.

NL: Really? But there are all these different sections of Chevy Chase. There's the village, the town, the Martin's addition, the other side of Connecticut.

GC: Yes, and we were always for a long time Section 4 and it was a very interesting period when Section 4 decided to become a town.

NL: Well, when was that?

GC: Well, it's in that book, and I don't know, but it was probably around in the late '50s. There were these meetings about it and quite a bit of controversy. Several gentlemen got their reputations almost from always being the ones that would stand up and object to being a town. That it would be an unnecessary burden, but I think he was wrong. We were just like the village, the village is just a section on the map and we are Section 4 on the map, but we became a town.

NL: The other side of Connecticut, like the Village, seems to have more historic houses. I don't know why. Do you know why?

GC: I think that they were settled earlier by people that wanted to—well, one of the big settling factors of all of this area is that we're a little bit higher than downtown where Congress met, and the Congressmen and the Senators wanted to have a place, if you please, to go where it would be cooler. So this was the beginning of the traversing from downtown Washington up the small level to where we are, especially on Connecticut Avenue, and there's where they have handsome houses. There off Connecticut, they had handsome villages. Now, this place, this Town of Chevy Chase, was sort of a step-sister and the developers of it were thinking in

their manifold way as to, “All right, now, where are the ordinary people going to live?” and that’s why they built the bungalows. We had a lot of them and they lasted a long time.

NL: I have one.

GC: And they’re very pretty.

NL: Yes, it’s very pretty. I just love old houses.

GC: There are a number of them there up on Curtis Road, which is that road that leads over to Leland from Oakridge Avenue, you know, the crossroad, very short and on Curtis Road there are delightful homes.

NL: At least in this section we can walk into Bethesda and that’s a good thing. I love that.

GC: Oh, this section is marvelous. I couldn’t have a better place for our boys. You see, they all went to the school.

NL: Did they go to Chevy Chase Elementary School?

GC: They did, and they walked over all by themselves, you know, and they came home. There was no worry about bad people on the road.

NL: I still think it’s safe right in here, I feel.

GC: Well, there are so many changes as to the children, too. You see so many young couples buy homes in this neighborhood, right on this street, and then they both work. So then they have the babysitters and they love what Leland Junior High School has become, which is a center and there’s a daycare center. I see the nannies going by my house taking little children over there and coming back at noon. I think it’s pretty nice.

NL: It is, it’s very nice. Bethesda has changed so much, right?

GC: Bethesda has just been absolutely phenomenal.

NL: What did it used to be like?

GC: Well, it used to be just a little village with a few stores.

NL: Is that where you went to the grocery store and so forth?

GC: Yes. There was a Safeway store up where—way up there where Staples is now. Small Safeway store, and before that there was a wonderful drugstore called Carrier and that gave way to Safeway. Across the street where the St. Johns Church is, was a Giant. It wasn’t called Giant, it was called A&P. Those were stores, and then on the corner coming down opposite the farmer’s market, you

see, which is original, there was Budget Store for Woodward and Lothrop. Do you remember that?

NL: No, because I'm very new here.

GC: When did you get here?

NL: A year and a half ago.

GC: And so you live where?

NL: Ridgewood Avenue. Ridgewood.

GC: Ridgewood.

NL: One block from Chevy Chase Elementary School, where my daughter goes. One of my daughters.

GC: That's a beautiful street.

NL: Yes, and the school is so lovely. They renovated it and it's so—

GC: And there's a lot of changes on Ridgewood, in the mansionizing.

NL: Well, on my block it's not so bad quite yet. I live in a 1923 bungalow.

GC: You do?

NL: So your last son was born here, when you had moved here?

GC: Yes, and his death at seventeen, a car accident.

NL: Oh, I'm so sorry.

GC: A wonderful boy, but you see that was a great dividend boy for those three older boys. The older boy was seventeen, so they had all those boys and they had Dave. Anyway, you know, when you have children, and I told you about my granddaughter, I told you about how she's gone down with her husband to stay at the Mayflower and have a nice dinner and go to the movies and just get a break. You can't blame her or anything, but I think to myself, I didn't have a break. We didn't have that much money. You know, it was hard enough for us to buy this house. We knew the thing to do was not keep paying rent, and houses were not very available and we wanted one. We had three boys, and so we bought the house and took two mortgages, you know, and we were strapped pretty much and didn't have much extra for anything. My husband has his Ph.D. and had no problem finding jobs.

NL: So he was a professor, a teacher?

GC: Yes, that was what he started out to do, but then it turned out that in a way he didn't really—he wanted to be more engaged in events of the day, so he got jobs

with trade associations, and finally was an education consultant for a large private trade association. His Ph.D. counted just as much in that. So he earned enough so that year by year we piled a little more equity in the house and we could borrow on it again, and things like that. So that the house was all to the good, but it's not easy, you know. So many young couples here buy big homes. Some work, both parents, but most of the ones that I know just inherit lots of money and they don't have to be under that financial worry that you do if your salary is the only bit of backing that you have financially. My parents, my being the fifth, you see and everything, they were getting aged and I went up for the funerals, my father first and my mother, but the boys came. So it was a different life from what I see here with the nannies.

NL: Yes, right.

GC: But it's so interesting, you know, if you trace the life.

NL: Very interesting.

GC: But now all my sons, except for Dave, have gone. They're retired, in their sixties.

NL: Do they live here in this area?

GC: Well, no. Paul lives in California in Sunnyvale and my son Jonathan lives in Alexandria, and he is a very attentive son and does a lot for me. My oldest son is in Connecticut, but he's been president of two universities.

NL: Really.

GC: He was president of Wesleyan in Connecticut. Six years in Wesleyan and nine years president of Emory in Atlanta.

NL: How impressive.

GC: And so he's now retired at sixty-five.

NL: Is that the one in Connecticut?

GC: Yes. He and his wife finished the presidency at Emory and they had this little house that they had bought when they were president of Wesleyan, which is in Connecticut. So they fixed that up and it had been rented. They're having a wonderful time. You know, it's quite a job being president twenty-four hours. I'm glad that he's out of it because he has come back to himself.

NL: So they're all three retired now, your sons.

GC: Three of them are retired.

NL: And the one in Alexandria, he's close by. He's the closest by. Alexandria is very historic.

GC: Oh, it is very historic and he has a lovely place to live. He comes over a lot.

NL: Do you live here alone? Do you live by yourself here?

GC: I do.

NL: Wow.

GC: My husband died in 1975, so that makes how many years? Twenty-nine years, and I was married to him for thirty-nine years. But all that twenty-nine years I have run this house and I've made out pretty well. Now because I'm getting so—

NL: With your eyesight.

GC: Eyesight, and a few things having to do with old age, such as lack of balance, two hearing aides. I get tired awfully easily, but I have a lot of help. I employ the Potomac Home Support.

NL: Oh, good.

GC: And they come five days a week and do things for me and I make lists and they take me around to different dentists and doctors and so on, and do the shopping, groceries, write my checks. I can't see anything on banking, although John does most of that work. So I'm trying my best to hold out and stay in this house, but sometimes I don't know.

NL: Yes. How many grandchildren do you have altogether?

GC: I have five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. One great-grandchild is in California.

NL: Well, where is Sunnyvale that your son lives in?

GC: Oh, that's right south of San Francisco. He's been there a good while and when he retired, he got a job in the VA Hospital. He's the only one that served in the Vietnam War. He didn't get to Vietnam, but he served four years.

NL: We came from California before we moved here, San Diego. Very nice. We moved here from San Diego.

GC: I was in San Diego once and we had a lovely lunch at that wonderful hotel, Coronado?

NL: Yes, yes.

GC: I remembered.

NL: Well, you remember everything.

GC: Paul was in San Diego then had a condo and was employed there. Then he left San Diego because he got a good job at Stanford University and he was there for about twenty years. Now he has just a volunteer job, but he feels it's best to have a volunteer job. Then what you do is appreciated.

NL: I'm going to stop it for a minute.

GC: --glad to answer about anything. I told you about the Indian tepees.

NL: Yes, and we were talking about Oakridge. It's on page twenty-six of *The Town of Chevy Chase, Past and Present* book, and Grace's house is—

GC: What year was that produced? You can look in the front.

NL: I guess it was 1990.

GC: Well, see, that's almost fourteen years and we had that very serious storm which they've described in the back of this book. Have you ever heard of it?

NL: What year?

GC: Well, that would be 1990. That's fourteen years.

NL: Ice storm? Snow storm?

GC: It was called a 'down wind.' It was a sudden wind that created so much havoc, trees fell down right in houses, and a great big tree hit adjoining yards. A limb of that—it's called a Tulip Poplar tree. It's not a very strong tree in the first place. The roots are narrow and so on, but I was out on the porch and I suddenly thought, "I must go in," because this gale came up rather suddenly. It had been raining and I came in and stood there by the picture window. Stood back and I saw that this limb from this Tulip Poplar was falling, a big limb right down on top of my garden out there. So I realized that some damage had probably been done. It knocked a hole through the garage and made a deep trench and spoiled my flowers and bushes. That was called a 'down wind.'

NL: I'm terrified because we have giant poplar trees in the backyard of my bungalow that just tower over the house. They're beautiful—

GC: But you just worry about them and that same tree that's in this yard next door looks rather poor right now and the people that live in that house are not interested in horticulture. They don't care.

NL: What should I do? Get a tree guy to look at my trees and make sure they're okay?

GC: I think if I were you I would call the Town of Chevy Chase and ask them to give you advice. There's a wonderful fellow whose name is Mark Peyton, P-E-Y-T-O-N.

NL: I've heard of him before.

GC: And he used to be working for the Town of Chevy Chase and now he's sort of on his own. So he knows everything about trees.

NL: Yup, I've got to look into it.

GC: I could give you his telephone.

NL: Okay, when you first moved—first of all, did you like living in Washington compared to Boston? Do you like Boston better?

GC: Well, I enjoyed Washington because it's a fabulous city and everything is wonderful, but you see my life became quite constricted with the care of the children. However, I got out a lot and I would go down shopping by myself on Saturdays, for instance. Bill would take care of the boys and I would wander around in all those wonderful stores. Garfinkels. Do you know about Garfinkels?

NL: No.

GC: Well, it was a wonderful specialty store and you just loved going in there.

NL: In Friendship Heights?

GC: No, all the way downtown.

NL: Downtown.

GC: All the way downtown, and it took about forty-five minutes to get down there because we didn't have any Metro at all. The Metro didn't come in until fifteen years ago, but I did like Washington very much and got to go down to the museums, and especially the Gallery of Art and all of those things, and special occasions. I joined groups. In my church you could get a season ticket for the concerts on Friday afternoon. So I'd arrange to get a season ticket and get some babysitter to come in. I got around and enjoyed it, but I had been acclimated to all of these cultural things because of being in Boston, which has a wonderful symphony concert series, and has marvelous museums, and a terrific park and everything that I knew about. Our home in Dorchester was very near to a park called Franklin Park and my sister and I would walk up to Franklin Park most every Sunday and look at the zoo and wander around there. It was a very, very interesting and cultural city and that was what Washington felt like to me for that

too. In recent days, since I was widowed and I was in very good health, I had lots of outings, the ballet, the arena stage, with the symphony and shopping with friends, and all of those widowed friends that were so companionable to me. Bridge Clubs. I belonged to the Chevy Chase Club and I belonged to that over on Connecticut Avenue. Everyone of those is gone—you know, all the little clubs, and still I linger.

NL: So were your friends mostly from right around here?

GC: Yes, the neighbors on this street are wonderful neighbors and we're all very friendly and affectionate and remember each other's birthdays and are concerned if anybody's sick and everything. We just lost a beautiful woman who lived in the house across the street. She had cancer and so we're all very, very sad and miss her. She died on Labor Day. So all of that takes place in one place.

NL: Do you remember who the neighbors were when you first moved in? Were there any that particularly—

GC: Oh, they were very interesting. There was an odd bachelor that lived in the house next door and he was not very amicable. He didn't care much for children or for little boys who climbed his fence to get their ball, and then he'd holler at them. So we had to get used to him. Then there was a lovely widow in the Spanish looking house across the street. She had formerly been superintendent of nurses and she was very statuesque and she also thought little boys should be very orderly. So we had to deal with them, but the people on the other side were very friendly and the couple that had bought their house when it was first built in there. Now, that house has changed. So many different people have bought it, sold it.

NL: This one right here?

GC: Yes, moved away. I've known all of them. Some have been odd. Some have been close friends. The last one was a lovely woman, very young who moved to Belmont and last Sunday she came to visit me, and I was so happy to see her. She has three little children and all of them I know. The first one was born from that house. I remember baking some bread and taking it over to her the day she had come from the hospital and they had told her to come right in. So she couldn't eat any bread, but her husband did. So anyway, I have lots of memories of the wonderful neighbors on this street and around in the neighborhood. Some of the caregivers from Potomac Home Support, and I take walks. They hang on to me

and I take my cane because my balance is not very good and I have to avoid falling. We go around the neighborhood and I point out these things to them: I knew that woman. She did this, that and the other thing.

NL: I'd like to hear about all that sometime.

GC: Well, I don't believe I place your house on Ridgewood.

NL: Well, it's 6912. It's one block from the school.

GC: Yes.

NL: I mean it's one block from Stanford Street, in between Stanford and Oakridge.

GC: There's some kind of building going on on Ridgewood Street that goes on forever. What in heck is it?

NL: Well, as I look at Ridgewood Street I feel that compared to other streets, it seems to be quite intact and I'm not—there's always little things going on like right next door when I moved in someone started adding on to their house next door to me, but I haven't noticed anything major going on there recently, thank God. But the trees do terrify me.

GC: Yes, well, I think you might just talk to Mark Peyton.

NL: I've got a note about that. I'm almost finished because maybe you're tired.

GC: No, just go on. I have nothing to do.

NL: I'm just going to ask a few more questions about the town. What are your favorite places in the town? Maybe over the years compared to now?

GC: Well, you see, the Leland Center is on a site which meant a lot to this family because Leland Junior High was there and we witnessed two demolitions, one earlier when the manner of demolishing was different from the next one, which was one of these swinging balls that swing from side to side.

NL: What did they demolish there?

GC: The school.

NL: Okay, second was the school and then something before the school?

GC: They were both schools. The first was a school. The second was a school. You see, the first was the original school and then a different school, more commodious and useful and that's where our children went, was demolished because years went by, at least eight, and they couldn't find anybody to take over the school. All sorts of plans were suggested and rumored and so on. At one time they were going to make that into a senior center and make divisions in it.

Another time a private school had made a bid to come there with their plans. They thought it would be a wonderful place for them. Then there was a hospital type that wanted to make use of it, but they couldn't get the money or the town didn't want them and protested and everything. So when the Town of Chevy Chase and Montgomery County and the National Capital and Planning Commission all got together, and not the Town of Chevy Chase because we weren't a town then. These growing concerns put their assets and point of view and expertise together and decided this whole tract of the building had seen better days, and being empty had been no big deal. Knock it down. And that was the end of the school. So that's how we've seen two demolitions of that school and then we see they have a tract of land upon which they built the Leland Center.

NL: Why couldn't they get anyone to run the school?

GC: Well, you see, you must ask—

NL: I can find out.

GC: Somebody. There's another big book about all Montgomery County that has chapters about this school and why it was. It had to do, you see, with the changes in the number of students that would be eligible to go there. Evidently, in its present state it wasn't big enough for all the middle school students that would be eligible to come there. Now, your children must go to—your nine year old goes to—

NL: Chevy Chase Elementary.

GC: Now, that went through quite an overhaul.

NL: Well, it's been renovated.

GC: Yes, so that had gotten to the point where something had to be done about it and so they did not demolish that, because it had prospects. It would be worthy of their attention and the money that would be available for the school and what did it take? About two years, I think, didn't it, to renovate it?

NL: It could be. That was before I got here.

GC: How does your oldest like it?

NL: It's lovely. It's just lovely. It's wonderful.

GC: Well, all of our four boys got good teachers and have good memories of that school.

NL: Yes, I love it. You know, I'm always curious about when 9-11 happened, was that scarier than World War II?

GC: Oh, yes, 9-11 was totally different, you know. It was something that happened in New York. It didn't touch us in a real way, but I know that everything that came to my mind after seeing those things on the television just scared the life out of me.

NL: I know. I had never seen anything like that in my lifetime.

GC: Oh, I don't think that we ever again will either. I hope.

NL: Yes.

GC: But that was such a sudden thing. You know, when the Second World War came and we were up in Cazenovia and the announcement came over the radio, "This is a day that will live in infamy," and that was repeated over and over. We were all hushed like little babies. We just didn't understand that, even though it was world history. There's a new book for children and I'm very much interested in it. It's called *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, and this is a book by a wonderful children's author who has made a story, imagination to bring back the towers and what happened to it. Somebody named Mordecai something—I wrote it down but now I've forgotten where I wrote it.

NL: That's it.

GC: That's it.

NL: Yes, interesting. When I moved to Washington it was a bit of a scary place, compared to San Diego, which was not a scary place. Anyway, Washington politics.

GC: Oh, yes, and Washington politics is sickening and you have to keep rising above it. I don't blame people for steering clear of the place, but it wasn't like this always.

NL: It wasn't always so consumed by that?

GC: No, because we didn't have television. You see, you had to gather things from the newspaper or from somebody who knew and was going to give a lecture or from your church or something. Everything wasn't so hurried.

NL: Yes, it's so frantic.

GC: Everything is so hurried now that you're beside yourself picking out anything that you want to know more about.

NL: Yes, exactly.

GC: The people that talk on the television are so hasty, there is no sense of repose or anything in their voices. So it's just talking rapid gibberish.

NL: It's hectic.

GC: The pace of everything is so unfriendly to any kind of sense of lingering or anything. You've got to be right up there and keep talking.

NL: Was there any one particular administration that was associated with a more pleasant or gay type—

GC: Roosevelt came in 1932 and was president and elected four times. That was the end, really, of any kind of deliberation. After Roosevelt, I think of everything going haywire. You had to get up pretty early in the morning to face it. Folks got to work fast, and so on. See, I lived in the days when, for example, Woodrow Wilson was elected, and he was elected way back in 1912. I was in Boston then and the newspaper, a great big headline, in the *Boston Globe*, said, "Hughes Sweeps the Country." He was a Republican and he didn't become President, but that was the tally, you see. Then the Wilson administration came in with a very slim margin. But it took all that time. The newspapers published it and sure enough, Hughes, having been chief justice, was a very learned and trusted man and the Democrats were not quite in good favor, but Wilson got it.

NL: So you didn't like FDR? You didn't like Franklin Roosevelt?

GC: President Roosevelt?

NL: Yes.

GC: Oh, I liked President Roosevelt, but I'm just saying the times after him.

NL: So it was the times, it wasn't him.

GC: It was the times and the war, the war that Roosevelt had to run and everything. That was the first real—

NL: Tragedy.

GC: Of course, the First World War was pretty hard, too, and two of my brothers went into the service. I have vivid memories of celebrating, going out on the street with a mallet and any kind of a tin plate and banging on it. "War's ended. War's ended." But it was everything. The communication was totally different and now it's so different with the websites and the computers and everything that I have no acquaintance with. It's a hard world for somebody like me.

NL: It's pretty hard here, for somebody like me, too. I had a hard adjustment. It's so hectic.

GC: Well, I don't know—do you think if you lived in Oregon or—

NL: San Diego.

GC: Hmm?

NL: Yes, San Diego, it's quieter.

GC: Quieter. This is a harried place.

NL: Yes, I think so.

GC: Everything seems to be magnified in such a way that you can't get away from it.

NL: But when you first came here, it wasn't quite as it is now.

GC: No, it was nothing like this. When we first came to this house, why, it was just—well, example. I could call on the telephone down to the agency. There were these agencies for hired help and say, "Can you send somebody to help me?" and I would get some pretty good people to come out. Finally, we got somebody that wanted to come every day and we made a little deal with her, a Black woman and she came out on the trolley. She would come about ten o'clock and stay through dinner, so I had her cooking the dinner and setting the table, and she'd serve it.

NL: How lovely.

GC: And the charge was—from ten to six, it would be eight hours times five, forty hours, fifteen dollars a week. See, that gives you some idea of how your funds could go a little bit longer. But on the other hand, it turned out that there were so many bottles of hooch in the discard, that I had to say after a little while, "We won't need you anymore." But that just illustrates. You know, there was no washing machine and this same Sarah would wash out clothes with her washing board, one of those scrubbing things that you have never seen, maybe. Have you seen one?

NL: Not really. Sort of.

GC: It's a metal board, very sturdy and you put it in the set tub, you see, and then you can scrub out those spots with laundry soap. That was one of the first things that we tried to buy and we did buy one, but it didn't fill the bill. There weren't any washing machines, and somebody found the washing board and it wasn't very good.

NL: I'm reading a biography of Eleanor Roosevelt. Was she a figure that made an impact on people in those days?

GC: Well, she was controversial, kind of like Hilary. Either you like the Clintons or you don't like the Clintons. The Roosevelts were different, they were so plutocratic. She had a way with her that showed us she didn't really care whether we liked it or not. She was going to go ahead and do what she wanted to do, same with him.

NL: Interesting.

GC: But they were controversial. But history has dealt very kindly with them, their image and all that they did accomplish measures up to having met the needs and being a person of great merit.

NL: Yes, I wonder if the Clintons will end up that way. Only time can tell, right?

GC: I often think who around now is ever going to be somebody that we couldn't have lived without, you know, that we did need and had courage and had a thinking mechanism and everything, and there doesn't seem to be anyone, really. Although I think there are more people that have a lot of background and competence that have emerged due to the need, and that's a good sign. There are more statesmanlike people and also I think more coherence among the Democrats. They're going to get together and not be at each other's throats, I hope. Maybe you're a Republican.

NL: I'm sort of nothing. I'm not political. I'm nothing.

GC: Nothing. You haven't followed politics.

NL: It's not my greatest interest.

Okay, we're going to talk about the azaleas.

GC: Well, I'll begin by saying that I've already said that we moved here in 1945. In about 1948 we were finding our decision to buy the house very promising and that we wanted to do something about beautifying the grounds. We went to the Lyons Nursery, which is still very well thought of in Montgomery County, and there Mr. Lyons had a program of selling a Lyons Dozen of small azaleas in pots. The Lyon Dozen was thirteen and it was ten dollars. So each year we would go out to the nursery and buy ten dollars worth, which was a good amount of money for us to spend on beautification at that time, and we'd have a variety of colors and types of azaleas and we would plant them around this house. Over the years now, these

azaleas that we bought in the early days have grown and have provided us with a lot of color and interest, and there are so many that need a lot of attention, too, because as you know, azaleas have to be pruned and have to be shaped, or they would take over. So we think of our investment of ten dollars year after year as being a very good thing.

NL: That's some of them right there, right?

GC: That's the camellia. That camellia is an interesting one, too. As you see, it has buds on it.

NL: Yes.

GC: And the first one that Mr. Lyons sold to us, he said, "Now, find a place where it will not get the winter sun," and I bought that for three dollars for my husband's birthday and we planted it there in the northern window, so that it wouldn't get the winter sun. So we are very fond of the camellia and all those different azaleas that he sold to us back in the '50s.

NL: I think I should get some camellias and azaleas, maybe.

GC: Remember about the winter sun. The buds come out so early. So no winter sun.

NL: Let's continue to talk about Bethesda.

GC: Bethesda was a country village with small stores and the first big store, which we learned to call the Ford Building, at the corner of Willow Lane and Leland Street, replaced a semicircle of delightful shops that come back to mind. On one side was the Wittlesey's Drugstore and on the other side was Sportsman, which had wonderful athletic equipment, tennis racquets and different things, and in the middle was a classy grocery store and then others that I think everybody will remember, a private lending library run by Lois Roberts, and it was just a semicircle of intimate shops that we felt agonized about because they were all torn down and this great huge glass building was put there.

NL: What a horrible, horrible pity.

GC: And our hearts were broken.

NL: That's a horrible pity.

GC: The beginning of a rude awakening for Bethesda, but so much of Bethesda is almost known the world over, I think. Some people, foreigners who have been coming here for two years to be in a government somewhere and do the consultant work that we prize, will say, "Well, it's any house in the Town of

Chevy Chase that we wanted,” and that particular development of the retail offerings is much part of its charm, and its use. The farmers market is another relic of the past that has continued and people love it and they tell us that they’re not selling.

NL: Thank God.

GC: Of course, having the Metro come, began the building, in a way, and the rebuilding, you know, of many schools. Bethesda Elementary is done over. Well, I think I’m getting tired.

NL: Okay, thank you, Grace. Grace Chace.

End of Interview