Interview with Kathleen Williams
The Town of Chevy Chase Oral History Project
Interviewed by Cathy Wolf and Carol Levin on January 5, 2004

INTERVIEWER: Kathleen, how long have you lived in the Town of Chevy Chase?

KATHLEEN WILLIAMS: Since Christmas Eve of 1951, however many years that is. I've lost count.

INT: And, why did you decide to move to the town?

KW: Well that has quite a story. David had come back to Washington ahead of us because his mother was ill, and he chose Chevy Chase in Montgomery County because he had heard that the public schools were better than those in the District.

L: And David was your husband?

KW: Yes. And he'd been looking for houses and he bought a nice large on Hesketh Street in Chevy Chase near the Chevy Chase Circle. Then he was invited to a party--a swimming pool party in Maryland. He went, and he thought to himself, "This is a better house," because it has a pool that was shared by two neighbors. And he thought--because we had three kids and they were all rather shy, and it would be a big change for them coming over and having to make new adjustments—that a shared swimming pool would be a great way for them to get used to the new place. One night at 2 a.m., I was fast asleep in my apartment with the kids in Hampstead and the phone rings. I mean that was long distance in the old days. [Chuckles] And I heard David say, "Shall I sell the house we own near Chevy Chase Circle, and buy the one with the shared swimming pool?" I said, "Well darling, you're there and I'm not. I'll leave it up to you." And that's how we happened to come to the Elm Street house in Chevy Chase. The house was much smaller and much cheaper and in less good condition than the Hesketh street house.

L: So sight unseen, you moved into your house at 4305 Elm Street, and this was your first house in the Washington area. Where did you live before, Kathleen?

KW: Well, we came from London, where we first lived in a large house in St Johns Wood and then moved to an apartment in Hampstead. Prior to that we lived in Columbus Ohio. And believe me, when I visited Washington it was like going to Paris. [Laughter] So I was delighted to move here.

L: What was Washington like in those days?

KW: Well it was steamy and hot, but it was beautiful, unlike what I remember of Columbus.

L: When you first lived in the house, do you remember who your neighbors were?

KW: Oh, of course. I mean, as I said we arrived on Christmas Eve. It was pitch dark and you could barely see anything. However, I recognized some of my furniture from our

Columbus house, which I had no seen for five years while we were in England. The furniture was sort of sitting around. But I immediately hated the house. [Laughter]

L: Why?

KW: Well it was dreadful. To begin with, you opened the front door and there were the stairs running straight up. What was even worse, the fireplace was right next to the front door. How non-U could you be? I mean it was a disaster in my view. Furthermore, there was plaid wallpaper going up the stairs, and great big red cabbage rose wallpaper in our bedroom at the top of the stairs. It was also very small. The basement was unfinished. There were windows on every wall that didn't look out on any views. and a screened porch that was in bad shape. There was only one redeeming feature, the dining room had a large bay window with the diamond leaded panes and windowsill that looked out onto a ravine. When we arrived we couldn't see what it looked out on, but next morning we discovered it.

L: What did you discover?

KW: We discovered the ravine with terraces going down the hill to a stream at the bottom. Right under the window was a clothesline; with two shabby looking roses at either end. The series of terraces going down the hill were bare except for a few weeds and not much grass. Across the stream at the bottom, a dead tree was lying on the ground. There was no bridge that I could see. Papers were blowing along the ravine in the January wind. It was rather bleak looking. [Laughter]

L: Well, Kathleen, with this in mind, what have you done to this house and the lot? To change it, to make it the way it is today?

KW: As you can see, it took more than fifty years. [Laughter] And it was very gradual. Before we moved to Chevy Chase, I had been living in rented places for five years. I had left all the house furnishings in Columbus when we moved to London. So it was nice to greet some of my furniture again, although it was all in a jumble down in the unfinished basement.

The other side of the basement was a garage. So the lower floor was divided between the unheated garage and the basement, with a drain in the floor and an old gas furnace. But there was one redeeming feature, it actually had a bathroom and the garage had windows. On the back of the house where the garage was located, the ground sloped steeply down. Because of this, it was difficult to drive into, so

nobody ever used the garage. We always parked the car on the street. However, we didn't have a car for six months. But we were fortunate in the way we could walk to the grocery.

L: What grocery was that in those days?

KW: Well, you know I can't remember exactly. I think it was an A and P located near the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and Bradley Boulevard. Later, I think there were two Safeway's, one located on Old Georgetown Road. That's right. And we had neighbors. What were their names, the Ruckles who had two children, Martha and Anthony who were about the ages of our two older children, Pamela and Ian. They had rented the house at a block nearer Wisconsin Avenue than we were, and from people, a professor from the University of Maryland, who had done a lot of work in the garden. While the Ruckles were living there as renters, they were not taking care of the garden. The garden had been well landscaped with great azaleas extending down and across the stream.

L: Kathleen, I'm confused. Was it their garden or your garden?

KW: Oh no, their garden and I lusted for it. Our garden was a desert. There was nothing. The dead tree—well there were two rose bushes, one at either end of the clothesline. And there were some roses growing around the pool, all sort of dangling into it. Rambling roses. One of them was a silver moon, but the other one was red.

L: When did you get the idea of making your own garden?

KW: Oh, last—certainly not immediately. We arrived, as I said before, in late December, so we couldn't do anything. We just looked down on the bare terraces with papers blowing around. The man who previously owned our house was a writer who has stored his papers in the shed-underneath the screened porch. The shed had a concrete floor but still was not thoroughly fixed up. It contained two cabinets that were filled with papers. These papers kept leaking out and blowing around. I forget what we did with them in the end.

As I said, the previous owner was a writer who had a large family who had finally gotten one of his books published called " Subways are for Sleeping," which became a best seller and later a movie. I think he used some of the monies to build the swimming pool on a whim on one hot summer day. . However, he still lived on the margins and was very happy to get the money for the house. We were later told that we had overpaid for the house. He and his family left the house in terrible shape. [Chuckles] It needed a new roof and rain was coming in upstairs. A few little things like that.

L: Do you know if he was the original owner of the house?

KW: Oh no, no. There were people who lived in it before them, and they had covered the radiators in one or two places and had done something towards making the house a little more habitable.

L: The house was a challenge for you?

KW: [Laughs] Oh that's a good one. It was a challenge.

L: How did you change the house since you've lived in it?

KW: Oh. Well, I guess the first thing was to do something about the kitchen. It was a disaster. It had black linoleum on the counters that gave a sort of marbleized affect. The kitchen was the worst I think. Well, the bathroom was terrible too and there was only one upstairs and none on the main floor for a family of five. We had three children. I often, looking back on it, and wonder how we managed all those years with such small amount of space. But anyway, here we were. And I liked the neighborhood.

L: Kathleen, your garden is a legend in the town. Were you a gardener before you came here? Had you done a lot of gardening, or was this new?

KW: Well, in Columbus we owned the house but I never liked the garden because it never had a background. What I liked about the space here was although it was all so uncared for, there was a stream at the bottom which is a great feature. It had the embankment of the B and O railroad tracks as a background.

My first experience with gardening was with my governess years ago in England. I remember the horse chestnut as a wonderful nut with its glossy green cover, which when you peel back reveals its wonderful rich brown nut. This nut grows a white shoot very easily. My governess planted a chestnut seed in some potter's soil in a blue and white willow patent bowl and it grew. It got to be 3 feet tall. It was so exciting to watch that see grow.

After the chestnut outgrew the blue and white bowl, we planted it in the garden of my first house that I remember. There was a little triangular space beside the pond and a summerhouse where we put it. Then when we moved, I forget what happened. Anyway, my chestnut tree disappeared after that. But never mind. I planted many other things.

I had my first real garden at boarding school in England. . Actually, I had gardens both at junior school, Dunhurst, and senior school, Bedales. The only reason I liked coming back to school from home was that I could see how everything had grown. I have vivid memories of this first garden at boarding school. I always remember the very first plants I planted. They were little seeds of a pale blue-green flower and there were cuttings of a pink plant. I planted them all in a row, and they all grew. It was such a

miracle that these little pale blue-green beads that I put in the ground with a tiny little roots, actually grew. And I guess that was my first excitement. Then, my friends and I planted peas and beans.

At my senior school, Bedales, we had a dreadful thing called outdoor work. For this we were asked to chop out bricks theoretically for an outdoor tennis court. While I liked playing tennis, I couldn't think of anything worse than playing lacrosse, which was the game we had to play. Loathsome as was cricket, and football. Since I did not like chopping bricks, I opted to have a little plot of ground and garden. I made a pond in senior school and lined it with cement so it would hold water. Of course, now I thought hat the outdoor workdays never lasted long enough. But, now at Elm Street, having a real live stream was another thing. That was really rather glorious.

L: What were some of the things that you first planted in the garden here?

KW: A baby Juniper was the first plant I put in the garden. There was a big lady by the name of Bush who lived on Old Georgetown Road and had a nursery. She gave me a little baby juniper about six inches tall, which I planted beside the poplar tree that divides our garden from the Reeds. Now, only three of its grandchildren remain. That little bit of garden, between the poplar tree and the steps down to the pool where the ground was totally bare was the first section that I started working on, because it seemed to need care the most. It was and alas, still is the most vulnerable. The slopes are always something you had to watch. The rain washes the soil away, so it is always important to plant on the slopes.

During my first or second Washington spring, my neighbor Betty Smith and I had a wonderful garden experience. She called me to tell me that she was going to pick me up early the next morning and that I should wear pants, gloves and socks. Dressed appropriately for an adventure and as protection from the rampant poison ivy, we drove out Connecticut Avenue – then just two lanes – towards Kensington. When we got to the right spot, we parked on the side of the road and climbed over the embankment. To my delight, there were clumps of maiden-hair ferns, which we preceded to dig up. I knew that the steps leading to our pool would be a perfect place to plant the ferns. I was right. The ferns loved their damp and shady spot and multiplied so I later planted them beside the next steps that led to the bottom terrace and they are there to this day.

L: And there are your artworks in your garden too. Tell us about them.

KW: Oh yes, but I didn't add those until much later. Betty Smith was one of my first patrons and bought several of my large garden sculptures for her garden. Needless to say, her

garden was always a showpiece. She also introduced me to my Henry – who virtually "made" my garden.

L: Did you plant some special things along the stream?

KW: Well not for a long time. I mean the stream had a lot of lilies growing wild, which of course was good. I mean there was so much garden, we had to plant two of course. And of course there had to be a bridge. And we used to cull the land beyond the bridge, which we didn't even own at that point. We had to—it was a no-man's land, that strip. We used to call it Mexico. [Laughter] It took us a while to gradually work down the hill and get going with the planting.

L: And there's a train that used to go behind there.

KW: Oh, you're right. Twice a day. It was great—and of course, there was always the pool. This was a shared pool with our neighbors, the Reads. One of the great things about the neighborhood, was that the Reads had three kids next door who were about the same ages as our three. There was no patio around the pool. There was just a small concrete patio in front with roses surrounding and hanging over the rest of the pool, so it was difficult to walk around it without getting pricked by the thorns. There was no filter then, so the pool was fill and draw. Thus, it had to be emptied and cleaned once a week and then filled with two hoses from both our houses.

L: Who cleaned the pool?

KW: The kids did. We wouldn't think of doing it. Dallas Read was a great organizer. She was a career lady and not someone like myself who was at home when I wasn't doing something else. It was a hot summer with no air conditioning. The doorbell would ring constantly, and little faces would peek in and ask, "Can we go swimming?" Of course, we'd all heard the story of the neighbor down beyond the Reeds who had two kids, Poncho and a younger one who had nearly drowned. The Reeds had built onto their house a large porch with an excellent view of the garden. Underneath the porch they had made an apartment where somebody could live. That child would have drowned if the guy living there hadn't pulled him out. So, that was something that we all took note of. The pool was both a danger as well as a pleasure. I very much envied their porch because my porch had not have a bit of view. It just looked onto their blank wall, and you could only see a little bit of the garden because the house went down to the garage. So the view from my porch was nil.

L: Didn't you also have gatherings? Neighborhood gatherings in the evening around the pool, or

KW: Oh yes. Well you see, in order to mange the situation with the children wanting to swim and the bad experience with the near drowning, we realized that there was a need for constant supervision which neither the Reads nor we wanted to undertake. Dallas was a career lady and I was interested in the garden or my art so I didn't want to be hanging around the pool all the time. We wanted to organize the neighborhood so our families could enjoy swimming without interruption on weekends and the neighborhood kids could swim under the supervision of a lifeguard on weekdays. Dallas organized the children into age groups, and we got a Boy Scout who was a good guy to be a lifeguard. The children's families paid a small fee to cover the lifeguard's salary and they came each week day at specified times by age group to swim and clean the pool each Friday.

Since this plan was such a success, at the end of the season we decided we could use all the families to help to shore up the pool, which was gradually sliding into the stream. The mud around it was all being washed away. We also wanted to build a small patio that went around the pool. Because there was no patio, the children would get muddy feet and then enter the pool, which got dirty in a hurry. There was also the problem with the roses and their atrocious thorns. One November, I shall never forget, we employed all these high-paid people in the government to come down and survey the problems. The roses were hiding a lot where there was big damage. So it really had to be shored up, and we had to put in a retaining wall.

Nick Read, who had great charm, and knew everybody, somehow connected with the B & O railroad company and asked them to drop some railroad ties down over the embankment. There was not too much bamboo there in those days. We had started planting, but they was only a little. Then we recruited all these government workers to set them in the streambed and build the retaining wall. In order to do this; they had to carry down numerous buckets of cement from the road. Meanwhile, Dallas and I fed them hamburgers as fast as we could. [Laughter] And I remember it was a rainy, gray day. The next day, none of our high-class workers could use their typewriters. Their hands were all so stiff and swollen from carrying down buckets of cement. [Laughter] But we saved the pool sliding into the creek.

Next, with the help of one of Pamela's friend's father, I would prune the roses back. And eventually we built it up so we could begin to get more of the patio. And I also had this marvelous—I had somehow gotten acquainted with Henry, a wonderful black man who was a gospel singer. He couldn't read, but he was so wonderful, and so strong. He knew all about plants and he could lay cement. He was so strong that he could take a

lead pipe and bend it to make it fit into whatever shape he wanted. Nick and I would go to the trash depot in Rockville where they had old tables. In fact, one of those tables still stands outside on my deck for which I paid two dollars 45 years ago. Anyhow, we got lead rods at this depot and used them to build a framework fence around the pool. Although there was a snow fence around the pool because it was illegal not to, but it needed more. And we did this with Henry's help. Henry also laid stones for the patio around the pool, put in the terraces on the stream banks, and helped with the retaining wall. Well that's quite a bit about the pool.

L: Kathleen, what about the town events? What was the town like when you first moved in, and do you remember some of the events that you went to? Get-togethers?

KW: Not really. I mean we were very much involved with our neighbors. But this—we were in section four I think. The town was very much built into sections, and you know the kids walked to school. But the office wasn't here. It was over somewhere in Chevy Chase. So really the town itself didn't play much of a part in those early days.

In those years we had so many friends within walking distance with kids the same ages as ours. The kids became acquainted either at the school, on the playground or through friends already made. In fact it was a wonderfully friendly neighborhood and just what David and I had been hoping for. Our friends included Jeanne and Burnie Davis, a fellow Rhodes Scholar who worked at NIH, and lived just around the corner on Leland Street. A little later the Hills arrived, Zita came from a very distinguished English family, her father was a Dean in the Church of England. He had known H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw and other far out characters such as Lady Warwick, a passionate suffragette. One summer we even met the old gentleman at the Hills house on Oakridge.

Then there was the intrepid Betty Smith, who lived in a very impressive house on Leland Street – and as my friend Jeanne Davis used to say had an equally impressive instant garden. The Davis also had an impressive garden in the back of their house very similar to ours but in their case the garden, with its fabulous azaleas planted by Burnie, was on a hill going up were as my garden was on a hill going down. As far as I can remember these friends were also part of our newly organized pool group supervised by Sonny Crawford.

Betty Smith and I ran a Cub Scout Troup together in her spacious basement, all beautifully fixed up. It was pretty strenuous dealing with a bunch of lively boys, which included by youngest son Michael and her youngest. Then we lit on the idea of doing a puppet show of The Cub Scout in the Wizard of Oz. Dallas Read was also involved

because her son Nash was to be the Tin Man. She knew another mother who lived on 44th Street who had a son the right age. That talented woman wrote our script. Therefore, her son took the title role of the Cub Scout, the only non-puppet role in the play. It was great fun, especially for me because I was in charge of helping the youngsters make their puppets. I always enjoyed the art projects. My son Michel was to be The Lion with No Courage. To make the puppet, we started with the cardboard center of a toilet paper roll, bought a dish mop with a wooden handle for his mane and to hold him up, and paper mache to make his muzzle. We had to paint Nash's Tin Man, which I recall was pretty glorious, too. We did the show one evening, in some public hall on the other side of Connecticut Avenue, for all of the adoring parents. It was considered an outstanding success. I may even still have that bright yellow lion with his tousled mane.

Betty's son had no sooner graduated Cub Scouts than she was into her most important project, first with school age kids then later with their mothers and others. Just when everybody was becoming more conscious of the need for exercise, Betty started having dance classes in her basement. She choreographed every exercise to appropriate music that was very culturally diverse. It was a delight to participate and I enjoyed it very much. The sad part was that when she had her stroke she had never instructed anyone else to carry on. I don't think she every understood how to share her considerable talents with others and a result we were all the losers.

L: What was the Elm Oakridge Lynn Association?

KW: Well that was something Dallas organized. Dallas organized that because of the railroad. I think that was the reason.

L: Where did the children go to school?

KW: Well they went to Rosemary Elementary School.

L: Which is Chevy Chase Elementary?

KW: Yes. Right.

L: And did they go to Leland?

KW: Oh yes.

L: For junior high did they go to Leland? That was right across the street.

KW: They went to Rosemary and then they went to junior high.

L: I believe the junior high was where the current town office is.

KW: Yes. Right. It was all along there. I remember helping in the cafeteria there. And the playground was where the tennis courts are now. But then there was an embankment with a high fence. I remember my son; my youngest Michael was a great one for basketball.

There were basketball hoops there and he and his friends would play basketball there twenty-hours a day, practically. Then they tore that down and built a huge, new junior high which faced Elm Street right opposite our house, but that was later.

L: And then they went on to BCC High School.

KW: Oh yes. Right. They all had different ways of getting there, crossing over the old B and O tracks down the road as well as other paths.

L: What was Wisconsin Avenue like in those days when you walked--?

KW: There was a wonderful little shopping center where that horrible big brown building is now. There was a little inlet that had a grocery, store with all sorts of expensive groceries. It was a privately owned place. The butcher would give Pamela bones for our dog. They had expensive canned goods that my son would buy. On the corner of the inlet and Wisconsin Avenue were Whittlesey's Drugstore and the Regional Stationery down near Leland Street, opposite the Regional Stationery, there was a handy little parking lot. I remember sometimes I would park there in such a hurry that I would leave my brake off and find myself rolling into the next car. [Chuckles] It was all very friendly. And then there was Highs on the other side of Leland where everybody could go after hours and get whatever they needed.

L: That's where the lamp store is now, right?

KW: That's right. On the corner of Wisconsin and Willow Lane there was the Woodward and Lothrop budget store. On the other corner of Willow Lane was the Farm Woman's Market. The Farm Woman's Market. was wonderful. I got to know all the people. I guess that was the first place I started buying plants, along with the Bush Nursery, come to think of it. Some of which I still have. And I still do, of course, buy herbs and other things.

L: Do you remember what some of the issues were that the town was concerned about? Or that you were concerned about in relation to the town in the earlier days?

KW: I'm trying to think. [Long pause] Well, I must confess that David may have been more involved. There was the PTA of course, but I don't think I attended. I can't have been a very conscientious parent. [Laughs]

L: Politics. The realm of politics is not your—

KW: No it was not. There was too much excitement going on right here with the B & O tracks, and the swimming pool, and the kids. Oh yes, and of course my neighbor was very political. A fellow traveler as David remarked many times. But I must confess, I thought it was great fun living in this area. I called it bohemia in suburbia, because they had all

sorts of people visiting. They gave great parties. We gave parties too on the bank of the swimming pool and so forth. Washington was a very lively place. Somehow or other the town was less prominent because there was much activity outside of it, you know in the general political arena. I think I would put it like that.

L: Do you remember Chevy Chase Lake.

KW: Oh yes. That's true. There was the Chevy Chase Lake. But I know there were all these sections, and there was a question of getting them united in some way. Of course, it was after my divorce I guess, that I was shocked to find found out how different the sections were. At the time, I was interested in possibly adding to my real estate, or looking at other houses. Going to Oakridge just across the way there, and inquiring about a place, and discovering their taxes were a thousand dollars more than ours was shocking. Later on, we claimed the land in the rear of the property, which was a no man's land. We claimed it and of course that added to our taxes. But our taxes were still less than taxes for the other sections, I think. But they should be, because ever since we've lived here we've had the problem of the railroad.

L: Why don't you talk about that a little bit?

KW: Well, of course it made a background, but there was always the question of what would happen to it. Dallas was very active and vocal about it. The question was--did we own the embankment on which we planted and put fences on? She organized the Elm Oakridge Lynn neighbors, and we had meetings about it. We also met over there in, at the 4-H Center on Connecticut Avenue where the town office was located for a while. There were meetings and more meetings of all kinds. I mean political and everything. But the town itself was not a major fact in those days. To me it wasn't. I was not part of it. But then I left all that to David. Of course he was busy with his own things.

L: Kathleen you've touched on the subject of the commercial area near where you live, and it's very different from today. Can you expand on that a little more?

KW: Oh yes. I mean, Community Hardware, where everybody took his/her household construction problems right at the end of the street—

L: Where they took their problems? [Laughter]

KW: Well they did. I mean, you know, the tap was leaking or they had mice in the basement. I mean anything. Or they couldn't make the toilet work, or who knows. Any problem you could take, somebody would know how to solve it in Community Paint and Hardware. And they had—the ground sloped down beside the railroad tracks, so you could always park. And they were the nicest and friendliest people. We were always were going to

Community Paint and Hardware. There was always something you needed. They had garden supplies. They had just about everything. So we were always going up there. At first, there was the little hamburger store by the bridge over the railroad tracks. They had the best hamburgers in town there.

L: And what about Hot Shoppes? Was Hot Shoppes there?

KW: The Hot Shoppe was up at the corner. And of course the family would go there; you know when we didn't want to cook.

L: Did you walk up?

KW: Well when you haven't got a car you had to. I remember going to the grocery that first spring, and it began to snow and all the bags began to get wet that we were carrying home. [Chuckling] What a dismal walk home that was. But in the spring we got a Nash Rambler, and that was wonderful. But I had to learn to drive again. I'd learned to drive—my family said I didn't have the temperament to drive before I was married, so I never learned to drive in England. But when I was in Columbus I'd learned to drive. But then in London we didn't have a car again, so when five years went by so I had to learn all over again. But we had this lovely man, a friend of the Reeds, who taught me. You know, he took me out and got me through my driver's test. That was up in Kensington. And of course that road which is all so slick now, was just a country road really. Kensington was nothing but a little village sort of thing. It was a different—it was very rural. Let's put it that way.

L: Were there farms in that area? Or was that area up North of Chevy Chase?

KW: No, not exactly. But I mean the roads were just two lane highways. The pike going out to Rockville was tedious to say the least, but it was still only two lanes then. Can you imagine?

L: I guess the traffic problem isn't the way it is now.

KW: [Laughs] Well, I guess it was sometimes or they wouldn't have enlarged it. But it was very different. But we never went to Rockville really.

L: Were you able to find everything around here that you needed?

KW: Well more or less, except Group Health which we belonged to we had to go downtown to. And there were trams of course. And it was a day's expedition getting downtown. [Chuckles]

L: Where would you take the tram? Where would you catch the tram?

KW: Well, first you'd have to take a bus to get to the District line. That's where the tram stopped. Now, on the other side on Chevy Chase, but then you couldn't get there, because

there was no way unless you took a taxi to get to Chevy Chase. Once you had a car, then you could get there and then it was a bus downtown. Otherwise the only way to get downtown was by tram, by the streetcar or a bus through Georgetown.

L: Now you remembered a little bit about your neighbors. Would you like to tell us about the neighbors you were remembering? The stories?

KW: Oh yes. Well my neighbor Eunice Harvey whose child nearly drowned in the pool, introduced me to the ceramic guild, and for which I was duly grateful because I'd always loved clay, so that was wonderful. That made it for me. That and—we had a little studio on the outside of town near Edgemore Road, one of those tree-lined streets, in a house owned by one of the members.

That was where I did my portrait of Pamela. She was twelve at the time. And I was very keen on the French artist whose name I think was Despiare. He did a lot of portraits and was much en vogue. While in London, I had worked quite hard at an art school and at the Anglo-French Art Center. So I was dying to get back to work. I mean that's why I think I paid so little attention to the other things, because I was really involved with my work and the portrait.

Pamela was in the car with me one day and the lights, as you well know, right opposite where the police station is—well I was so excited about having my sitter with me, and getting to the studio—I guess it was a weekend. It might not have been. Anyway, I went right through the light and immediately a cop came up and stopped me, because I had no money or anything. And Pamela of course, poor little Pamela was quite disturbed, but of course we were right here, so she just walked home. But he took me into his office and, you know questioned me quite a bit. Well in those days I was quite good looking, and I think this was why. [Chuckles] Finally he called up David, and David had to come and bail me out. But I remember it was really quite amusing. At least it was a good story afterwards.

L: So he held you in his office to talk to you? To keep you?

KW: Yes. I think so. [Laughter] At least that's what David said, that he would have enjoyed making a date. Maybe he would have gotten to it if David hadn't arrived. [Laughs]

L: Kathleen, after the studio in Edgemore, the ceramic guild also had a studio here very close to you on Oakridge.

KW: That opened considerably later really. I mean the guild met at people's homes, and they worked at home for quite a while. It was only after Lucy was divorced that she began working for the Unitarian Church and set up the studio.

L: This is Lucy Collins?

KW: Lucy Collins owned the house on Oakridge Lane and turned the basement into a studio. We would buy chemicals as a group and pooled our money to buy a big kiln and so forth. And that's when we began to have classes. We invited people to teach, including Sue Nelson and Pietro Lazzari. Pamela used to baby sit. She took care of Sue's kids and babysat for various other people in the neighborhood. She was a great babysitter.

L: What was going on in your life at that point? You were going back and getting your license to teach?

KW: The kids were teenagers when that happened. And of course none of my family had ever worked. They'd always had servants—in fact to this day. Non-U to have to work. Since all three of our children were planning to go to college, David kept saying, "I think it's time you did something." I rather resented this really, because I wanted to do my thing. But I guess eventually I saw the light and in order to teach I had to go back to school to get my education credits. I went to American University.

Before I got my education credits, I took my job working with disturbed kids at the Children's Center on Nebraska Avenue. I made a miserable salary, and it was the most hair-raising job I've ever had in my entire life. [Laughter] With these kids, you couldn't turn your back on them or they'd set fire to something, or push you into the wall. I mean it was really incredible. But the worst of all, at the end I foolishly agreed to go on a camping trip with them. It was a nightmare and really nearly finished me off. Somehow, I managed to remain sane.

Part of the problem was that I had had no real training. I mean if you have training, you could separate yourself from some of these things. But it was really an extraordinary experience. It was an exaggeration of all human behaviors. It was like putting a magnifying glass on it. So it did enable me to understand what went on in some of these bizarre cases. It was interesting. But after that, whenever I saw kids on the street I'd say, "Thank God they're normal." I'll never forget it.

KW: My next teaching experiences were not that good either. Once I got my license I taught for two years in North Bethesda in a junior high, and that was pretty much of a nightmare too. Although I enjoyed the art classes, we had a period of the day when I was in charge of a homeroom. These little bastards would think of everything that they could to make life difficult. The cafeteria was noisy. When the years came to an end, I couldn't wait for it to end. The art supervisor realized that I was not exactly material for junior high discipline, so I was let go and not given tenure. David was terribly upset.

L: Tenure. You don't have tenure.

KW: Tenure. That's the word. So I was let go. Then I taught a year in private school, which I enjoyed. However, I couldn't teach sculpture which I knew, but instead had to teach painting, which I really didn't feel so competent to teach. The prior teacher had them all doing modern art. Everyone was painting stripes. Something like that. [Laughter] But anyway, it was a private school. It was Mount Vernon Junior College so it was all very elegant. Being an educator I didn't think that kids naturally moved like that unless they were exceptional. I mean if you're teaching painting you set up a still life or something. However, they had to raise money because it was a private school. And of course the teacher before had them doing these spectacular paintings. Many people turn to that school as a great art center or something, so I was let go from that school too. So having two classic failures was not exactly a good reputation to continue in teaching.

Anyway, after that I taught at North Bethesda Elementary School with 2nd-6th graders in the after-school PTA program. I loved it, and the kids loved it. We did all sorts of gorgeous things. After that period I got divorced, so then I had to get a real job. While the PTA had paid me, it was not enough. Finally, I got a job in the District, and from then on I taught at the elementary school level and I was perfectly happy and very successful, despite being a white teacher in a predominantly black school system.

L: How many years did you teach?

KW: I think it was fourteen all together--something like that. And I loved every minute of it and it gave me a pension. It was so wonderful to make my own money at last, you know, be a career person, which I'd always really wanted to be and not just a little housewife.

L: Kathleen, when did the Torpedo Factory come into your life?

KW: Oh much, much later after I retired. I used to go and visit it with my friends and I found it very exciting. But I didn't think of joining it until my sculpture group and the ceramic Guild got involved. We all joined it together. Although I was part of a special sculpture group at that time I was beginning to do different things, stitcheries and jewelry. One of the studios, the Fiberworks, needed somebody, so I joined them. .

L: So they steered you more towards jewelry?

KW: No, not really, I realized that, as I was growing older, I couldn't heave great lumps of clay around forever seeing it's very heavy, and you're on your feet all the time. So, I decided it would be nice to sit down and I'd learned a number of exciting new techniques. One of the things I'd always enjoyed very much is color. While I know there

is color in sculpture, it's not as immediate as when you're playing with threads and beads. So this was another opportunity to do that. That's what happened really.

L: Why don't you describe your work, Kathleen? I know you're doing a book. You might want to mention that, but also just talk about the kind of work you do because it's very unusual.

KW: Well, it's putting together things. As a youngster in England, I was always searching for interesting objects. We had a summerhouse in Sherringham on the Northern Coast, near the beach. Although there were no shells on that beach, and there was sand and shingle and lots of pebbles. I used to spend hours searching the beach because you were supposed to be able to find both amber and carnelian. Well I don't think I ever found either, but I found lots of other things. [Laughs], and the search was always fun.

On this beach, we had sand, a strip of pebbles and below that shallow chalk rocks with saltwater pools and seaweed and jellyfish as well as all sorts of little animals and plants. We would have lots of fun as kids because we were a big family. We would build little villages, using the chalk to whitewash the walls and the pebbles and seaweed to decorate the gardens.

On this same beach, I made my first sculpture, a life-size sculpture in bas-relief, because the sand was firm and you could model it quite well. So really I got my first experience looking for found objects and sculpture on that beach in Sherringham on the Northern Coast. And really and truly what I do now really echoes of all those things that I discovered and sort of played with in my imagination growing up. I mean when you look back you can find it's like a necklace, all your memories and thoughts and so forth.

L: What's the name of the book that you just finished?

KW: It is called "Wearable Magic," and I have just sold out of the first edition and am now preparing for the second edition.

L: But it's wonderful jewelry. I mean it's really—

KW: Well it's wearable. It's wearable art. But it's not the conventional wearable art. In fact, in the show I had last March, I made some big pieces, really big pieces. One of them uses a piece of orange nylon rope, I found on the shoreline at Cape Cod. I used the strands of this rope in different ways to make a mermaid's necklace. This is now at the torpedo factory no less, with a cluster of objects--all kinds that land on the tide line on the high water mark.

L: Kathleen, maybe in summation of your early life. I have a question. What's your earliest memory?

KW: Leaving the first house. I'm sitting in the back of the car, and the luggage is all around me. We're moving just about a block actually, down the road to the second house.

L: About what year was that?

KW: Well I was two.

L: 1913.

KW: I suppose so, yes. That was my earliest memory.

L: Can you talk a little bit about your pen pal relationship with David, your future husband?

KW: Oh yes. It was at Bedales. I was a senior. I guess sixteen--maybe not, maybe fifteen. Anyway, we were in the English class, which closed at 1:00 p.m. when we would go down for the midday meal. And just before, it was Major Crump and he was the senior English teacher, and he threw on his desk a bunch of postcards, and said, "Well if any of you are interested in a foreign correspondent, here's your chance." And he walked out and left us to it.

Well I wasn't that interested but I thought I'd just have a look. So I went up and saw these pictures, and there was a mountain there that looked very much—and I thought, "Is that Mount Fujiama?" And I picked it up and looked at it, but it had a town underneath. And I thought, "I don't think in Giama there's a town right under it." And then I looked and it said Portland, Oregon. Where in the world is that? Our geography was not very good I might say. I knew nothing about America. So then I turned it over, and there was this bold—the back sloping writing that you could read very easily but you know sort of unusual. And it began, "I'm a pleasant person," or something like that, and "I'm interested in corresponding with a foreign student in another country." Then on the second line, I think he said, "And I'm a pleasant kind of person and would like more information." That was the gist of it. And I thought to myself how intelligent describing a little bit about the personality. Because otherwise it's so bland and you don't get anything, and I really will answer this. And I picked it up and answered it. And that was David.

But of course that didn't happen right away. We wrote a number of letters. But he didn't understand me, and I didn't really understand him. I remember I had two pigtails at the time. I was thoroughly overweight, and plain. And I remember drawing a little picture of myself in the margin of one of my letters. But also, I couldn't understand a lot of the stuff he was saying. He said he couldn't understand a lot of the—

I was about to take what I called my school certificate. That later became matriculation. But anyway, our correspondence didn't last all that long. Finally, I was at

the London School of Economics years later—I'd asked to go there because I'd been two years at art school. The art school was not telling me why the hunger marchers were walking down South Hampton Row. There was poverty everywhere, unemployment, and so forth. The dollar was big news. And I wanted to know why this was all happening. So finally I said to my parents, "I can't stay in art school with all this going on. History ended in school with the end of the last century. I know nothing. Why is this happening?" So I went to the London school.

I was doing my practical work associated with the work I was doing, and a postcard arrived at the Settlement House, and I turned it over, and I recognized the handwriting. It had been forwarded from my old school. I recognized it immediately. And this time we got together. It didn't blossom right away, but we got together. And it was at his mother's urging. [Laughs]

L: He came to England, right?

KW: Yes. That's right. He was then a Rhodes scholar, and so he'd come to England. And he'd been at Oxford for two years, or at least a year. And finally at his mother's urging he decided to look me up.

L: And you were married in what year?

KW: Oh, considerably later, we met again in 1934. But I visited him in New York one summer and then the next summer we got married. And then I went back to Columbus as a bride in the fall of 1937.

L: Some wonderful stories. That's a wonderful story. Kathleen, this has been a treat, and it will be a treat for everyone who listens to it.

KW: Well, I don't know.

L: Well it was wonderful to hear your stories, and I think you enlightened us as to how the neighborhood felt to you years ago, and we're most appreciative. We thank you on behalf of the town, your neighborhood and the community.

KW: The sad thing is you spent too much time on things that aren't important. Don't you? I mean well what is important? How do you know?

END OF INTERVIEW