

Interview with Mier Wolf
The Town of Chevy Chase Oral History Project
Interviewed by Nancy Lemann on March 7, 2004

LEMANN: This is Nancy Lemann interviewing Mier Wolf on March 7, 2004. First we're going to do your background before we get to Chevy Chase, although you have such an encyclopedic knowledge of Chevy Chase. But anyway, so where and when were you born?

WOLF: I was born in Austin, Minnesota on June 21, 1940. And that's where I basically grew up my first eighteen years. I went to the public schools there.

NL: And then did you go to college there?

MW: I went to the University of Michigan for a year. I transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, from which I have a Bachelor of Arts degree. And then I took a Masters in Business Administration at the University of Chicago, so I was in Chicago for two years. Then I worked for several years, went back to school in New York, and went to St. John's University Law School in Brooklyn while I worked for a senator to the state legislature, who represented most of Manhattan.

NL: When did you first come to Chevy Chase, or Washington?

MW: Cathy and I—I met my wife, Cathy Wolf, in New York. We were both working. Cathy's from New Orleans as you know. We got married in New York in 1969, and after I finished law school we decided to move to Washington. We agreed it would be a good city to live in. We knew people in Washington, and we thought with my law degree and Cathy's public relations background, we could find jobs.

NL: Did you come right to this area—this neighborhood?

MW: No. In 1970 we moved to northwest Washington. We lived on Connecticut Avenue across from the Sheraton Park Hotel. I think it was 2700 Connecticut Avenue, in an old apartment house with high ceilings. It was kind of funny because we lived in the Village in New York before that and we moved from a one room studio apartment to a two bedroom, good-sized apartment on Connecticut Avenue.

NL: Is it still there? That building?

MW: The building is still there. And the only reason we moved was our son Matthew was born, and it reminded us that we would need more space as a family. And then we went to look for a house where we would have some more space, and we checked out communities and came to Chevy Chase.

NL: Really? So what year was that?

MW: 1972.

NL: Did you have to decide between Maryland and Virginia? Or did you not think--?

MW: No, because I felt that we should live in Maryland. At the time, it was probably a lack of knowledge on my part, but I felt there were more Jewish people in Maryland, and I thought I would want to live in Maryland for that reason. Plus, if we lived in Maryland, we wouldn't have to cross the bridges so we only looked at Maryland. We put a bid in on a house in Potomac, fortunately which we backed out of because, in the end, it was so far out of the city, and we were commuting into work.

Cathy worked at the National Archives, and I then was working in a small law firm. But the commute seemed like it would be impossible from Potomac. And I don't have the greatest sense of direction. There was some concern that I could make it out of Potomac once, but would never find my way back. So we backed out of the contract, found a different real estate agent who was more oriented to a closer-in community, and she found us a house on Lynn Drive.

NL: So it's the same house that you're in now?

MW: Yes. We've been in this house for, I guess thirty-one or thirty-two years.

NL: And Bethesda was completely different then, right?

MW: Bethesda was completely different. Well it's grown exponentially since we moved into this area. When we first moved into the area when you walked to Elm Street Park and up Wisconsin Avenue, there was a Woolworth's and a little toy store called Lowens. It was never charming, but it was kind of quaint. It was a real neighborhood institution.

NL: That little circle of shops is something that others I've done interviews with have been pining for?

MW: That's right. You probably have heard that from people where Modell's Sports shop is now and where the Mongolian Grill Restaurant and all that—

NL: Yeah. It's a big black skyscraper now. It used to be a little arcade where the ladies would—

NL: But is this a good thing, all those changes?

MW: Well, it's a mix. Change I think is something that needs some analysis instead of just one impression, good or bad. Because Bethesda is so interesting now in terms of the availability of restaurants and movie theaters and book stores. It's just a

whole world, and it's a--from our house a twelve minute walk. I feel like I'm in heaven. The thing that's sad is that there is a lot of history that gets lost because old shops—when you know the entrepreneurs or the business people, and that changes, it's sad.

NL: And what about overcrowding? Parking problems? Traffic problems?

MW: Well all of that, if we so choose, we can have less of if you are a walker like I am. I walk to metro everyday. I am a walking commuter. I walk up to Bethesda. I have been very active in opening and maintaining the Capitol Crescent Trail. It's one of my volunteer projects. In fact I, among various people, received an award for working so hard on the trail. And as you might know, it goes from Bethesda to Silver Spring, but also goes from Bethesda to Georgetown. Well, I am thrilled to go out there and walk as an option, particularly between Bethesda and Silver Spring. It's an amenity that is wonderful for a near-in community. And I think—you know you mentioned the traffic and the difficulties of Bethesda. I understand that, but still I feel like our town is a great refuge. I love coming home—from work every day. We have beautiful trees. We have nice houses. We have nice neighbors. We have walk-ability, as I mentioned, to interesting things, and I can take metro to work.

NL: So the changes in Bethesda though, all happened around the metro coming in?

MW: I think that's probably true. In the mid-1970s would be my guess that a lot of change occurred. There are a lot of disappointments in that change because there were other amenities, particularly artistic ones, of more interest in Bethesda that never got properly done.

NL: What do you mean?

MW: Well, one example is the Residence Inn, which is on Waverly Place. There's a little courtyard that has some artwork in there that is now fenced off and is so inaccessible from Wisconsin Avenue, yet it was supposed to be a part of anyone's experience on the street. And there are a number of those type art projects in Bethesda that haven't come to life or been the success that they should be for the residents.

NL: Before, when Bethesda was the old Bethesda, you would still walk there and hang out there and stuff?

MW: We did. The toy store Lowens was a real neighborhood hangout. It was where we bought all the kids birthday gifts for birthday parties, that sort of a thing. I think that we had a different use of Bethesda before it changed. I think it was a good one because of the toy store and several shops. But now, for me personally, it's meant a lot to me to have book stores—I'm not big on chain book stores, but I do go in and browse.

But then I try to patronize independent bookstores in D.C. because I don't want independent bookstores to be lost. I think the change has basically been good. It's a struggle to maintain certain things though. Sense of community is always something that takes work to keep or you might lose it because people are busy and working so hard. But I think that overall the change—well, an indication of the important changes is that our neighborhood is in so much demand. Everybody wants to move into our neighborhood because we're near Metro. We're drivable to work. We're walkable to restaurants and amenities. We have fabulous public schools, and that's part of the change.

Our schools have been renovated completely. Chevy Chase Elementary, Bethesda Chevy Chase High School, are basically new schools. Westland was renovated maybe seven or eight years ago, and Rosemary Hills has always been kept up pretty well. So within the change there are good things, which is important to remember. Some people say, "wow, the traffic is terrible," and "isn't that too bad."

And also there's a concern about mansionization. The houses, nice old houses in some cases, and not such nice old houses, were taken down. But I believe that the change for the most part has been beneficial to residents who live in the town.

NL: Well now, over the umbrella of Chevy Chase, there's the town, the village, Martin's addition, and section—

MW: Sections three and five on the East side of Connecticut Avenue, and then of course there's Somerset which is Dorset Avenue off Wisconsin Avenue, which is another incorporated Chevy Chase town. My guess is that there are probably six or seven incorporated, chartered towns in Chevy Chase maybe including fifteen thousand people and we are the largest within that group.

NL: The town?

MW: The town is the largest out of the Chevy Chases, considerably larger.

NL: Really? Is that a new thing with all the growth?

MW: No, it's really borders. It's just geographically and population-wise —bigger than the other communities.

NL: The borders which are Bradley, Rosemary, Connecticut and Wisconsin?

MW: That's right. With a thousand thirty-two households. And The Village has seven hundred households. I think Somerset has six hundred households.

NL: And what are the boundaries of The Village?

MW: The approximate boundaries of the Village are Wisconsin Avenue on the west, Brookville Road on the east, Bradley Lane on the north and Chevy Chase Circle on the south.

NL: Is that far?

MW: Yes. It goes further east than people realize, yet they have fewer houses than we have.

NL: Because they have bigger houses?

MW: In part I think that's true, although the houses that are east of Brookville are similar to our houses.

NL: But The Village and also Martin's addition are like, more ritzy than the town originally--but now the town is getting extremely—I mean, I have the worlds most expensive bungalow, for example.

MW: [Laughs] I don't know about that. But I think the town—

NL: Is getting, as you said, really sought after.

MW: It's very sought after, and it's sought after for a lot of reasons. Which I think is very good for the town in terms of people wanting to go to a place where there are nice houses where the town is well maintained. I would like to think because our town services are so good that our reputation gets out as being a great place to live. The streets are well kept. The trees are pruned. The schools are very good. We're close to Metro, and the neighbors are neighborly. It's a kind of a town where you can be good neighbors yet give people privacy. I think people like the balance of a community, but don't feel overrun by neighbors, but you can be good neighbors and enjoy each other. It's kind of an understanding.

NL: It's all quite Norman Rockwellish here.

MW: I think maybe in good ways. I mean I'm from a little town, and when we moved to this town, when our kids were growing up, I actively worked on creating more

of a Norman Rockwell like experience. Because I think kids should have it. I don't mean in terms of social values necessarily, but in terms of the feel of the community. And so for instance, I started the—I'll be self-promoting here of course—

But, I did start the Town chili dinner. You know, we have three hundred people who would come to dinner in February. So we do have town sponsored activities. Then we have programming in the Town Hall that Belinda Wilborn and I plan every year. And we try to serve all age groups and interests. And I think that's Norman Rockwell like. But mixed with Norman Rockwell, and what I like about the town so much, is that our schools are well integrated and children are raised with the social understanding of a mixture of economic levels and cultural understandings and experiences in the world. So that when our kids leave here, I feel that they have a well-balanced experience with Norman Rockwell aspects.

NL: That's a compliment by the way. Norman Rockwell like.

MW: Right. I feel that way too. But on the other hand, I do think in terms of anything too either exclusive or isolated the town isn't that way because the schools are mixed with different groups. There are ninety foreign languages spoken in Montgomery County schools. I didn't know that there were ninety foreign languages. But I think it's dialects in different countries.

NL: So did you become a community activist the minute you moved here?

MW: No. What happened was, I'm an attorney by day at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD. And at a certain point I was doing a lot of litigation for HUD. And I changed jobs within HUD and I moved from trial work and travel. At a certain point I made this move to being a legal adviser to a HUD grant program - Urban Development Action Grant Program. And when I did that I said to Cathy, you know, I travel so much and I don't like traveling more and I don't want litigation to be my whole career so kind of a family joke was, "uh oh. Dad's coming home now, we're going to be seeing more of him." So that's what happened. When I ended the travel and I was looking around I knew that I could be a community volunteer, so I thought, "well—" I put my toe in the water by going on the PTA at Rosemary Hills Primary School and I had a friend on that town PTA whose name was Jane Lawton, became my political mentor. And she was on the town council then. And at the end of my

several months on that PTA board Jane came to me and said one of the council members would like to give up her seat and doesn't want to run. Her name is Anne Bushart. She was great woman in our town history. But she didn't want to give it up unless somebody who she respected and knew would do the work would come on the council. So Jane asked me if I would meet Anne and run for the council. And I met with Jane and Anne and I ran for the council and I won and that was twenty years ago. And the rest is sort of history in that there's so much that's gone on in the twenty years of being on the town council and I've been mayor off and on. The mayor is selected by the council.

NL: So how long have you been mayor for?

MW: Well, I was the chairman of the council from 1991 to 1995. In 1995 they changed the title from chairman of the town to mayor. And I was the first mayor of the town from 1995 – 1998. And the idea of creating the position of mayor was that it seemed to the council that a town mayor would have more credibility before county council and state legislative bodies when you went to testify before them concerning municipal issues. And also the town's people would enjoy having a mayor. And so I thought to myself, "this is great. It wasn't my idea but—"

NL: So you've been mayor for like over ten years?

MW: I was mayor from 1995 – 1998 and I have been mayor for the past two years, from 2002 to 2004—well, you're right. Including being council chairman from 1991 – 1995, I have led the council for nine to my twenty years of council service.

NL: So how many city council members are there?

MW: There are five town council members.

NL: And mayor and then the staff. How big is the staff?

MW: Well, we have a staff of seven - town manger, town clerk, constituent services aide, management assistant, code enforcement officer and two maintenance men. The office for the maintenance men is in the Town garage located on the grounds of the National 4-H Center. In fact, when I first joined the council for my first years on the council, we used to have our Town Hall on the grounds of the 4-H Center until the Leland Center was renovaded or built. The Leland Middle School—

NL: You mean where the Leland Center is now?

MW: That's right. This was a middle school. It was closed. My wife Cathy and others led the effort to build a recreation center—

NL: Why was the school closed?

MW: Because it was a time school busing and distribution of school populations was involved and the school closed and the county wanted our middle school to go over to what was then called Western Middle School, which is now Westland. It had to do with, I believe, mostly with busing issues. It got to be also there were efficiency questions with Leland. I mean the school was an enormous white elephant in a way so that the combination of busing, low enrollment and building disrepair caused it to be closed. We had a lot of movement of school boundaries in the 1970s.

NL: So this whole complex was built when?

MW: This whole complex was originally built in—I'd have to go take a look outside at the plaques. I don't know. I think it was built in 1989 and then the town hall was built in 1997. After the Leland Center was built, we moved the town offices from the 4-H Center to the Leland Center. Our offices didn't have a town hall and we had all this extra programming we wanted to do. So we went to the county executive Doug Duncan and said, "You know, when we built the Leland Center, we didn't know that there would be such a demand for county and town programming and now we need more space." It's kind of like victims of their own success or something. And we said, "by the way county, when we raised funds for this project. The project came in under cost.

NL: That's unheard of.

MW: It was unheard of. It came in under cost. We asked the county executive to let us use the funds that weren't expended to build the town hall. That is a transaction I negotiated with the county, including the county executive, Doug Duncan, who's been very helpful to us. And he's been in office for quite a while, too. The financing of this Leland Center was the idea of Bill Wildhack, the chairman of our council in 1989. Bill's idea was if the county wasn't going to do a bond issuance, the town could do a bond issuance. The town has authority to issue bonds. We had never used it before. And Bill said, "Why don't we issue bonds. If the county will agree to become our tenants, and the county will pay the town the amount of the bond principal and interest as tenants, and that way the county

would only have to pay maybe fifty or a hundred a thousand dollars a year for a certain number of years to pay off the center instead of going through a bond issuance itself.” It was an absolutely wonderful, brilliant town/county teamwork idea. The county went for it, and the bonds have been paid off. When there were—when the project came in under cost, the county could have well said, “Well why don’t we the county just give that money to the bond holders and reduce the amount of the outstanding bond issuance?” And we said, “No. We need more space. Let us use the project coming in under cost to build the town hall.” And that’s what happened.

NL: Do the Village and the Martin’s Addition have elaborate seats of government also the way the town does?

MW: Well, Martin’s Addition does not I believe. The Village has just redone its town hall, and maybe they did it because of—I mean you do set a good example. I think they just made a—put in a great expenditure to redo their town hall. And theirs is a social hall as well.

NL: But they don’t have a playground.

MW: They don’t have outdoor facilities there, but they have done a major interior redevelopment there. I am glad we have this wonderful green space in town. Our playground and tennis courts are real assets to the town.

NL: I like that there’s a pathological rivalry between the Town and the Village because it just makes things more spicy and exiting.

MW: But you know what’s funny though? It isn’t. I have never felt that. It’s been—it’s kind of odd to say, but we always felt in the Town, well the ones in the Village are the ones who are really well off. But I mean, who are we kidding? When you think of America and the world as to who’s well off and who isn’t, our Town residents are very well off. And it’s just our quiet little joke that maybe there’s a town south of us, and maybe they have bigger houses and more income, but in the world of who has things and who doesn’t, our townspeople are in the group of people who have.

NL: Well you know, I mean I haven’t priced the houses down there, but like I said I live in the world’s most expensive bungalow, I can’t imagine that the houses there are much are much more expensive than here at this point. Real estate here has skyrocketed, wouldn’t you say?

MW: Well it has, but it has skyrocketed there too. And it skyrocketed there because they have some big old houses that were summerhouses for well-to-do Washingtonians that have now been converted to year-round houses. And the architecture and the size—I mean what you should do is go to the Chevy Chase Historic Society supper, which is April 18th. They do it at an old house every year. If fact, if Cathy and I are in town and go this year, come with us.

NL: Will you remind me?

MW: Yeah. I will remind you. It's an interesting thing to do. First of all it's kind of surprising who lives in these towns.

NL: Yeah. Who lives here?

MW: Well you know there are fewer well-known people who live in the towns than you would think, because the towns are well-known. But occasionally you run into people who you didn't know are here. Like in our town Eric Severeid, the news commentator, lived in our town. And he used to go to CCRA to swim. And I used to think to myself, "Oh my gosh." Now Eric Severeid wouldn't mean anything to younger generations here, but he was one of the kings of early media people--that sort of a thing.

NL: Yeah well, and Mike Kingsley lived on my street, Ridgewood Avenue.

MW: That's right. I didn't know him. I just saw him run by. Also, Marvin Kalb used to run the other side of Connecticut Avenue, and you know, Chris Matthews and Kathleen Matthews, TV people, live on the other side of Connecticut Avenue, so you would run into them on occasion. George Will lives in the Village. I once was in a barbershop and he was in there with one of his kids. And he sat there reading and underlining things in yellow. And I felt like—you know I look around for some current magazine or something. A lot of these real achievers are there; even at the barber shop with kids crawling around he was underlining something in yellow. I mean, I don't know.

NL: And Tommy Boggs.

MW: Tommy Boggs lives in—I just saw him. I don't know him, but I just met him at something. I think he just moved into his mother's house, which is out—what is it? I guess it's out—Bradley. But it's the house he grew up in. It's Bethesda.

NL: I thought he was in the Village. Or maybe he just moved from the Village.

MW: He may have moved from, but that's where he lives now I believe. It's either he or his sister, you know Cokie Roberts. One of the two of them. But I think he told me that he'd moved into that house.

NL: Is the Village historical society in that little complex there, or is that with the whole Chevy Chase Historical Society?

MW: They're with the Chevy Chase Historical Society, and they're leaders in creating historical society. It's mostly Village, although Julie Thomas, our town resident on Ridge Street, has just been wonderful. She's been our most active Town history person. She continues—she found the photographs that you see in our Town office, and you can see more of them now at Chevy Chase Library.

NL: Yeah, I really have to—I have so many things on my list to do like that. To go there—I just can't seem to—it's not even kids. It's me.

MW: Right, but you know what? You'll get around to it. It's nice to have that list. It's kind of like a to-do list. And I still do. It's kind of funny. Being on the town council all these years, you would think that I would be ready to point out—you know I've been involved in so many projects, and we can talk about it, but I still have the dream. I mean there are all these other things that I would like to work on in the future. I mean I'm wearing this BCC High School sweatshirt today because although my children, as I told you, are thirty-two and twenty-eight years old and went to that school, the head of the school foundation, the volunteers, came to me in the last year and a half and asked if I would go back and serve on the foundation. And I thought that was nice. His name is Matt Gandal. He's thirty-five. I know his family very well. I thought, "Well, if he wants a more intergenerational foundation for them and he knows I'm an active volunteer so I've gone back in to it."

NL: Would you consider retiring from your day job and devoting yourself full time to all of this?

MW: Well, that probably is what will happen. I qualify to retire and I'm thinking about it and it will happen in the next year or two. And when I retire it's probably what I will do. Beside the Town council, I am on a number of boards in the county. I'm active in the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the Friends of the Library and the Board of Writer's Center, as you know. So it's something that I might do. But I might also try to figure out a board like the Board of Appeals or the Planning

Board or something to see if I'd want to try to get appointed to one of the boards to organize myself better. To say that there's one activity that I'd like to go to once a week.

NL: Is the Writers Center one of your babies?

MW: Oh yes. I've been on that board for ten years.

NL: And when did that start?

MW: Well, it's kind of funny the way it started. I went over to welcome them because they moved from Old Georgetown Road to where they are now on Leland St. and the guru and the originator of the Writers Center Al Lefcowitz, when I went over he said, "oh my gosh. I heard that if we could put you on our board it would be a wonderful thing." I just went over to say hello. And the rest is history.

NL: What's their program? Do they have full time courses?

MW: Full time fiction, non-fiction, poetry and screen writing courses and they have a small theater as well. But they don't run it but they rent it out.

NL: Do they have a library?

MW: Well, they have more of a small book gallery. Which is a bookstore of sorts. It's interesting because it's got these literary reviews in it, which still exist, which is reassuring. It's kind of fun to go and look at those.

NL: How many classes do they teach in there, do you know?

MW: They probably teach—no I don't know. But they also, because we teach them not all in Bethesda but in Arlington and in a couple of other places where the courses are given. And then we have readings. I'm going to a reading tonight.

NL: Is that the Howard Norman?

MW: Tonight at 7:00 he's reading some non-fiction he's written. I think he's a wonderful novelist.

NL: He lives in the Town?

MW: No he doesn't. He lives in Northwest D.C. actually. But in terms of the Writers Center as a resource it's within two blocks of the Town. Go over there and take a course or go there and read. It's just become one of my activities. I think in terms of the Town, and I know you're going to ask me this. I like to just jump into it, of the projects that I'm involved in, I think the Leland Center is the most important because it really saved such good parts of the Town. I don't know what else would have been on this land but as a matter of fact our Town Hall, the Town

Office, the recreation center, daycare center and all the outdoor activities is a terrific plan. Really a blessing. Blessing is kind of overused these days. But it's a blessing to have these resources. And when I come up here and I'm with my daughter, I took dance lessons at the Leland Center with my daughter because her boyfriend didn't want to do it and so we took the lessons. As we were leaving I said, "Joanna, you know everything is full," as we left. And she said, "Daddy, you always say that as you leave here." Well, if you go back to the council who worked on it, including me, this is so tangible to see this in use. It's just a wonderful experience. You know your workday, you as a writer can be writing, the value of writing we know. In my daytime work world I deal with urban problems but I'm not on the urban streets. I'm in an office. To walk by something you worked so hard to get built and see people in it is a joy.

NL: Yeah, well, I don't think it was accurate when you said that you and your wife just tried to step back and stay away from the pace and everything because it's like you've accomplished so much here. You're a part of that hectic pace that I'm talking about. The amount of stuff you do.

MW: I think it's true but not true.

NL: It is true.

MW: Well, maybe it is true. Let me tell you the place where it isn't true. The place where it isn't true is, a lot of my adult life—it's sort of a family understanding that I am miserable in anything mechanical. So I have not raked my yard, I don't have a stamp collection, I don't watch a lot of television, my personal hobbies—

NL: Well, obviously, you're banishing what is unimportant and unconstructive and you're just focusing on what is important and constructive so—

MW: Yeah. It's funny you say that. I think you're right. And I think Cathy would probably agree with you. Her statement about me is, "Mier never saw a meeting he didn't want to attend." Because I've gone to hundreds of meetings for different reasons but so much of it has felt productive and good that it didn't feel like a chore but something good to do. I feel frenzy if there's something I have to do and I don't particularly like it but I know I'm supposed to do it. I feel more tension than if it's something I'm normally inclined to work on.

NL: Well, what are your other proudest accomplishments in the town here?

MW: I have to say, working with other people, and it's always with other people, but I have pride in certain things. Working on the Capital Crescent Trail has been incredible. I was on the citizen group that opened the trail between the Bethesda and Silver Spring. I was also, along with another town resident, the leader in getting the tunnel open under Wisconsin Avenue, which is very important for the trail. So that I would say the Leland Center, the Capital Crescent Trail, those are major things. You know I have something more recent that's important to me because it is recent and that is that I helped raise the funds for the new Cyber Café at BCC High School, which is a great place. The Café has twenty computers, coffee and student art. Really the reason B-CC wanted me on the foundation I think was to help them with this project. There was a feeling in the school that there wasn't an even playing field for some of the Silver Spring kids who economically didn't have computers at home or printers, that sort of thing. So there needed to be more opportunity at school computer-wise, than existed at school. So we built it and anybody can use it but our Silver Spring kids are coming to use it so it's a successful mix. Well, one of the Chevy Chase kids said to me, "Why did they build the Cyber Café." And I said, "Well, in truth, because there are kids who don't have the same speed computers or printers at home as others of you do." Also, I've been a strong advocate for the renovation of schools both BCC and Chevy Chase.

NL: It's so beautiful, Chevy Chase Elementary.

MW: It's such a wonderful place. You know, our friend, Mrs. Rich. She's a fourth grade teacher and one of my daughter's best friends. She went all through the public system. So now it's fun when sometimes the product of the system comes back and teaches in the school she attended.

NL: And what about your dreams that have yet to be realized here for the Town?

MW: Well, I have things that I would like to see done that basically improve what we've brought to the Town. I guess that's the best statement.

NL: Anything specific?

MW: Yes. One of the things that's not my idea but I'm glad to do it is Pam Browning's idea that we get a new committee started that would look at how changes in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area affect the town. I would be the Council liaison to the committee. It would relate to any threat to the trail, noise from Bethesda,

development in downtown Bethesda or any other pertinent issues affecting the town. You know we testify on occasion on further development of Bethesda, because we try to look into what's proposed and see if we can argue for responsible levels of development and that kind of thing. I have good access to the County Council and representatives. So I'd like to do more of that and I'm willing to do more of that. That probably is the major thing I would like to do. I am active as I told you at BCC High School. They asked me to form a new advisory board, which I have done and I have all of these county leaders who said yes because I have to say, when you do twenty years of volunteer work in the community, I guess they know you're serious and for real. So I am in a nice position where if I ask a friend or someone near to me for a favor it seems to work out because they know. The new advisory board I should say is full of new, kind of outside volunteer plans for BCC High School to connect to the community. So Doug Gansler, the States Attorney, will mentor some mock trials. We'll do a political forum in the fall and I asked Morton Kondracke who used to live in the Town to participate. Morton's wife Millie was so ill and they had to leave the Town and move to a one-floor assisted living but their daughters went to BCC High School. He may lead a forum in the fall at BCC.

NL: What is the exact location of BCC?

MW: BCC High School is on East West Highway, maybe two or three blocks east of the heart of Bethesda.

NL: And what about Westland?

MW: Westland is on Massachusetts Avenue.

NL: How many hours do you put in a week as Mayor?

MW: It depends. This is a bad time to ask me because I've been awfully busy in the last two weeks.

NL: I mean do you have to come up here in the middle of the day from downtown?

MW: No, I don't do that. You know because I have to keep those things separate. But what I do is I am in touch with Todd Hoffman, our Town Manager who's excellent, at least once a day. That I must do. And I do things on weekdays and weekends. And it just depends. We have a hearing coming up. It's really a public meeting on traffic questions this week and so I've had to try to make sure the

traffic committee would be organized and have the support they need to run the meeting.

NL: Maybe I should ask you about that whole historic district thing. What happened there?

MW: Well, it's a long story but I can tell you the short of it. The County came to the Town and said we think that there should be a large historic district in your Town and they basically threw a net over the old Section 4. And the old Section 4 is Connecticut Avenue is the eastern boundary the western boundary is Leland Street, north to East West Highway and south to Bradley is the old Section 4. And that was a separate town until the mid-1970's when they annexed what was called Section 8 where Cathy and I live, the western boundary of the Town was annexed. And what they said was the old Section 4—

NL: What year was that?

MW: I believe, I'm not sure, maybe 1976 oh when they came for the historic district I would say in the mid 1990's. And they said this is historic and this is our plan to become a historic district while the town was very unhappy about it.

NL: They don't want rules and regulations regulating their tear-downs and additions.

MW: Well, it was less their tear-downs because I think the people were most unhappy with concerned about conditions and upkeep that if you had to maintain slate roofs but the other thing was there were a lot of people—and I felt this way somewhat—I didn't think that the argument that we were a historic town was valid. I mean I drive around the streets and one of our strengths is we have a diversity in our architecture and it just didn't look historic to me.

NL: Maybe they should just designate certain houses.

MW: Well, and that's what they did. And they designated twelve of our houses as historic. But they threw this net over it which I thought was kind of lazy and self-serving for the county saying, "We'll just throw a net over a big population," and we said, "Why are you doing all of Section 4?" And they said, "Because it was one of the early suburban commuting communities where people drove into work." And we said, "Yeah, but we're not fearful about change in the Town in terms of the streets, and that's our history. The streets are the streets. We aren't going to change the dimension of our streets. Anyway, the great majority of our townspeople opposed our being declared historic.

End of Tape 1, Side 1]

NOTE TO MIER FROM NANCY – YOU MIGHT WANT TO WRAP UP THIS SUBJECT RE THE TOWN BECAUSE WE MOVE ON TO THE VILLAGE WITHOUT FINISHING THE TOWN RE THE HISTORIC DISTRICT...

NL: Let's see. So—

MW: Did you want me to go back just to complete the discussion on the Village?

NL: Yes. Yes.

MW: What happened, as I understand it with the Village, there were two hundred houses in the Village that were a summer colony. They were large houses that had been renovated through the years that are now peoples' year-round houses that the County wanted to declare historic. The Village threatened litigation and tried to fight it off and couldn't, and so they have two hundred houses that are declared to be historic. And actually I think the county is probably right about that. If you drive down those streets, it looks old and historic.

NL: And it is older than the Town, right? I mean it was—it looks like it was started earlier.

MW: That's right. It is older than the Town.

NL: More like 1880s compared to—

MW: Right. But I would base it I think more on—as a layperson not knowing that much about historic preservation, I'd base it more on look. I mean it looks old and historic to me. I drive down our streets, and I love our town, but street to street I don't feel like it's historic. I think it's a wonderful place to live and—

NL: But what about on the other side of Connecticut between Bradley and Rosemary? Does that have designations?

MW: I don't think so. I think most of—I'm not sure about the designations. I think that for the most part the Village designations were between Connecticut and Wisconsin. And I don't know what happened on the east side of Connecticut.

NL: The east side looks pretty historic, too.

MW: Right. So it may be both. I don't know.

NL: So the Town really is an anomaly. It has its own—

MW: Well, the Town—and I think that's a good description. I think these towns have their own character and personalities for different reasons. And you have only to

work on different subjects to see that the towns might have different view points about them. As hard as we fought for the Capital Crescent Trail, the other Chevy Chase towns, The Village, Somerset, you know, haven't been that interested. They use it but there isn't anything that they would do that I'm aware of particularly to support it so much as the towns. But we're next to it. I think also town, because we abut Bethesda, we have been more proactive about what's planned in Bethesda. We're just a much more active kind of a town. And I think you find in the other councils that they really don't do much outside their own borders and that we go out--the high school is not exactly in our border but we are very active in our high school and the other schools in the cluster. And we're active in Bethesda. I was on the Board of the Bethesda Urban Partnership for eight years and that's a County entity that maintains downtown Bethesda, the flowerbeds, the streets, that sort of a thing. It was a great learning experience for me because I got to learn more about Bethesda and it has several citizen members on that board as well as business members and that's how not only did I learn more about Bethesda but then you start to find volunteers in your causes in the business sector and in turn you become a civic person to volunteer in their projects. So there's some cross fertilization I guess.

NL: And Bethesda, is it as old as Chevy Chase?

MW: I don't think so.

NL: It was kind of started around the NIH as the place for people who work there to live?

MW: I'm not sure of that either because the NIH has grown so tremendously since the mid to late twentieth century. I think it was just population pressure that came out. Of course you mentioned Metro earlier which has had a tremendous impact, a positive one. Metro is terrific. And I have to tell you when Metro was being built there were all these fears like who was going to ride it and what was the crime problem going to be. Social change does not come easily because people understandably have some concerns about what is going to happen but Metro has just been very well run and it has been terrific for Bethesda and for Metro sites north of Bethesda.

NL: Well, let me just go back a little bit. I didn't finish your background. So how about if we switch back to that for a second.

MW: Sure.

NL: Now, your parents. Were they also from Minnesota?

MW: My parents were from Iowa. My dad was from Mason City, Iowa which is the town in The Music Man. It's River City in The Music Man and my mother was from Sioux City, Iowa

NL: What's her maiden name?

MW: Her maiden name is Rosenstock. And she went from Iowa to Wellesley College which she was very proud of because it was a long trip. The school tried to modify her mid-west accent!

NL: That's where my mother went.

MW: Oh really?

NL: Yep.

MW: Well, at some point we'll have to compare notes.

NL: Yes. What year?

MW: 1934, 1935 something like that. I suppose your mother is probably younger.

NL: Yeah. WWII time.

MW: Also my mother went there for just two years and she transferred to Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin because she had a sister who didn't want to go east so my mother agreed to come back. My grandparents felt it was best if the sisters went to the same school which is kind of a long story of a different generation. My mother came back. Then my parents married and we grew up in a small town in Minnesota. My dad had a department store in the town and then converted it into a furniture store later on and my mother was a volunteer in the League of Women Voters and she was a Gray Lady in the hospital. She went to the hospital at least once a week and took magazines to the patients, that sort of a thing. And my dad was on the city planning commission so I grew up with a sense of the importance of volunteering and caring about people. And also I had such an important experience with them. When I was senior in high school we took a senior trip east and I said to my parents, I went to an organizational meeting and I said to my parents, you know so and so came in on a truck and it was kind of funny and they said do you realize how important that trip is for her. I mean she's out on a farm and somehow she got to that meeting. They also emphasized how she would benefit from it. And there were messages that were important

messages to me because my family had been financially successful in the town. And my friends you know in some cases grew up in very modest circumstances. So there were lessons for my parents, my friends and their families.

NL: How many siblings do you have?

MW: One. I have an older brother who is in Kansas City. My grandparents were in Kansas City. One set of grandparents. My mother's parents moved from Sioux City to Kansas City after my mother was married.

NL: Your brother?

MW: Yeah.

NL: Interesting. And Kansas City is sort of interesting. Is it not?

MW: Yes. I think so. I mean I feel spoiled living here. I like living here not only in the Town but I love the east coast. I love eastern cities. I love the mountains. I love the ocean. Cathy and I have a place in North Carolina.

NL: You do?

MW: Oh yeah.

NL: What town?

MW: Well, it's Southern Shores North Carolina near Duck. Cathy said to me before the interview, "Don't forget your wife and children."

NL: We're going to get to your wife now. Your wife was born in New Orleans. Born and raised. What year was she born?

MW: Well, she had her sixtieth birthday this week so I think 1944 would be my guess. That's why we were in New Orleans. To celebrate her birthday.

NL: Really. Are her parents living?

MW: Her stepmother is still there. Her brother is there and some close friends are there.

NL: Now, who's her brother?

MW: Larry Samuel. He's a lawyer in New Orleans.

NL: So is her maiden name Samuel?

MW: Yes. And Cathy went from New Orleans to Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania which is a Presbyterian women's college. Then she went back to New Orleans for a year, worked in the New Orleans library and then moved to New York and then met me fairly early on. I think we had an excellent marriage and many happy years but—

NL: Well, how old was she when she married you?

MW: I think she was probably 25. I think she was 25.

NL: So what part of New Orleans did she grow up in?

MW: She grew up uptown. She went to Newman School from kindergarten on. Her great uncle was the first graduate of Newman. Her grandfather was a few years later. So her grandfather, her mother and Cathy went to Newman. But let me tell you more about Cathy coming north. She worked for Collier encyclopedia in New York when I met her and then the Shell Oil Company. When we came here she worked for the Federal Register which is part of a national archives and then we had children.

NL: And what was she doing at the Federal Register?

MW: She was an editor. In fact she's done editorial work off and on including Editorial Experts. I don't know if you've heard of it but it used to be you could get kind of editorial—editing piece work if you will. Then when we had Matthew and Joanna she stayed at home. Of course she always had either Editorial Experts or something going on. If it wasn't work she finished her course work for a Masters in Art History at the University of Maryland during the time when our children were young, particularly when Joanna was younger. And there was a time also when Cathy was very active in our public schools. She was President of the PTA at Chevy Chase Elementary School during one of the most striving times politically because the school had been kindergarten through sixth grade until 1974, I think and then in the mid-70's, there was a move to make it a kindergarten through sixth grade again.

NL: Why did they change from being from kindergarten to six in the first place? That would have been a lot better.

MW: Well, the people who did it thought it would be better because of school integration concerns and the Rosemary Hills School was all minority, probably all African American in the sixties and the seventies.

NL: Yes.

MW: And so it made the change ahead of a possible court ruling for the county to better integrate its schools. Cathy was in a group that wanted to have Chevy Chase Elementary School a second through sixth grade and have an extra year of nursery school at Rosemary Hills along with first and second grades. So in the end we got

the third through sixth grade at Chevy Chase Elementary. Rosemary Hills and Chevy Chase Elementary Schools have been very strong schools.

Cathy was, I think, PTA president maybe two years after the schools were changed when a new school board wanted to make other changes so she's been through the political wars on the school integration issues. And it's Cathy who insisted our children stay in public school. Cathy had gone to private school and I had gone to public school and I thought maybe private school was something to consider for our children. Our son was at primary day or nursery school but after that, Cathy had said they should go to public schools just for community reasons and their own good. She was right.

NL: So they went to Rosemary Hills first?

MW: They went to Rosemary Hills, Chevy Chase, Westland and BCC. Although our daughter went to Rosemary Hills only for kindergarten because first through sixth then was kept at Chevy Chase. Anyway Cathy was very much a leader at Chevy Chase Elementary and stayed on the school PTA. She was active at Westland and BCC high school when both kids were there. She also formed groups within the neighborhood of women who are at home for most of the hours during the week. They had play groups that Cathy was very active in and she also had a group of women who went to lunch once a month to try different places just to do a little more outreach from what the day to day routine was. And the art history part and taking those courses and finishing the courses was quite an accomplishment. When our kids were twelve and eight years old Cathy said, "well, the kids are old enough where I should branch out a little more," so she formed her own antique jewelry business. She bought the jewelry in England and she sold it back here at school benefits, community center benefits, home shows and that sort of thing. And she would take ten-day trips to England in the fall and in the spring--

NL: Oh how delightful.

MW: --to buy the jewelry and then tour herself or with a friend.

NL: That is so delightful.

MW: Well, and it was so interesting. Of course at the time nobody else was doing that. So in terms of my work as a federal government lawyer versus private practice she would say, "you can steer your course because I know how to live within our means and do only what is important to us." And that was a very important time.

She did it for fourteen or fifteen years. It got to be known that she had her own clientele.

NL: Is she still doing that?

MW: No, but she has some jewelry left over so maybe you should go see her.

NL: Really?

MW: She used to run antique shows at the Leland Center. She and Sue Hill, a town resident, would have Christmas, antique jewelry and craft show the first week in December at the Leland Center. And that was a benefit for the Leland Center. Of course she profited from whatever she was able to sell. So those years were very busy for her and then when the kids left, finished high school that sort of a thing, there was a time that Cathy decided that she wanted to change things in her life and she did. She said that she wanted to give up the jewelry business and she got a job with Montgomery County where she works now. A few days a week in the area of domestic violence. She was a volunteer victim's assistant in the county and a job came up and they asked her to apply for it and she got it. So now three days a week she works in domestic violence for the county.

NL: For battered women? And children?

MW: It could be either women or men. There are children involved but there's a separate service that deals with the children.

NL: She deals with the battered women?

MW: Right.

NL: Or men?

MW: Or men. And she goes to court with them. They're seeking protective orders.

NL: But she's not a lawyer?

MW: She's not a lawyer. She's a court companion. Then she also works one day a week at an art gallery in Dupont Circle called the Jane Haslam Gallery which is a wonderful place on Hillyer Street. That's just the balance that art history brings as something she's interested in and one day a week she goes down to—

NL: What kind of art do they show there? Is it modern or—?

MW: I would say it's mostly twentieth century lithographs. It is a wonderful gallery. You'll have to go down sometime when she's down there.

NL: I'd love to.

MW: Now let me tell you a little bit about our children so that it's in the history. Matthew who's older is now 32. He went to the school system Chevy Chase Elementary through BCC High School. And in family terms known to be an extraordinarily nice guy, stay in touch guy. He was on the BCC High School tennis team. Which was nice.

NL: Where did he go to college again?

MW: He went to undergrad at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana and then he came home and worked as a paralegal in a law firm in Washington for maybe two years and he moved to San Francisco eight years ago which has turned out very well for him. He shifted from being a paralegal to taking a masters in business at the University of San Francisco and he got an internship at Sun Micro Systems while he was at that university and has worked at Sun Micro Systems now full time for three years and had an internship the year before that and he as a result has been to Asia, Europe and India for them.

NL: And do you think he's a Westerner now?

MW: I think he is. I say that happily because I'm happy for him but I don't say that happily familywise.

NL: Well, how often do you get to see him?

MW: He comes home for Christmas, Thanksgiving. He takes our family trip in the summer. He's still single. So that part we like for the time being for accessibility purposes. And when there's a business trip he comes back. We don't get out there as often as we should.

NL: Not once a year?

MW: No. We've only been there maybe three times in eight years. Sometimes he's gotten business trips back here and then we feel like well we've just—

NL: I think that if you stay out west for any length of time over about six years, that's it, you know?

MW: Well, I think that's true.

NL: You know it just gets under your skin.

MW: Well, in particular San Francisco; it's different. I know you know Southern California, you probably know San Francisco too. It's just a very nice way of life. There's lot's of friends. The only thing is it's so expensive there, that if he marries or is in a long term relationship and they try to get a house or if he tries to get one

himself, that's kind of where the rubber hits the road because it's such an expensive area to live in. Now our daughter, who went to the school system, went to the University of Pennsylvania for a year and a half and transferred to the University of Maryland which has an education and English department which is what she wanted. She decided she wanted to teach and she finished Maryland, taught for four years in Silver Spring at a public school called the Silver Spring International School.

NL: Is that one of the language immersion programs?

MW: Yes, it's French. She is now headed to graduate school in English literature at the University of Maryland. She's an extraordinary student and she's had four years of teaching. Then she'll teach at some level after that. I should mention just quickly in terms of family life, that our family has traveled a fairly significant amount through the years and after the kids were eleven and seven and they got their first trip to Disney World. We've traveled with our children to France, England. Cathy and I have spent some time in Spain, Italy. Cathy took Matthew to Greece for a wedding there. I took Matthew to Israel when he was 25 which was a wonderful trip.

NL: Wow.

MW: So travel has been an important part of our family life. Mainly through Cathy. She was a great traveler. I think that I wouldn't have done as much and might mostly have gone to North Carolina and come home.

NL: Well, how often do you go to your place in North Carolina by the way?

MW: We don't go as often as we should because we're so busy. We rent it in the summer. But we go maybe two or three times a year. That's another retirement goal I have that once I retire, I feel I could spend a month in the spring or in the fall if I want to. It's a wonderful place. And it's a very happy family memory for all of us down there.

NL: How old were the kids when you first started going there?

MW: When we first started going there Matthew was one year old. So we've been going down there for 31 years. We rented for 21 years and then we built our own place about ten years ago in the same place. So you know, that's our family place.

NL: How do you get there? Do you fly to Raleigh?

MW: No, no we drive. It's a five hour drive.

NL: Five hour drive?

MW: And Raleigh's not the right direction.

NL: No.

MW: So it is a five hour drive down there.

NL: I had this feeling that you would be a two part interview because you had so much to say so if we don't finish today we'll just have to continue another day.

MW: That's fine with me.

NL: So, are your neighbors the same as when you first moved here?

MW: No, our neighbors aren't which is sad but our lives aren't the same either. We have different interests. We have very nice across the street neighbors now but we had very close friends across the street who retired. They aren't retired actually. They moved to Cape Cod and he commutes to Cape Cod to Washington.

NL: Wow. That's quite a commute.

MW: It was sad when they left. The import of neighbors is greatest when you have young children because you want to know if there are other kids or babysitters. Or if you're elderly just that your neighbors can be helpful in some of the in between years, you want to have nice neighbors but your interest and needs change so I'm not at a point where I'm as involved with neighbors. But I have new neighbors across the street from us. We just met. They seem terrific. A new young couple and that's always reviving.

NL: Well, I have lovely, lovely neighbors and they all work at the World Bank and the CIA and the Pentagon and stuff like that. It's just so Washingtonian. And that brings up another point I was going to say about the parties or lack thereof. You know maybe the character of Washington; it's just not real decadent. It's not the way New Orleans is. It's just not real decadent here. You know everybody's out working so hard and trying to change the world and fix the world and they don't have time to just be bohemian and decadent. That's not the nature of this town.

MW: Well, no it's not. I mean Washington is not New York or New Orleans as we know it. Nor San Francisco. And I think what tends to happen, what you and I call parties and maybe it's just my age group but we went to dinner parties and subjects came up of social concern to people. That sort of a thing. And if you're lucky the people who host it were great cooks and had a nice wine cellar and all

that kind of a thing. But Washington is a serious place because it's the seat of government so you do meet very well educated people. I think you meet socially concerned people.

NL: And a lot of type A people that are very driven.

MW: Right. But again we get to pick and choose. One of the reasons I have liked living here and I think Cathy has too, is that we choose who we want to be with. If there's a situation where we think we don't want to do it or we don't want to do it that often then we don't have to. So we're not in a situation that we must be somewhere every week like a planned thing. Or there's a once a month certain get together. For the most part we've been able to be with the people we enjoy and it got to be more that way when our kids grow up. Sometimes you're more tolerant of adults or need to be if their kids are friendly with your kids. You feel like you have to be. But there was an interesting—dropping off the friends when our kids went off to college and the truth set in, then there was kind of a rearrangement. It wasn't so dramatic but you notice kind of change.

NL: Is it a good thing? Is it a refreshing thing?

MW: I think it's a mix. I mean I think it's too bad because I'm a big reminiscer, sentimentalist. But I do think it's good to be looking for new experiences. I'd say it's a mixed kind of experience.

NL: Do you have special hangouts in Chevy Chase or Bethesda that have changed maybe over the years?

MW: Well, Cathy's an extraordinary cook. And in fact so extraordinary she's known in our social circle as all that. As this is the place to go. If we entertain, very rarely has anyone said they can't come. And I think we're nice people and fun.

NL: Does she do New Orleans cooking, too?

MW: Some but she does, I would call it—I don't even know what to call it. She cooks most things and she entertains beautifully and when we've had parties everybody comes.

NL: So you're saying you don't need hangouts?

MW: No and we prefer to be at home. Kathy prefers to be at home to cook. Kathy cooked her own birthday party dinner in New Orleans. Took the food from Washington to New Orleans and cooked the dinner on Saturday night. I mean

there were other restaurant plans that we did but for the main event so to speak she did it herself because she loves to cook and she's very good at it.

NL: Wow.

MW: So we don't really have hangouts. There's no one place we go to in Bethesda or anywhere else. Although, for major family occasions we do go to Auberge Chez François in Great Falls, which is a drive.

NL: Is that Great Falls Maryland, or Virginia?

MW: Virginia. And it's probably forty-five minutes away.

NL: You can't just drive over a bridge like in Maryland Great Falls, and then—is it the same Virginia Great Falls right across the river?

MW: It is not as simple as what you describe. And that's for major family events. Otherwise we're at home. We're at home around furniture that was Cathy's grandparents'. We have their dining room furniture that was built for them by a New Orleans cabinetmaker in the early twentieth century. A round table. It's very congenial—and I think our dining room has been a nice meeting place through the years as I think about it. Hopefully for our kids, and us, but also for other people too.

NL: Have you changed your house? Additions and all that?

MW: Yes. We have an addition in the back of the house, very much in scale with the house. And some other minor fix-ups.

NL: Since you moved here, would you say it's really changed a huge amount? Just sort of the look of it, or not so much? Not just your house, but the whole town.

MW: I think in terms of the town the western boundary of the town has changed. That's 44th, 45th Street. The old Section 8 that was annexed in the mid 1970s. I think there's major change there, and I'm of a mixed view of it. Because on the one hand many of the houses seem awfully big to me. On the other hand, the bungalows that were there were falling apart and were not easy to sell or to rent. So when they were taken down I wasn't so concerned about it, but I am concerned about what goes in their place.

NL: You have design review and that sort of thing, do you not?

MW: No we don't. We have—you have to get a building permit, but we don't have design review, or an architectural review board. The town looks at a plan to see if

you fit within the building restriction lines and meet height requirement and all that.

NL: And that's for additions too?

MW: And for additions. So I think that the town has stayed much the same except for the western boundary. And we're having a study done of the town by an architecture firm who defines that western boundary as kind of a separate, logical neighborhood. It's near metro, near Wisconsin Avenue, and kind of an alternative lifestyle within town.

NL Are there any plans for getting a design review type—

MW: No there's not. But we have a town construction committee, and they're working on possible adjustments to what the town controls to see if we should have more restrictive building restriction lines, so the scale of the houses aren't as big as they are now so that there's more open space between houses. And after they've done that and come to the town with it, they would be looking to see if there's some way to propose a reduced height in new houses or additions. But the county would have to agree to that. For the most part the county has much of the control over what the scale of a house is going to be. I mean we can do building restriction lines to an extent. My own concern has been height. That our town is very hilly, and if you build a house that is—a tall house looks even taller because of the nature of the terrain in our town. That's my greatest concern.

NL: Were you here for the downdraft? The downdraft of '91 or something? It was like this moment where the wind—Grace Chace told me about it. Where the wind like suddenly swept through and—

MW: Yes. Actually it was 1989. That was our terrible storm. Because it was during the opening of the Leland Center.

NL: What month of the year?

MW: I would guess April. It was a horrible storm, and we lost a number of trees. And yet we were lucky. We had no loss of life, and that's once in the thirty years we've lived in town. It was the worst storm over a thirty year period in town.

NL: What about this past hurricane? How did that compare?

MW: Oh, the last hurricane was nothing. But in the storm of 1989, whole big trees were uprooted, but we also handled it very well. Our town services were prompt and thorough. We got some assistance—extra trucks from PG County. We got

reimbursed by FEMA for the extra expense it cost to take the trees away. We have something like seven thousand trees in town, including town and private trees. So when a tree is lost, it's serious and we don't want it to happen. But we do have thousands of trees, and that's something that we guard. We plant something like fifty new trees a year. But we're taking down trees all the time because of different tree sicknesses.

NL: So do your people go all around and make sure—if there's a sick looking tree, they'll take care of it?

MW: Yes.

NL: Even on our property?

MW: What we do is this: for town property, we have a town arborist who keeps track of our town trees and lets us know when one has to come down. For private property what you can do is you get a free consultation once every two years with our town arborist. That's Tolbert Feather. And he will tell you what trees you either need better pruning for, or need to be taken down.

NL: I want that. There are huge trees towering over the house, and—

MW: Well, call. Call Tolbert. To reassure you, we've had one horrible storm in thirty years. Isabelle was serious, but nothing like that storm in 1989.

NL: Do you like the underground electrical wires, or do you not like that?

MW: Well I would prefer to have them, but the cost is something like a million dollars a mile so I haven't paid too much attention to it because I can't figure out where the money's going to come from. We used to have a wonderful tree man. In fact I'm going to interview him. I should mention Mark Peyton who took care of our trees for many years. His father had the contract with the Town before him. He's now our supplementary snowperson, and that's a story unto itself, but he's a legend and a terrific good friend of mine. And just one of the benefits of living in town is to ever have met anyone like Mark. I mean he's just a wonderful man. And as I say I'll interview him for—I offered to interview him for the town history committee.

NL: Great. I mean that would be so fascinating.

MW: Because he starts—he knows most of the residents from years and years ago. Well I don't know. I guess Mark's in his late fifties. He started working the town when

he was eight years old on his father's truck. Anyway, the trees—we now have a tree ordinance, and you can't take a tree down until you agree to plant a new tree.

NL: In New Orleans you know that they have horrible storms, but the trees don't generally crash over like they do here.

MW: No. I think you—well I don't know why that is, but having just come back from New Orleans, and Cathy mentioned she'd like to spend more time there. And I said fine, but the infrastructure there is so miserable. The sidewalks are a wreck...I'm a big town walker, and our streets and sidewalks are wonderful. And in New Orleans, it's beautiful to see the houses, but you could break your neck on those sidewalks. And I mean, you know—where we were staying they pay almost no real property taxes in New Orleans.

NL: And have you heard about the crime?

MW: Crime is terrible.

NL: They say it's the murder capital of the USA.

MW: Well, people are being mugged and that sort of a thing. I do want to mention—because I know we need to leave this whole thing today because of our scheduling, and I just wanted to shift completely on to something else because there's a name I have to name. And that is our congressman Chris Van Hollen. And that has been very important in my life. I volunteered for him for twelve years. I was his campaign chairman throughout his state senatorial career, and he's one of my heroes, as is Ike Leggitt, who was on the county council and is now a community leader within the state. He's been the only minority member of the county council for many years, and is just a great, good person. But I feel privileged, and I've enjoyed associations with so many people I've met in different ways, and I just would have to mention their names. Cathy will laugh at this like I'm plugging all my political—but I've worked on so many things with different people, I'd feel uncomfortable not.

NL: I think that would be a good note to end this one on. But the typist—after I can edit it—I just wanted to ask you one question about crime that we were talking about before. Has there ever been any crime in our town? It seems so safe. That's one of the beauties of it.

MW: I think—I have a big complaint with local media, with local television media. Because when you watch the 5:00 and 6:00 news, and they have sirens on and you

don't know where the crime is, they create fear in all Washingtonians until you find out what neighborhood has the crime. As a result as that kind of fear, scare tactics, sensationalism, the towns in Chevy Chase have unbelievable public safety plans that I think are beyond what's really needed. Over in section 3 I think it was they changed all the streets light. I said, "Why are you doing that? Do you have a crime rate?" And they said, "No, but I don't know. We just thought brighter lights would be better for public safety." I think in terms of our town, we have very good extra police services. From the village, and we have off duty county officers.

NL: I leave my door unlocked incessantly.

MW: Well I think that you should lock your door. Because there are things that occur that shouldn't. But basically, we have occasional vandalism on the weekends at night, but we have never in the thirty years I've been in town had any kind of what I would call major crime. It's a safe community in which to live. Very safe. And that is an important thing. But there are occasional random break-ins and vandalism, and it's not always from the outside of the community. Sometimes there's a teenager who's disturbed in some way in our own community who might create some problems. We have a thousand households, and within that number there can be a situation that—problems created that you wouldn't think of. But you're right. It's a very safe community to live in. I would still lock the doors. We're careful about that.

NL: The children can almost walk around by themselves, like in olden days.

MW: I agree with that, but I wouldn't do that. And that's really just from what I've read anywhere in the world. I'll tell you, the residents on Leland Street, behind Rob Enelow, Amy Kassoff, and you know that—and Liz Lyons and Doug, they've opened their backyards to each other. I mean that's real community spirit. I still am not, in terms of kids, my own kid I would want them walking with another kid. And we've never had a problem.

NL: My daughter goes to the Thornapple Path all by herself. To write, or to run away from home, or stuff like that. She's so independent I can't seem to stop her from doing that. It seems to mean so much to her, and it seems so safe here that I just—

MW: Well I feel it is. But I just am that kind of a person. But if that's the plan, then I would want to know a certain time limit on it and all that.

NL: Yes we do that.

MW: Because I think you don't do a child a favor by raising them in fear, particularly when there isn't anything to be fearful about. On the other hand, these random sorts of things that occur that you read about are such—I'm on the more careful side of things. I always was.

NL: I thought it was more scary like that in San Diego. Perverts.

MW: Well I think it is from—in terms of California it is. But we did have a plan, and I don't think it's been re-instituted for Chevy Chase Elementary where kids were walking that you could put a—there'd be a blue card in front of a house where people were home during the day, so if something did happen kids could run to that house. But we've not had a problem. So you can overdo it too, you know.

End of Interview