Interview with Polly Flemming
The Town of Chevy Chase Project
Interviewed by Stephanie Brown, November 13, 2006

STEPHANIE BROWN: This is Stephanie Brown interviewing Polly Flemming on November 13th at her home, 4111 Stanford Street.

POLLY FLEMMING: And I have lived here ever since the fall of 1944.

SB: The fall of '44. Now, where did you live before you came here?

PB: We came from Boulder, Colorado. My husband was in the navy, in the Japanese Language School and he was stationed in the intelligence here in Washington. So instead of being sent to Japan, we came to Washington, and my children were with my mother in Birmington, Illinois, but I immediately looked for a house and I bought this one, so I could bring the children. I was absolutely thrilled because it was within walking distance of the Rosemary School, which is Chevy Chase Elementary, and Leland High School, which was located where the Leland Center is now, and B-CC. All my children went to all three schools and they always walked to school.

SB: That's marvelous. Now, how old were your children when you moved here?

PB: Well, my youngest daughter was only five, and I had a job at the Public Library, the main office, which is on New York Avenue, that great big main building.

SB: Yes, at Mount Vernon Square.

PB: Yes, and I was behind the desk just receiving in books and discharging them. I just had to get my daughter in school, so that she'd be in both a morning and an afternoon session. I couldn't have the job, if she were only in kindergarten. So she was in first grade in Bloomington, and we transferred her. So she did start school a bit early, but she had been tested at Illinois State and Iowa University and she tested about seven. So that when we started her in first grade, she was really able to do all the work.

SB: She was more than ready. Did she walked down the street to the Rosemary School?

PB: She walked down the street to Rosemary School and I did have a colored maid who was here to receive her when she came home.

SB: So you worked a nine to five—

PB: Just about, yes.

SB: Did you take the streetcar or did you drive?

PB: Oh, no, we didn't have a car in those days. Nobody had a car. They were—and when they came on the market after the war, they were rationed and people were on lists, and people—people, when you wanted to go downtown, you just stood on the corner and a doctor or somebody with a rationed car would pick you up and take you as far as the Metro.

SB: Oh, that's marvelous.

PB: And there was no Metro, of course. Take you as far as the bus, as the bus stop.

SB: And was that just past Chevy Chase Circle? Is that where you would pick up the bus?

PB: Yes, uh-hmm.

SB: At that bus depot?

PB: Yes, uh-hmm.

SB: Is that how you got to work those years?

PB: Yes, I went on the bus, with a transfer probably.

SB: To Mount Vernon Square and checked the books in and out in that beautiful building.

PB: The old-fashioned—yes, the lovely old-fashioned building.

SB: Now, your husband worked in intelligence, you said. Was he with the—

PB: It was called the Annex, and you're not supposed to mention it. [Laughs]

SB: Was he in Washington or Virginia?

PB: The Annex was on—no, it was in Washington. It's on Nebraska Avenue, right by Ward Circle.

SB: Yes, by American University. Where American University is.

PB: Well, down that way, yes.

SB: Down that way. So he took the bus to work, too?

PB: It was sort of right in front of the Alice Diehl. Is it Alice Diehl Junior High School?

SB: Yes.

PB: It was—the buildings were a little bit down the way and in front of that.

SB: What was it like to come here from Colorado in 1944? Where were you—where were you in Colorado?

PB: We were in Boulder, Colorado.

SB: Boulder, at the university there, more or less?

PB: Yes, the language school was in the university, and we came here and there in Union Station there were ladies sitting at desks. My husband was an officer. He was a junior grade, lieutenant junior grade at the time, and we were sent to an officer's desk, as soon as we got off the train. One of the ladies at the desk liked my husband's looks, I guess, and suggested that we could stay at her house.

SB: Oh, my goodness.

PB: So we got picked, and her house was on number 7 Raymond Street, and we lived with her for several months, and I looked all around the neighborhood and bought this house. But she told me that government officers, government—

SB: Workers?

PB: No, government spies, really, had been occupying the room across the way from us, spying on the house next door and it was a setup brothel where the government sent high ranking generals and visiting foreign dignitaries.

SB: Oh, my goodness.

PB: And the prostitutes were all government spies, and these men listened.

SB: And this was on Raymond Street?

PB: These men had listening devices and they were listening next door.

SB: Gracious, and this was on Raymond Street, this house was?

PB: On Raymond Street and the house next door was the set up place.

SB: Right, and then across the street were the spies who were listening to what was going on.

PB: Not across the street.

SB: No.

PB: The very adjacent house.

SB: Right next door.

PB: They were close as this. You know, close as I am to that house.

SB: And that went on all through the war?

PB: No, it didn't. Then, when you left, you see, she rented the room to me—to us. They had just left, and that's why she had a room to rent. She couldn't have anyone else in the house while they were there.

SB: So what time of year did you come? Was it the fall?

PB: It was spring.

SB: It was spring.

PB: It was summer.

SB: Summer, and so you found the house and then you sent for the children and they started school.

PB: It was, let me see. It was getting on toward fall, but my children, I left them with my mother so that they could start school there. So that I could transfer my daughter. I didn't bring the children here until the first of November, but we moved in on the first of October.

SB: Into this house?

PB: Into this house.

SB: The first of October, 1944.

PB: Uh-hmm. And we found, right behind that china cabinet over there, when we stripped the wallpaper off the walls—when I moved into this house, everything was dark brown. The woodwork was absolutely stained very, very dark. Those pillars were all dark and the woodwork was all dark and the wallpaper was oatmeal, and it had turned dark. The house was really a gloomy, awful looking place, but I knew I could brighten it up.

SB: Well, it's a beautiful house. Do you know when it was built?

PB: Yes, because when we stripped the wallpaper off, there was a date behind there and it was 1919.

SB: Oh, that's marvelous.

PB: So it was built just after World War I.

SB: Right.

PB: All these houses along here were. All three of them, and evidently by the same builder because the architecture in them was identical and they all had pillars in

them. That house did and this house and that house, and they took the pillars out of all the other houses, but I left them in mine.

SB: I like them. I like them. They're lovely.

PB: I think that—I think it makes it look much larger.

SB: Yeah.

PB: Than if they weren't there.

SB: Yes. Well, it feels right for the house. It feels like the way the house ought to be. Now, who did you buy the house from?

PB: I bought it from a lady named Young. From a Mrs. Young.

SB: And had she lived in it for a long time?

PB: She had grown up in it. At the time, she was in St. Elizabeth's and her husband was very eager to sell it. She didn't want to sell it, and they had to persuade her.

SB: Oh, how sad. She was an older person?

PB: No, she was—

SB: She wasn't?

PB: She was middle aged or young middle aged.

SB: But not healthy. Not doing very well.

PB: Well, I didn't ever know her, you know.

SB: No, of course. Of course. Was it the house—it was the house that she had grown up in.

PB: Yes.

SB: So her parents may have been the first owners of the house.

PB: Probably.

SB: So it's only had two owners in its eighty-five years.

PB: Well, practically, yes. Uh-hmm. She had inherited it from her parents, but their name was not Young. Couldn't have been.

SB: Right, right. So in '44 you came. The war ended the following year. Did your husband stay with the government?

PB: No, he taught at the University of Maryland and retired emeritus and died in 1991. So—well, now let's talk about—let's talk about early memories in Chevy Chase. All this about the house is not nearly so interesting as all the social things.

SB: Well, tell us about that. You came—you were here in ’44. Was the street all built at that point? Did all the lots have houses on them?

PB: Oh, yes. Everything looked very much as it does now, except for two houses have been torn down and two big ones have been built since.

SB: Enormous ones.

PB: Yeah, very large. Well, it was a very open neighborhood. Everybody expected to know everybody else. I was called upon and there was a welcome committee that gave you a basket when you moved into Chevy Chase.

SB: And what would be in the basket?

PB: Hmm.

SB: Coupons or coffee or—

PB: I can’t remember what was in it.

SB: But people would come and bring the basket and have tea? It was a—

PB: They came to the door—they came to the door and gave you a welcome basket. It probably had brochures and information about Chevy Chase, and then it had some gifts.

SB: Uh-hmm.

PB: And tea towels. Seems to me if I remember something like a tea towel.

SB: Yeah, that makes sense. That makes sense. So were there mostly young families on the street?

PB: No, they were mostly older people, but there were a few young, a few children on the street. There were wonderful children next door in both houses. In the house next to me, 4109, military people had always lived in it, and General Simmons and Mrs. Simmons were the original owners and Mrs. Simmons’ daughter, Mrs. Riggs and her husband, Brigadier General Riggs lived there. Lived with the Simmons’ and they had four sons, if you please. So there were six boys. I had these two boys, and the children’s ages just overlapped. The Riggs’ oldest son was fourteen. Their youngest son was six. Or five, I guess, about the age of little Mary. Then the other boys were in between and my sons were ten and nine. They just tore up our backyard. They completely ruined the ecology digging to China one day and they—[Laughs] There were stones arranged so that the

drainage was just perfect when I moved here, and they took all these stones and made a fort. Everything was military, and all conducted by the oldest son over at the Riggs'. Of course, the war was on at the time, and he used to tramp round and round my big tree in the backyard lecturing on military strategy to this whole group of younger ones. I remember that very well. [Laughs]

Down at the Rosemary School, Mrs. Rose was a very popular principal. She was very liberal and the school was in a permissive condition, and it had very high grades. The teachers were allowed to teach just the way they wanted to, and they really went into it, you know, tooth and nail and the children really learned. Of course, the classes were not very large. No more than twenty in any class.

SB: That's marvelous. Now, I've heard other people talk about one of the teachers at the school teaching the women in the neighborhood how to can.

PB: I never heard of it, and I knew how to can, but I didn't. [Laughs]

SB: But you didn't.

PB: Didn't want to. [Laughs] I knew too much about canning.

SB: Had you done it as a child? Had you grown up doing that?

PB: Well, in—our house was next door to my grandmother's house.

SB: In Illinois?

PB: And there was terrific canning going on during canning season of every kind you can imagine from pickles to all kinds of jams, jellies and relishes and quantities of canned peaches, and canned rhubarb and canned everything. Loads of applesauce and grape juice. We canned everything, as the groups came into market and our maid and my mother and I would all go over and my grandmother's cook and my grandmother and my Aunt Laura would come and everybody would sit in the kitchen peeling and paring. This went on all summer off and on.

SB: Yes, it's hard work. Hard work. Now, you grew up in Illinois, is that right?

PB: I grew up in Illinois, in Bloomington, Illinois. Well, this is Chevy Chase, you know.

SB: I know it is. I know it is, but it's always good to have a little bit of background about where you were before you came here.

PB: On my first interview, I told a story that I thought was interesting. After the war, there were very few electrical appliances of any kind. When I first came here, the washing was done by hand and I was able to obtain a wringer washing machine and then I hung all the laundry up on the line outside. I had two big lines and all the sheets, everything I hung.

SB: That's a huge job, and you had a—

PB: It was fun. It was fun to hang. I loved to hang out laundry and it dried in the sun and it was really nicer. But I finally, of course, later got a dryer but not until much later. But one of the first things I got was an old-fashioned dishwasher because I had four children. One daughter was born after we moved here. I had—I really wanted a dishwasher and I looked in the ads and I went way out Bradley Boulevard to a really fancy place and bought an old-fashioned dishwasher from a man who was buying one of the new kinds that I couldn't afford. But I got this thing for a good deal of money in those days. Probably fifty dollars, which seemed an awful lot, and it attached. It had a glass top and you could look down and wash all—see all the soapsuds swishing around the dishes. He told me when I bought it from him, this is the story…he was born very near Chevy Chase Circle. Very near the house where I live now. Probably on the highest ground down there by—well, probably a higher place, and he said that the water tower and all this part of the land belonged to his family. They owned the water tower, too.

SB: How about that?

PB: That was at Hillcrest Circle down very close to my house.

SB: Oh, my goodness.

PB: So I thought that was very interesting.

SB: Yes. Yes. So that's such a great connection between—

PB: But evidently they sold it. He sold it all and with it he bought this fancy house way out down.

SB: Towards the Potomac.

PB: Yes. [Laughs] Well, I was going to talk about during the atomic scare.

SB: Yes, please do.

PB: All the preparations for an atomic attack.

SB: So that was in the late ‘50s? In the late ‘50s and early ‘60s. Around the time of the missile crisis?

PB: It was the early ‘50s.

SB: Earlier than that, okay.

PB: Oh, yes. Right after World War I, really.

SB: World War II.

PB: World War II, I mean. And people in those days we didn’t—it was—we hardly believed that we’d be alive in five years or maybe ten. You know, we expected maybe we’d all be dead in a short period of time. We talked about it, you know. We faced the possibility. Of course, I never really believed it, but a lot of people did. My husband did quite implicitly. He was always a pessimist and it seems crazy now, but it wasn’t then. All up and down at Chevy Chase Circle, from McKinley Street—yes, from Northampton Street down to McKinley they were digging a deep trench and they made—there are—they’re still there, of course underneath the street are fallout shelters.

SB: Is that right? From McKinley to Northampton.

PB: From Northampton to McKinley. Well, they started—they started right below Chevy Chase Circle and then they were digging in the street and you could just see them, you know. Everybody knew that’s what they were doing.

SB: Wow, that’s remarkable.

PB: And also there were—at Dupont Circle there were two underpasses. One for the trolley and one for traffic. The one for the trolley was boarded up and used for a fallout shelter. So there is a great cavernous empty place right under Dupont Circle to this day.

SB: I’ve heard of that. Now, do you remember anyone building a fallout shelter up here in Chevy Chase?

PB: No, because it was all very secretive. If they did, they didn’t want anyone to know it because they were afraid their neighbors would pile in and crowd out the family.

SB: Well, what were you going to do?

PB: Nothing! I wouldn't do a thing. I refused to because I thought it was ridiculous to plan something that would be so temporary and futile, you know. And somebody said, "Well, what would you do with your daughter, if she were in school and there were an alarm?" and I said, "She'd have to do what all the others do. Whatever they did is what she would have to do." You know, it was just like that.

SB: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. Well, what did your children think about it?

PB: Oh, we didn't talk to the children about it. We didn't scare them. You said you got under your desk. Did anybody scare you about it?

1PB: Oh. Well, we had a neighbor who was a captain in the navy and I went over to—their little girl was the same age as Mary and they were best friends, and I went over there one time to return a sweater or something like that, and I noticed in their dining room they had huge pieces of insulation. Great enormous slabs of insulation piled up so that they were about five feet high against one of their dining room walls.

SB: Against the wall.

PB: And I surmised and I counted them, and there were a certain number of people in their family and there were two a piece, and I surmised that they were for the family to get between in case of an atomic attack. Because the one man that survived the central of the attack in Hiroshima had dived under a pile of comforters.

SB: How about that.

PB: So the idea was to get between and these of course, the insulation was fire proof and everything. It was a good idea, I guess.

SB: I guess.

PB: So I mentioned it to Mary and she said, yes, that's what they were for.

SB: She had heard the family.

PB: Well, her little friend had told her that's what they were for. She probably asked what they were for and the friend had told her what they were supposed to do in case of an atomic attack.

SB: Wow. Wow. It's amazing to think about that, and it wasn't very long ago, really.

PB: No, people were really trying to plan what to do for their family to survive, you know.

SB: Of course.

PB: And it was very real. It was very real.

SB: Did you listen to the radio and read the—which newspaper did you have delivered? Did you have a paper delivered?

PB: Oh, yes. We had the *Post* and I used to read—there was a Chicago newspaper that it was printed in the shape of a sheet, you know, book shape, and all the front cover of it was a war map. Each day there was a war map with the war news.

SB: And you took that paper because it was from—

PB: No, but we would get it on newsstands. I took the—we took the *Post*, and of course, it was all full of maps, too, but on the inside. But this was a very large map, enlarged section of wherever the fighting was in Europe. And I used to read that, I remember.

SB: So there were newsstands that you would tap on your way to and from work?

PB: Well, I worked downtown, you know.

SB: Yes, yes.

PB: Well, I remember buying this at the drugstore at Chevy Chase Circle.

SB: Oh, right, the one that's now a CVS.

PB: No. No, there was a drugstore on the corner of Northampton, just across from the bus station. That was the one that I used to patronize.

SB: So is that where you—did you go down just past the Circle?

PB: And the CVS was People's Drug and Whittisie's Drugstore was up in Bethesda.

SB: Now, did you go to the—where did you go to do your shopping?

PB: Chevy Chase Circle. There was an A&P at Chevy Chase Circle.

SB: And you would—

PB: And then, of course, we also went down to—we also would walk all the way down to Wisconsin and shop there. There was an A&P where a building is now. It was directly across the end of Stanford Street, practically, and at the end of Stanford Street was the diner, the very same one that's over in Bethesda now.

SB: Oh, yes.

PB: They moved it.

SB: They just picked it up and moved it?

PB: Well, yeah, it was on wheels, I guess. [Laughs]

SB: Would you go to the diner?

PB: Yes, uh-hmm. We used to sneak down there. We used to—you know, we left our doors open at all times. Never locked anything because I didn't want my children either locked in or locked out, you know. They came and went, you know and played all over the neighborhood, in and out of everybody's houses. The way I did when I was growing up, when I was a little girl. That's the way we did in my neighborhood, and I let my children do it, just the same.

SB: So you would leave the door open and just run down to the diner for—

PB: We'd put the children all to bed and if we—then sometimes we'd just run down to the diner and get a waffle and some coffee or something, on the sneak. [Laughs]

SB: That's marvelous. Now, when did you have your first car living here?

PB: I'm trying to think. I don't think we had a car until my father gave me one. An old one.

SB: An old one.

PB: Uh-hmm. I can't really—I'm trying to remember. We did have a car and I think it was one that had been my father's. I don't think we had a—we went without a car for a very long time. My husband took the bus, when he taught at Maryland and I taught there, too, and I would take my little daughter, Joanie, with me, and she was in nursery school out there. My husband taught—I taught Monday, Wednesday and Saturday and my husband taught Tuesday and Thursday, and he would take her the days he went and I would take her the days I went and she was in a nursery school that was run by the University out there.

SB: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

PB: And we rode back and forth on the bus.

SB: How long did that take?

PB: Forty-five minutes or fifty. And then the bus—and then we'd have to walk all the way from Wisconsin home.

SB: So the bus dropped you at Wisconsin?

PB: Uh-hmm.

SB: Where on Wisconsin?

PB: Stanford Street and Wisconsin. Then we'd have to walk all the way down Stanford Street to here.

SB: With your little girl.

PB: With my little girl.

SB: Did she complain?

PB: She was very—I remember she was very active on the bus. [Laughs] She used to stand up and talk to the people behind us and that kind of thing.

SB: Now, did you know most of the people between here and Wisconsin on Stanford Street?

PB: No, we didn't. Only the ones on my block and one or two across.

SB: Across the—

PB: Across the way. I never have known anybody except the people right on our block.

SB: Were there ever block parties?

PB: Hmm?

SB: Were there block parties? Did you all get together?

PB: No, I was the one that started entertaining people.

SB: And how did that begin?

PB: Well, I realized that if I didn't entertain, I wouldn't have any friends because people were all busy and paid no attention. We were very far from the campus, you see, and so I just gave parties.

SB: Who did you invite?

PB: The neighbors.

SB: The neighbors. Did many of the other women on the street work outside? Did they go to jobs?

PB: No, the ladies stayed home in those days, pretty much. I think that maybe the Snapes both worked.

SB: And where did they live?

PB: They lived right across the street. Their son Bill lives there now.

SB: Oh, is that right? Is that the house with the S on the screen door?

PB: I don't know about anything, any S's on anybody's screen door.

SB: I'm sorry. But they both worked?

PB: They live in that white house.

SB: In that white house.

PB: The one that's straight across from me.

SB: Now, what did you teach at Maryland?

PB: I taught English. My discipline really was French, but I couldn't get a job in the Modern Language Department, so I got one in the English Department because, you see, it was during the war and then the minute the war was over—well, it was during the Korean War. Hmm.

SB: When did you stop working at the library downtown?

PB: Oh, I was discharged for pregnancy.

SB: Oh, I see.

PB: Soon as I got so that I showed, the very sour-faced lady who was in charge down there fired me. She knew I was pregnant, of course, and I insisted I had to have a stool to sit on behind the counter. I couldn't stand all day, and she resented that very much. She was an old maid and she just didn't like that at all. She thought I should not be there, but she unwillingly furnished s tool for me to sit on.

SB: Until you got to the point—

PB: And then when I got to the point where she just didn't like it at all, she fired me.

SB: And then where did you have your fourth child? Where was she born?

PB: Suburban Hospital.

SB: How long did you stay, do you remember?

PB: Yes, you had to stay at least a week or ten days. A week.

SB: Did your mother come from Illinois?

PB: No, no, indeed.

SB: So your husband managed the other three at home while you were at the hospital and the neighbors probably helped.

PB: No, nobody helped. There wasn't any help needed.

SB: You were a self-sufficient bunch.

PB: Oh, very. [Chuckles] My kids were old enough to help, too, a little bit.

SB: How old was your eldest?

PB: He was ten.

SB: He was ten. So ten and seven and five and the baby.

PB: No, ten and nine.

SB: Ten and nine, and then five.

PB: And six.

SB: Six.

PB: Mary was six by the time Joanie was born.

SB: So Joanie was born in '45? Or '46?

PB: She was born May 28th, 1945.

SB: Right before—right after President Roosevelt won.

PB: Well, and also right after VJ Day. I mean VE.

SB: VE Day.

PB: Yeah, VE Day because I couldn't—neither Rudd nor I could go downtown for the big parade that Eisenhower was going to be in, but I insisted on sending the boys down.

SB: Oh, how wonderful.

PB: They had been downtown because we used to go down to the National Gallery for Sunday dinner and we'd tour the gallery and spend all day down in the National Gallery on Sundays. Down on the Mall, you know. We'd ride the bus, the whole family and they were used to going up and down on that bus, as far down as Constitution Avenue. Independence is further, that's right.

Well, so I just insisted. I gave them money and I gave them sandwiches and I gave them money to buy drinks down there, and I insisted that they go down and see the parade. Well, they were scared. They didn't want to go, but I just said, "You know how to do it," and so they did. I made them tie their money to them, so they could be sure to get back.

SB: Their bus fare?

PB: Their bus fare and I sent them down and they climbed up in a tree when they got down there, and General Eisenhower waved to them.

SB: Isn't that spectacular. And they were old enough that I'm sure they remember that.

PB: Oh, yeah, and then they had the time of their lives, you know.

SB: Of course. What a wonderful thing for you to have done, to have made them go.

PB: Well, that's the way I brought my kids up, you know.

SB: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

PB: And they've all profited from it, I think.

SB: Oh, I'm sure they have. I'm sure they have, and their children, too. Well, after the war ended then, you had a little baby.

PB: Yes, and you know, the day that my furniture arrived from New Orleans—

SB: Now, how did your furniture get to New Orleans?

PB: Well, we'd lived there for ten years when Rudd—he was teaching.

SB: He was teaching there and then the war came and he went to Colorado.

PB: Yes.

SB: And you left your furniture in New Orleans.

PB: In our house. We actually expected to go back there, but when they heard we'd bought a house here, they—and it was just all, you know, hearsay and gossip and what not, but anyway the landlady went ahead and sold the house right out from under us, which was against the law at the time because if you were in the service, they had to save your house until you got back. But she heard we bought a house, so she just sold it. So we couldn't come back. So we had to stay here. We really—we loved New Orleans and we'd lived there for ten years and we had a townful of friends and somehow we wanted to go back, but we never did and it's a good thing.

SB: So the day your furniture got here.

PB: So the day my furniture got here was the day that I came home from the hospital with Joanie, and I arrived from the hospital to see a big van in front of the house. So I sat down in a chair over there with the baby in my arms and as the men came

in, I told them where to put the things. They walked right past me and the baby. [Laughs]

SB: And was it the furniture—I mean, was it this furniture?

PB: A lot of this. A lot of this furniture. Not that because that came straight from Bloomington and not that because it came later from Kentucky.

SB: Not the china cabinet.

PB: But that piece.

SB: The dresser.

PB: And all these chairs. Not that. Some of these things I bought here, but the little couch over there, this little couch I bought here.

SB: Loveseat.

PB: And then our bedroom furniture.

SB: All came straight from New Orleans the day that you came home from the hospital.

PB: All came straight from New Orleans, uh-hmm.

SB: Now, did you have a maid who lived in with you to help? Or did somebody just come during the day?

PB: No. No, I used to do a lot of the work myself. If I remember, I did the cleaning and brushing up a lot of the time, and then we finally did get a maid pretty much fulltime.

SB: And she came in the—

PB: But I always had to have somebody come in the late afternoon. What I had was a part time maid that would arrive around two thirty, and so she'd be here when Joanie got home at three—when Mary got home at three. But when I had the baby, I stayed home all the time and did my work. My own work.

SB: And what was that? Did you write and research?

PB: No, housework. Taking care of the little baby and a house, cleaning and cooking. [Laughs] But then I went back to—it was much later after the children were older that I went back to teaching.

SB: I see. So you were home for awhile, for several years.

PB: I was home until Joanie was five or six.

SB: So five or six years. Now, did you help out at the school? Were you in the PTA?

PB: Yes, I was, and I also helped in the cafeteria and I helped in the library.

SB: Now, what did you do in the cafeteria?

PB: Oh, there was a cafeteria in the Rosemary School and the mothers all were scheduled to help for one week during the month. And the lady that ran the cafeteria would tell you what to do. She'd tell you, "Take this and this and put it on the lettuce." So we'd just take—we'd make salads just like this, you know, putting stuff on top of the lettuce. Or else I remember having to pick open the milk bottles with a pick so the kids could pull the milk out of the cartons. [Laughs]

SB: Now, where did the food come—did you—did the mothers make the food there?

PB: No, we—some of it was made there and it was—the mothers could help make it, like cutting up cabbage for cabbage slaw and stuff like that, you know. I don't know. But it was bought by the cafeteria. Of course, they bought everything in bulk and the food was mighty simple.

SB: What sort of food did you prepare?

PB: Oh, some kind of salad and some kind of sandwich and a little dessert and milk.

SB: Did most of the children buy their lunch at school or bring their lunch from home?

PB: The ones that lived nearby always went home and the ones that came from a little further to go and come would eat there. Of course, nobody was bussed in those days. It was a neighborhood school.

SB: Right, right, right, and most of the mothers were home.

PB: Yes, the mothers were practically all at home. In the first place, the reason why is because there were no jobs, you know. There was nothing. You know, there was nothing for people to do.

SB: How come?

PB: Oh, I don't know, but the women weren't employed in so many capacities. And it was very hard to get a maid, though, because all of the—all of the people that had been doing domestic service were in war work and getting much more money for it, too. It was just awful and very, very hard to get a servant.

SB: And then did that change after the war?

PB: Oh, yes, after people—you know, during the Depression, people—everybody was out of a job.

SB: Of course.

PB: There wasn't any more war work and that really caused the Depression.

SB: What was it like under Eisenhower? What was it like in the '50s in Chevy Chase? Did people begin to get cars? Did more people get cars?

PB: People—more people bought cars and then to get out to University of Maryland you would pay somebody that had a car to take you. I remember when I was teaching there, I went—I would go with one person and come home with another sometimes, and I remember that I came home with one of my students, who drove his father's car and I paid him to drive me home.

SB: Gas money.

PB: Yeah.

SB: How would you get from here to the University of Maryland? Did you go down 410?

PB: Get to?

SB: To College Park.

PB: Well, we always went through Tacoma Park and down some kind of parkway.

SB: Yeah, yeah. So you went back to work in about 1950?

PB: I think I was there in '49. Yes.

SB: When Joanie started school.

PB: In 1951, Rudd had translated "The Seven Against Thebes," tragedy by Escalus, and I persuaded him to give the play in Chevy Chase— I persuaded Rudd to produce "The Seven Against Thebes," in the Rec Center at Norwood Drive.

SB: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm, off of Wisconsin Avenue.

PB: Off of Wisconsin Avenue right here in Chevy Chase, and we spent all summer on the project. The problem was how to light it and we decided that we would use natural lighting. One suggestion was having automobiles put the headlights on the stage and that seemed very crude and difficult. We could have driven them in, but we decided to have torches and we spent all summer making these torches,

and we did it by buying long wooden poles and buying candlewick. Wrapping it around one end of the pole, and each wrap had to be tacked on with carpet tack because, we found that as it burned, of course, it would fly off, but if it was tacked on with carpet tacks, it would burn round and round and not come loose. We also had big buckets to douse them in, and of course they had to be rehearsed with because if you're going to handle something like that, you know, you have to rehearse it thoroughly. The seven warriors each was given a torch and then the seven opposing warriors were each given a torch, you know, during the course of the play. That made fourteen, and then when we they fought each other in mock battle, the torches were thrown down and were all stuck into the ground around the apron of the stage.

SB: Oh, my goodness, it must have been so dramatic.

PB: Oh, it was. It's a very dramatic thing. Then they all kill each other.

SB: Yes, Escalus is like that.

PB: Then we had gods and goddesses on the stage. There were seven gods and goddesses who guarded the seven gates of Thebes, which were defended by the seven warriors, you know. Our handsomest friends, we invited to be the gods and they stood up on—we made great big platforms for the gods with building blocks and we got the building blocks from a building company, and then when we returned them back, we got our money back. We did it very inexpensively.

SB: So you got friends to play the gods and goddesses.

PB: Oh, we got friends to be almost all of it, except that the chorus was a women's—we lived near a woman musician who had a girls' chorus and her whole girls' chorus was our chorus in the play.

SB: Now, how many times did you put it on?

PB: And we had a—we didn't know what to do about the Greek choruses. They were all in Greek and such ancient Greek that they didn't make very good sense, even when you translated them into modern Greek and then into English. So we didn't translate them at all. We just had them recited in Greek by a singer who intoned them.

SB: Oh, how dramatic.

PB: [demonstrates singing] Kind of like that. [singing again] It went like that, you know.

SB: It must have been lovely.

PB: Well, and she had a gorgeous voice and she was Black. I don't know how we got hold of her, but the lady that had the chorus was very doubtful about having this person, and there were no Black people on a stage ever in that time. But we did. We introduced this Black girl in the chorus and we were the first people that ever had a Black person on stage in the Washington area, and nobody ever knew it or mentioned it because we did it—we just did it. We didn't ask anybody should we or can we. We just did it.

SB: Just did it. Well, good for you.

PB: And then she was later in plays at Theater Lobby because they picked her up and put her on stage down there. She was, you know, really good.

SB: What was her name, do you remember?

PB: She lived in Michigan and she didn't know what she was doing. She didn't know she integrated the whole damn community.

SB: How about that.

PB: She had no idea. She thought it was herself and her great talent that we needed, not her Blackness. [Laughs] And she went back to Michigan. Her name, I've forgotten it, but of course I have it on a list some place.

SB: Do you still have the—did you print up programs for the play?

PB: Yes, we did. I hope I've got one some place, but I don't know if I do. But it was free and we had at least five hundred people on two different nights. However, they were many of the same people. So I don't know how many people saw it, and it had absolutely no press notice.

SB: Did you put up posters in the neighborhood? How did people know about it? How did they know to come.

PB: Postcards. We sent postcards. Everybody in the cast was given a bunch of postcards and we sent out—I sent postcards to everybody.

SB: So people came. You sent them to your friends.

PB: And all the neighbors, you know.

SB: And people at Maryland? People at—

PB: Uh-hmm.

SB: Were your children involved?

PB: Yes, every one of them. Even my little daughter Joanie. A friend—well, at that time we were concerned with Theater Lobby and working with actors down there and a great many of them were in it. We had some really good talent.

SB: How did you get to use the Community Center at Norwood? Did you just sign up for it? Did you just say—

PB: Yeah, uh-hmm. That was easy. We just told the county.

SB: And what about costumes?

PB: Well, we devised those. I put the thing on. We did that. They were simple.

SB: Togas?

PB: Some of them but all the principle characters were in costumes and all the extras and the townspeople, there were forty people on the stage for this because all the townspeople were supposed to run back and forth and pray at the statues to save the city. It was supposed to be sort of a panic in Thebes, you know, when they were going to be invaded.

SB: And so what did the townspeople wear?

PB: Their own clothes.

SB: Oh, I see.

PB: Something simple. You know, something simple and nondescript.

SB: Not something that wouldn't call too much attention.

PB: Nothing fashionable. Something as close to just a long skirt, something like that.

SB: Now, where did you do your shopping for clothes? Did you go downtown? Did you go to Woody's?

PB: Woody's. Woody's was <u>the</u> place and it had a tea room. We went downtown to Woody's, and then there was a Woody's up on Branch at Leland Street and it burned down.

SB: Oh, really? At Leland Street and Wisconsin Avenue?

PB: Yes.

SB: And it burned down. When did it burn?

PB: Well, it burned down the day that—my husband's sister was a very prominent psychoanalyst and she and a psychoanalyst from Kansas City and one from Boston—she was from Denver at the time—were meeting here to ask for money. Well, these three psychoanalysts were meeting in Washington to go to NIH and ask for money to inspect detention places for disturbed children all over the place where there had been abuses and still are, I guess. Anyway, they wanted to try to put an end to it and have more inspections and they had to have money for it. Well, I had—my husband's sister spent the night here and I gave a luncheon for these three people and they had a one o'clock or one thirty appointment at NIH, and I gave them lunch at twelve and oh, they wanted to leave at twelve thirty. I said, "Well, it doesn't take one hour to get from here to NIH," and so I made them wait. And, oh, they were so nervous. I'll tell you, they were just scared to death, and we got down to Wisconsin Avenue and Woody's was burning down and we couldn't get through and we had to go around behind NIH and we didn't know how to get into it. I tell you, it was just awful. We got in front of the building just five minutes before they were supposed to be there. So they just walked right in. [Laughs] Then Rud's sister was—really, she was, "We should have allowed," you know.

SB: She let you know.

PB: She let me know that we should have allowed for this. [Laughs]

SB: You should have planned on a building burning down. [Laughs] What date was that? Do you remember about the year that happened?

PB: No.

SB: How old were your children?

PB: My children weren't in it.

SB: No, they were all at school.

PB: This probably—it was—yes, I do remember because I remember that that Woody's, I wonder if that was a set fire. That Woody's was closing down and one time I was in it and upstairs and there was a little girl who was a friend of—I knew her. I knew her parents. She was up there shoplifting because they didn't even have any carts in the store.

SB: Oh, so they weren't invested in it. What did you do when you saw the little girl?

PB: I stared at her and she snuck around. I don't know.

SB: Then you would go downtown to the big Woody's to do your shopping?

PB: I didn't tell her parents. I didn't tell on her. I didn't really do that. Maybe I should have, but I wouldn't have gotten into it for anything.

SB: So next door to the Woody's there was a Woolworth's, right? Is that right?

PB: Yes, that's right. I'd forgotten about it. You reminded me. [Laughs] Yes, there was. Now, see, you mixed me up in my own hometown. There was one in my hometown, too, that closed about the same town.

SB: But would you go up and down Wisconsin Avenue, go to the A&P and go to the Farm Women's Market?

PB: I never went to the Farm Women's Market very much. Everybody else did, but it was only special days and those were the days I taught. You know, I was busy, and on Saturdays, of course, I was terribly busy with the children.

SB: Now, did your children—you know, now everyone plays soccer and goes to piano lessons.

PB: My boys were swimmers.

SB: Oh, where did they swim?

PB: They swam at Walter Reed—well, they learned to swim early and they swam at Walter Reed Hospital. They were—this is when they were in high school.

SB: In the mid '50s.

PB: In BCC, and I used to—in mid '50s?

SB: No, it must have been the early '50s.

PB: No, it was in the '40s because Johnny graduated in—

SB: Well, he was ten in 1945. So he would have graduated from high school in about '53.

PB: No, he graduated in '52 and Bill graduated in '53.

SB: In '53 and Bill was in '52.

PB: Uh-hmm.

SB: So they would—the BCC swim team practiced at—

PB: No, John was '52. Bill was '53.

SB: Oh, I'm sorry.

PB: And we used to get them, pick them up. They were on the team at BCC. I don't know where they swam up there, but they did have a swim team there. But I would pick them up and take them to Walter Reed Hospital and they swam against girls who were practicing for the Olympics. They used the boys to pace the girls and they swam at BCC. One thing that happened—I might as well record this. I think I should. Bill Armstrong was in charge of the Olympic Team and he was their—they were working with him for a while, and then they had another coach, and the mother of one of these girls saw in the paper that Bill Armstrong had entered one of his swimmers to break a world record that had never been broken. A two-mile swim to be swum in a pool.

SB: Oh, my.

PB: Yeah, and the record was 1918 or something and nobody had tried to break it since then. So he had somebody that he thought could break the record. So they said Bill and John could both do that. So their coach, and I've forgotten his name now—Camel. Jim Camel.

SB: The coach at BCC?

PB: No, he wasn't at BCC. He was just a coach. Maybe it was at BCC. I don't know where he was the coach. Anyway, he was their coach. He entered both Bill and John and there was somebody there measuring the pool and both of our boys broke the record. John came in considerably ahead of Bill and then Bill came in very much ahead of the other boy. When they saw that the other boy wasn't going to make it, they just left, and the mother of this girl is the one that paced him because he wanted to finish and he did finish it.

SB: Well, how about that.

PB: But they were photographed in the Washington Post. Oh, they looked so cute, so happy in their bathing suits. They'd broken this record and everything at high school age, you know, and then it was disqualified.

SB: Why? Why was it disqualified?

PB: They said the pool wasn't measured correctly. They measured it with a stick instead of a tape.

SB: Oh, how heartbreaking for your boys.

PB: And they did it on purpose. Oh, yeah, it was—

SB: Why?

PB: Well, they didn't—

SB: Just hatefulness?

PB: Just—yes. Just because they weren't supposed to be there.

SB: Well, what did your boys think about that?

PB: They were disappointed, but I think it was just plain dishonest, and he was the guy in charge of the whole Olympic Team. And I'm telling on him.

SB: Right, well, now we now. Now we know. Well, that's awful. I'm glad you told it. It's a good story. Still a good story about your boys.

PB: And of course, we have the photograph. Oh, it's so cute. The boys in their swimsuits and their big smiles and whatnot, dangling their legs.

SB: Oh, so proud.

PB: So proud to have broken a world record.

SB: Well, they have that. I mean no matter what else, they still have that feeling.

PB: Oh, no.

SB: No?

PB: No.

SB: No, it's just disappointment.

PB: They don't care anymore about their swimming records. I saved some of their little medals and things that they got and asked them if they want them, "Nah." [Laughs]

SB: Now, what about your girls? Did they swim, too?

PB: Not much, no.

SB: No, they weren't big swimmers?

PB: Neither of them wanted to. They both can swim, but they just—not their thing.

SB: Did they have activities that were their special thing that they did?

PB: Mary went into cooking. When she was in high school and junior high school, they had little cliquey clubs and they were cooking clubs and the girls would—what they did was cooked dinners, and they would meet at each other's houses

and cook dinner and then every once in awhile they'd invite the boys. I guess that was the idea, getting to be a good enough cook so they could cook a dinner and have a dinner party and invite a boy.

SB: Did you ever have them here?

PB: Oh, yes, and Mary was absolutely—oh, she made the most delicious cheesecakes with different toppings. Blueberries or strawberries or something.

SB: Oh, wow.

PB: Mmm. She still uses that same recipe.

SB: Now, she graduated when, in about '58 maybe? If she was five in 1945--

PB: Wait a minute. No, she was—well, she went away—she's so social that she came home from high school one day and said, "Mother, you know I'm not college material," and I said, "Well, we'll see about that." I said, "You'll have to go away to a good preparatory school, I guess," and she said, "Well, I won't go to a girl's school." So I heard about High Mullings School and I received a lot of—I received a prospectus from the school sent to me by some friends who recommended it, and I read it and I was so impressed that I called the head mistress on the phone. She said, "Well, your daughter would have to come for an interview. We don't ever accept any pupil that hasn't been here for an interview." So I had to send her up alone because at that time I was teaching at the University of Maryland, and so was Rudd and we were—

SB: And you had Joanie at home.

PB: Well, yes, but one or the other of us could have left, but it just happened neither of us could. So I sent her up alone and a friend that I had, college friend in Boston met her in Boston and put her on the train for High Mullings.

SB: Where is that?

PB: It's in Wilson, New Hampshire.

SB: So she took the train to Boston?

PB: She took the train to Boston. My friend met her and when we took her down to the train, to put her on the train, the conductor or one of the conductors said, "Elvis Presley is in the car down there. Send your daughter down." So Mary ran

down the side and Elvis Presley waved to her out of the window. He was in a private compartment with some folks.

SB: Oh, my. That's wonderful.

PB: And she didn't give a darn about Elvis Presley. [Laughs]

SB: But it was still fun, I guess.

PB: She wasn't into that at that time.

SB: No? How old was she? She was sixteen, seventeen?

PB: No, much younger because she was always young.

SB: So she was young for her year.

PB: She went to BCC for three years.

SB: And then to High Mullings?

PB: She was one year young, you know, for her age. Her age group. So she went to High Mullings for two or three years.

SB: And then onto college?

PB: And then onto college.

SB: It turned out she was college material?

PB: Oh, yes. [Laughs]

SB: And then you still had Joanie at home.

PB: And she later went to High Mullings, too.

SB: Oh, after BCC or instead?

PB: She went for BCC for at least two years.

SB: And by the time your children got to BCC did you—did the parents help at the school a lot or was it less so?

PB: Oh, no, I was never near BCC. I never went inside it. I always just waited outside in the car for my kids. [Laughs]

SB: What about football games and things like that, did the children go to that?

PB: Never.

SB: No?

PB: No, they were too concerned with swimming and they were too concerned with swimming for smoking or drugs. We never had any problem with it. They never smoked in their lives. Neither of my boys because they were swimmers, and it

kept them out of more trouble because they worked so hard and swam so hard, that they just collapsed and went to bed. Then they got up the next morning and that was it. You know, they weren't into any night riding or anything like that.

SB: Were other children in the neighborhood? Were some of the children they grew up with, did they get more involved in—

PB: I don't know. Wasn't concerned with them.

SB: No. What about your other neighbors on the street—

PB: Oh, no, there was a lady. There was a lady, a mother of one of the children who told me that the children were having intercourse with each other at the school.

SB: Oh, my.

PB: And I said, "You don't say?" I was really surprised. I said, "Well, I don't think mine are." [Laughs]

SB: Goodness. Now, you said you had neighbors next door who had four boys. Did they stay and grow up with your children?

PB: No, they moved away, to our sorrow. They moved away after a couple years.

SB: Oh, that's too bad.

PB: And then the Blastley's lived next door.

SB: On the other side.

PB: On the other side, and they were younger.

SB: So did they stay? Were they here for a long time?

PB: No, they didn't stay either, and then the Moores moved in there and Joanie was best friends with Sue Moore, the youngest daughter, and they are still best friends to this day. I actually invited Sue Moore to my one hundredth birthday. She lives way up in New Hampshire and I received a regret from her the other day and we had a long talk.

SB: Oh, isn't that nice? It's too bad she can't come, but it's nice that you're still in touch.

PB: Oh, her father probably will come.

SB: Her father?

PB: Her father still lives in the area. He's in a retirement home now in Gaithersburg.

SB: Now, on down the street towards the school there are those wonderful three Spanish colonial houses.

PB: Yes. Well, the one on the end was a brothel, speaking of brothels.

SB: Chevy Chase was a rough town.

PB: And I think it probably was a government affair because one time I was walking home from the A&P, which I told you was at the end of Stanford Street down on Wisconsin, and a young girl was walking along with groceries, carrying them. I was pushing Joanie in the baby carriage, a big one, and so I suggested that she put the groceries at the foot of my baby carriage so that she didn't have to carry them. We walked along all the way up the street and she said, "You know, there's something very strange about that house that I'm staying in on the corner there. I think you ought to come in and take a look at it." She said, "My fiancé is in the navy and I'm here for the weekend. I was here visiting for the weekend and they put me in this house, and I think there's something strange about it." So she said, "I'll take you in." So I went in with her and we went all over the place and there were girls sitting around with no clothes, not many clothes on and, you know, wandering around upstairs. Then it did have a red light on the front door that blinked. [pause] Hi. [tape off/on]

I want to finish this story about the Spanish house. Well, it turned out that it really was a place where naval people were stationed and they were using it. It was a government place because neighbors up and down the street, as I learned later, had reported the place over and over again and the police wouldn't do anything about it. So it was a place that the government wanted to be there for intelligence purposes, I'm sure.

SB: Well, that's—

PB: However, that house was built by the architect who was also the architect of the Knickerbocker Theater. Have you ever heard of what happened to the Knickerbocker Theater? Well, it was a terrible tragedy. Snow fell on the roof and the roof collapsed. It was a movie theater and quantities of people were killed.

SB: Oh, how awful. This was downtown?

PB: Downtown, and he was the architect of that house in which he lived and the other two Spanish houses, and I think another Spanish house in Hillcrest. Actually, he killed himself in that house. Hanged himself in the house over the balcony. There's a balcony hanging over the kind of cathedral ceiling in the front room.

SB: Well, that's quite a story.

PB: So that's quite a story.

SB: It is.

PB: I was told, whether it's true or not and I guess it was true, that a man killed himself and his family in the house next door, which has since been torn down.

SB: It's gone, and that was before you came? It was before 1944.

PB: Oh, yeah.

SB: Considerably before that.

PB: Yes, considerably before.

SB: Were there any other—were there any big events in the neighborhood like that while you were bringing up your children?

PB: No. Absolutely not.

SB: No?

PB: No.

SB: When Kennedy was shot, do you remember that? Were you here? Were you home? Were you at Maryland? Your children were grown and gone.

PB: Yes, when Kennedy was shot, I was having roofing done and there were roofers in the basement and they were all listening to a radio. I thought—Joanie was at High Mulling at the time and it looked like her radio, but I thought she took it with her. So I said, "Is that your radio?" and they just looked at me and they left with the radio and they didn't even finish some of the flashing. They had gotten news that Kennedy was shot and they never told me. I had to find it out later.

SB: How about that. You must have been so puzzled. What strange behavior from roofers.

PB: Well, they were all foreign or Black or something. I don't know. They just—you know, they weren't going to communicate with me.

SB: They weren't going to—

PB: When they heard that Kennedy—they probably thought I was a Republican or something. [Laughs] Well, this is a story. Maybe we better call it quits. Believe me, I lived here a long time and things did go on, you know.

SB: Well, this has been wonderful. You have—you remember wonderful things. Thank you so much for sitting with us.

PB: Uh-hmm.

End of Interview