



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Annie Bell Nelson

Interview Date: December 3, 2001
MISSIAEN: Margaret Missiaen
Transcriber: Susan Dalpee

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

MISSIAEN: First of all I should say who I am and who you are. I'm Margaret Missiaen, and I live at 647 South Carolina Ave., SE. I'm interviewing Mrs. Annie Nelson who live at...

NELSON: 657.

MISSIAEN: 657 South Carolina.

NELSON: Uh-huh [indicating yes].

MISSIAEN: Could you start by telling us when and where you were born.

NELSON: I was born in Sumter, South Carolina, Sumter County.

MISSIAEN: And when was that.

NELSON: Nine Twenty-Two Fourteen. [Sept. 22, 1914]

MISSIAEN: You just turned...

NELSON: Eighty-seven.

MISSIAEN: Tell us a little about your early childhood.

NELSON: Oh, my early childhood. I was the oldest child of the family, oldest grand, and the oldest child, and I was very small. And when I was six years old, I started school. I went through elementary school, high school and three years college.

MISSIAEN: And where was that?

NELSON: Sumter, South Carolina.

MISSIAEN: That was your elementary school, high school and 3 years of college?

NELSON: Sumter, uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: How do you spell Sumter?

NELSON: S-U-M-T-E-R [spelled out].

[Long Pause.]

MISSIAEN: Ok. When did your family move to the Washington area?

NELSON: In 1937.

MISSIAEN: You and your parents?

NELSON: No. My husband and myself. My husband came first and I came afterwards.

MISSIAEN: When were you married?

NELSON: November 1936.

MISSIAEN: What was your husband's name?

NELSON: Joseph.

MISSIAEN: Why did he come to Washington?

NELSON: Looking for a better job.

MISSIAEN: What was he doing in South Carolina?

NELSON: He was a truck driver for, let me see, what do you call that, for a lumber company.

MISSIAEN: What kind of job did he find when he came to Washington?

NELSON: Oh, when he came here, he still drove a truck for Ajax Construction Company. And then, he rented a cab and started driving a cab in his spare time.

MISSIAEN: That must of kept him busy.

NELSON: Yes, [chuckle].

MISSIAEN: When you came here did you have any children?

NELSON: One.

MISSIAEN: Where did you live when you first came here?

NELSON: Oh, when I first came here, I lived, it was 454 M Street, Northwest.

MISSIAEN: Did you have a house?

NELSON: No. At that time, we had a room, cause my mother had the baby, [chuckle].

MISSIAEN: So the baby stayed...

NELSON: With my mother until we got a house, apartment rather, yes.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh. So you had the room on M Street and then where did you live after that?

NELSON: Corcoran Street. Got an apartment.

MISSIAEN: Then did the baby come up?

NELSON: Yea and then my mother brought the baby up. And then I had the second baby [chuckle].

MISSIAEN: [Chuckle.] Did you have a small apartment?

NELSON: Oh, we had one bedroom, kitchen, bath and a living room, dinette.

MISSIAEN: How long did you live there?

NELSON: Two years.

MISSIAEN: Then, did you move again.

NELSON: Uh-huh. I moved, I rented a house after that, at 462 N Street, Northwest.

MISSIAEN: 462 N Street?

NELSON: N, like in Nelly.

MISSIAEN: OK. So you had a little more space there?

NELSON: Yes.

MISSIAEN: At that time you had children?

NELSON: Uh-huh, and I lived there until I moved over here.

MISSIAEN: And when was that?

NELSON: May of 1948.

MISSIAEN: Did you buy this house?

NELSON: Yes.

MISSIAEN: Did you do a lot of looking at houses?

NELSON: No. I looked, I think this wasn't but this third house that I look at, for the first place I look at was in Maryland, was something like a farm house and my husband was crazy about that, but I wasn't. And then, I looked in the Sunday paper at the want ad and I saw this house was for sale and that Monday morning I called and the resident said he would pick me up. I said no, my husband was not home and he

said I'll carry you and if you like it I'll come back, leave and get your husband. And so when I walked in and walked through, I wanted it.

MISSIAEN: And you and the two children moved in here?

NELSON: No, I had more than two of that. Let's see, I must be had seven.

MISSIAEN: Seven when you moved in here.

NELSON: Yea, cause I had only two what was born here.

MISSIAEN: Ok.

NELSON: Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: What was the block like when you moved here?

NELSON: Oh, well, when I moved here, this side of the street was mixed. On the other side wasn't. And, uh-huh, the first somebody I met of color was Mrs. Haynes' mother.

MISSIAEN: Mrs. [Eva] Haynes' mother?

NELSON: Uh-huh, Ms. Parker.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh. Were there other people who you got to know on this block?

NELSON: Yea. It was another couple that was Hawkins. I think she, I think she died while she was still living here. And I don't what become Mr. Hawkins.

MISSIAEN: So your husband was continuing to work for the trucking company after you moved here?

NELSON: Oh, he worked for a while and the, the company he was working for told him, said, if I tell you something would you like it. And he said tell it. And he said, I think you should go in business for yourself. You're too hard a worker to work for someone else. And then he formed his own trucking company for himself.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Yes.

MISSIAEN: Then did he have other people working for him?

NELSON: Uh-huh. And first, think the first he got three truckers. He got a truck for himself and then he had another person that drove the other one and he had a spare if something happened to one of those.

And then after that he had, he went into the service and then before he moved he had and he sold the truck and then he came, and he got there he had to buy all new truck. But he still stayed in the business and the company that he was driving truck for, they give all their spare hauling. And he did good. Real good.

MISSIAEN: So your husband was a Word War II vet?

NELSON: Yea. World War II veteran, uh-huh. And the house was what he promised himself if the Lord had let him live he was going to get me a house [chuckle].

MISSIAEN: That's a good story.

NELSON: Uh-huh, and so this is my gift for him living [chuckle].

MISSIAEN: Well, when you moved in here, you had the seven children. Where did they go to school?

NELSON: Oh. Giddings and two of the children was just starting high school and they was going to Dunbar and they still went back to Dunbar. And Hines and Brent.

MISSIAEN: They went to Dunbar because that was where you had lived.

NELSON: They didn't want to change. I, cause see if they had changed, I think they would go to Eastern.

MISSIAEN: Right.

NELSON: But they didn't want to change and, so, they said they could get there every morning if I get them school tickets so his Daddy said let them go.

MISSIAEN: How did they get to Dunbar?

NELSON: How did they go?

MISSIAEN: Yes.

NELSON: Oh, they would catch the bus

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: and buy school tickets

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh, and catch the bus on Pennsylvania Avenue?

NELSON: No, on Eighth Street.

MISSIAEN: Oh, ok.

NELSON: And ride on down, and transfer.

MISSIAEN: Dunbar was an elite high school back at that time.

NELSON: Uh-huh, because, how many did I have from Dunbar? I must have had four or five that graduated from Dunbar. Carl was the last one that came from Dunbar. But they didn't want to change, and so he said, well, if they not that month they have to change, I'll get em school tickets every week.

MISSIAEN: I can understand that kids don't like to leave their friends.

NELSON: Yea.

MISSIAEN: Did you have a lot of friends on the block here?

NELSON: I was more than the friend with Mrs. Haynes' mother. Yes.

MISSIAEN: Where did you go to church?

NELSON: Franklin P. Nash United Methodist Church.

MISSIAEN: Franklin P.

NELSON: Nash. N-A-S-H [spelled out].

MISSIAEN: Methodist Church.

NELSON: And see, when I moved here, they was on Levy Street, Northeast. And, so, we got two loud for the church and bought a church at Lincoln Road and U Street, Northeast. And that's where I met Mel.

MISSIAEN: Ok. And you were still attending the same...

NELSON: Yes. Still attending, uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: Where is Northeast did you say the church is now?

NELSON: Lincoln Road and U, Northeast.

MISSIAEN: Where did you do your shopping when your children were growing up?

NELSON: Grocery or what?

MISSIAEN: Grocery shopping. Yes, let's start with groceries.

NELSON: Oh, ok. See, when I moved here, it was a, used to call it the Safeway. It was down, across the street from the market.

MISSIAEN: Oh, I remember that one.

NELSON: Yea. I shopped there. And it was one, down there on Eighth Street, I mean on Seventh Street, but you know, on Seventh Street, where that church or something is there now.

MISSIAEN: Yes, where that church is now.

NELSON: Uh-huh. It was a Safeway there. And the A&P.

MISSIAEN: Oh. Where was an A&P?

NELSON: At Twelfth and Penn where the CVS.

MISSIAEN: Oh, yes. I remember that.

NELSON: That was an A&P.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: And that was where I did my food shopping.

MISSIAEN: Did you ever go to Eastern Market to buy food?

NELSON: Uh-huh. Yea, sure.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: To buy vegetables and fish. They had the best fish and vegetables.

MISSIAEN: Now, did you walk to Eastern Market.

NELSON: Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: And you walked over to the...

NELSON: Yes. Yes.

MISSIAEN: Safeway.

NELSON: Yes. Cause all those were in walking distance.

MISSIAEN: Right.

NELSON: And then there was boys there that would bring you grocery home for you.

MISSIAEN: And other kinds of shopping, did you go to the shops on Pennsylvania Avenue?

NELSON: No. One time on Eighth Street they had a shoe store, good shoe store, you know sell good shoes and I go there...

MISSIAEN: This was...

NELSON: Uh-huh. And they had a dress shop and apparel for ladies.

MISSIAEN: This was on Eighth Street?

NELSON: Yea, on Eighth Street. And they had a furniture store. I think it was Walker. I think that was the name of it going down toward the Navy Yard, furniture store. When I moved over here, you really didn't have to go out of the neighborhood for nothing.

MISSIAEN: You could do all your shopping...

NELSON: Uh-huh, yea.

MISSIAEN: By walking.

NELSON: Uh-huh, yea.

MISSIAEN: What'd you do for entertainment?

NELSON: [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: Go out to movies?

NELSON: Yea. Go to a movie and go and at that time you use to do different things at church in the night and on the weekends. And I go, always loved to be a part of that.

MISSIAEN: Were there movie theaters in this neighborhood?

NELSON: Uh-huh. It was on Pennsylvania Avenue in the 600 block. It was two when I moved over here. There was one on the right-hand side and one on the left-hand side. And around on Eighth Street it was a movie. And I laughed one day, there was something that I wanted to see and I went out there on the, out to the, and it was gone the day before. And I had to see, what was that, Sampson and Son was it, knowing that, I said I don't care what's out here, I done come out here I'm going to stay at this movie tonight [chuckle].

MISSIAEN: [Chuckle.] Did you go for picnics in the parks in the neighborhood?

NELSON: No. We always used to go, cause my husband drove a Capitol Cab and they always have a big picnic for the drivers and their families once a year. And we would always would go out, and it would

either be out in Maryland, what's the place name, a place in, I can't think of it, don't know whether it was in Maryland or Virginia, but you could take the boat and go out to, out there, I can't think of it. But anyway, they had picnic out there and games and things you could play in. Used to be a good time. And then take on church picnic, Hershey Park and

MISSIAEN: Oh, ok. Hershey Park.

NELSON: Used to take the children once a year to Hershey Park and Atlantic City and Coney Island and I'd have more children than anybody else. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: [Chuckle.] Were there special activities at Christmas time or Easter?

NELSON: Oh, Christmas time, all the families, we would go from one house to another, you know, like I would have the family this Christmas, someone else would have the family the next Christmas, and we still do that. So we have this family gathering on Christmas.

MISSIAEN: Do you have other relatives that live in Washington...

NELSON: Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: besides your children?

NELSON: Uh-huh. My sisters.

MISSIAEN: Your sisters?

NELSON: I have three sisters

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: that live here in Washington. On, four. I said, three. One would disown me, hey.

MISSIAEN: What kind of changes have you seen along the block in the time that you lived here?

NELSON: I miss all the children used to be through the block. You used to see a lot of children passing. Well, you don't see the children any more. And being a mixed block, mixed neighborhood, I getting to know lot of people that they would have problems. But I've never had any problems. I had some good neighbors.

MISSIAEN: You said the neighborhood has been pretty mixed?

NELSON: Yea, oh yea. I never seen no, I never had no ill feelings about moving in this neighborhood.

MISSIAEN: Where there more African Americans?

NELSON: No, it was more, oh, it was more white.

MISSIAEN: When you first moved here it was mostly...

NELSON: Oh, yes, uh-huh, cause my neighbor on this side was white and my neighbor on that side was white, and right on down to the apartment house on the corner, that was colored. But this was, it was really more white than African American.

MISSIAEN: Did a lot of people live here because they worked at the Navy Yard?

NELSON: I don't know. And cross the street there was a house where, who was living there. The man that was living there, that was sold.

MISSIAEN: Dick [Wood]?

NELSON: Dick, that was who it is?

MISSIAEN: The double house across the street that just sold [number 644]?

NELSON: Yea. Oh, that was a house they used to rent to nothing but girls, was female, nothing in there but females and I used to just stand at the door and look and look. At that time, use to wear a lot of skirt and blouse. And they would be so crispy looking going out in the morning. I said, ooh, they look so nice.

MISSIAEN: So that was a rooming house for young women?

NELSON: Yea, uh-huh. Women, yes, when I moved over here.

MISSIAEN: Did they work for the government?

NELSON: I don't know. I just see them going and coming. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: Did you go downtown to the department stores?

NELSON: Yea. You know, it was Kann's, and there was a store on, named Lansburgh's and Goldberg's and Hecht's.

MISSIAEN: How did you get downtown when you went?

NELSON: Ride the street cars or bus. Cause when I first moved over here, it was street cars.

MISSIAEN: Ok.

NELSON: And I ride the streetcar or bus.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh. Where were the streetcars like?

NELSON: It was like a, something on the order of a train coach.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Uh-huh. And the driver, it was more like you just take one train coach and you know you a driver, and the seats in it, it was like a train coach.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: But is was nice. If it snowed, a whole lot of snow, you were stranded. Cause they couldn't drive. I don't know what was the problem, but anyways, if come a great big big snow, they didn't run.

MISSIAEN: It must have been because snow covered the tracks.

NELSON: Yea. Somebody guess had to do the tracks or something like that.

MISSIAEN: The streetcar ran Pennsylvania?

NELSON: Uh-huh. When I moved out here, there was a streetcar running. And then after that, the bus started.

MISSIAEN: You ever go down to the Capitol when it snowed?

NELSON: No.

MISSIAEN: Did your children play down there at all?

NELSON: Oh, they just loved to go down there in the spring of the year and play. [Long pause.] And the fireworks. They used to love to go down there sit up on the hill, and look at the fireworks.

MISSIAEN: Do you remember any, any national disasters that affected you? Do you remember what it was like at the end of World War II?

NELSON: I remember during World War II when you had to get those rations stamps, and the only way you could buy shoes, I think you had to use your sugar stamp or something. That was a disaster. And certain things you couldn't buy. That was the main thing. And gas too was rationed. Cause I know when my husband was in the service, he had a job that he couldn't get out, so he told me to let the other driver do his job and he always, and I don't know what he would do with the gas. Always had to go to office and sign up for extra gas. That was a mess. And then gas was rationed.

MISSIAEN: That would be a hard thing for someone who made his living driving.

NELSON: Uh-huh, yea, cause they do have to sign up for how much gas you need. And if was run out, you just was out.

MISSIAEN: Your husband drove a truck and the cab until he retired?

NELSON: Yea. He, when he retired he was still was on doing his truckin. Cause I had the hardest time to try to keep him home. He said, Why I can go and do a light job. I'll get somebody about, but he's not going to do nothing. No kind of job. And cause I took the keys and put them away where he couldn't find them. Cause he loved driving.

MISSIAEN: Did you ever take family vacations?

NELSON: Uh-huh, yes.

MISSIAEN: Going where.

NELSON: We'd go home to Sumter. Yes. But he was just like a, ants was covering him. He, are you ready to go back. I said no. Cause last time he did I told him, I said no. He wouldn't stay the time so I told him well I wasn't going no more vacations with him. Cause he'd say, I have to back and my work going on and you can't trust nobody to do your work like I can and, I know it's done right if I'm there. Well, I don't know what they're doing when I'm not there. I said, ok. I'll pack. We'll go. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: So, he did eventually retire and stay home...

NELSON: No. You know what happened? He had a doctor appointment and he went to the doctor and the doctor called me and told me not to look for him because she was sending him to the hospital. And, so she sent him to the hospital and they kept him. Cause she wanted him to have some tests and she was saying to the hospital, so when they sent him to the hospital. But she was concerned because every time he would come for his appointment his blood pressure would be higher and higher. And she couldn't understand what was happening. So she called Providence and she sent him there and so they admitted him. And from then on, he just started going down because the doctor said it was because of his kidneys. That's why they couldn't control the pressure. And they put him on dialysis. And he stayed on dialysis until he passed.

MISSIAEN: So, he worked up...

NELSON: Oh, yea. When he went for his appointment, he went from work. And they sent him to the hospital. That was his first time going to the hospital for that ailment. Now, he loved to work now.

MISSIAEN: Oh, it wasn't any sacrifice for him.

NELSON: Yea. So he just loved to work.

MISSIAEN: With all the children, did you ever try to do any work?

NELSON: On, right on when I was nine years old, I went to work.

MISSIAEN: Where did you work?

NELSON: Anegel insurance office.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh. What did you do at the insurance office?

NELSON: Oh, helped put the record away and cleaned for her.

MISSIAEN: Did your children help out at home?

NELSON: No. I would get home time enough.

MISSIAEN: But with 10 children...

NELSON: Well, see, I would only go three days a week. I was going to work full time and I'd have the other time home washing, ironing.

MISSIAEN: Must been a lot of work with all the children.

NELSON: Lot of work because at Dunbar and two or three would be deck

MISSIAEN: Oh

NELSON: and they had to wear white shirts so many days a week and that was a whole lot of washing.

MISSIAEN: You always had a washer and dryer?

NELSON: Uh-huh. But after you done wash and dry you have to iron them. And I one son just as cranky as he could be, Leon. That shirt had to be just right. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: I'm going to stop this a minute.

TAPE 1/SIDE 2 [Starts about 1/4 way into the tape]

MISSIAEN: The older children went back to high school, Dunbar?

NELSON: Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: And your younger ones?

NELSON: All, all of my children finished Dunbar. All of em went to Dunbar High School, but some, they went over there to Hines Junior High.

MISSIAEN: Right, but after that

NELSON: Went back to Dunbar, back to Dunbar.

MISSIAEN: Do you remember any difficult times?

NELSON: No.

MISSIAEN: For you and your family?

NELSON: No. No, I really don't. I would say, I would look back and wonder why I didn't. I really did not have a difficult time with the children. Because I can say they had a father that really tried to, I didn't say they got everything they wanted, but he would, you know, try to fulfill their needs. And he told them boys, say, I'm not going to tell you to go to school, I'm not going to tell not to go. I'm going to tell you one thing, if you drop out, you know what you're going to do? You're going to get a job. And that's up to you. And didn't have to worry about it, cause they went to school [chuckle].

MISSIAEN: And you said you went three years to

NELSON: College, yea. Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: What did you study?

NELSON: Teaching.

MISSIAEN: Did you, did you ever do any teaching?

NELSON: Never was, substitute. They told me that why had so many children, cause I didn't do that last year and I wanted a school. [Laughter.]

MISSIAEN: [Laughter.] When you got married, you dropped out of school.

NELSON: Yea. Dropped out. I said I was going on, but I didn't. Cause got pregnant. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: Right, then you had a baby to care for.

NELSON: Yea, cause my whole intention was to do that last year. Yea so I was a disappointment to my parents.

MISSIAEN: You said that Sally Collis was living here [at 649 South Carolina]?

NELSON: Oh yea, they was living here when I moved here. They was children when I moved here.

MISSIAEN: There was another African American woman who lived down the block.

NELSON: Oh, what that lady name, next door to me?

MISSIAEN: No, she...

NELSON: Oh, Miss, oh

MISSIAEN: The one who had the little dog.

NELSON: Alexander.

MISSIAEN: And was she living here [at 663 South Carolina]...

NELSON: Uh-huh. She's up on Second Street living with her brother, brother after, you know, after she got sick. Then she moved with her brother, cause one of her legs was amputated. Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: Oh, really, I didn't know that.

NELSON: Yea, I talk to her sometime. She's still making it.

MISSIAEN: Was she living here when you moved here?

NELSON: We moved in about the same time. Yea, she moved in. There was another family, can't think of her name. She had two girls and her son got killed in the service. Can't think of her name. It was myself, it was Ms. Alexander and the [inaudible] over the. Three of us that living right near together. But I'm the first one that moved in. Well, you know, it was so funny, then I move in, I didn't know it was a mixed block. I just, I was glad to get a larger house. I was looking for the house. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: Well, do you think that that was unusual in Washington, mixed neighborhoods?

NELSON: No. It was on back in the year that the neighborhoods wasn't mixed like that because I've always lived in all Black neighborhood until I moved over here. But in the later years, they got mixed.

MISSIAEN: What about the schools?

NELSON: The school

MISSIAEN: Were they mixed?

NELSON: No, I don't think they were. Cause I think I was over here a few years before Hines was mixed. But Hines was first school over here that I know that was mixed cause then I know I moved here Hines was white.

MISSIAEN: And what about the elementary schools.

NELSON: Oh they was total Black.

MISSIAEN: That was Giddings?

NELSON: Giddings, uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: Was there a white school there, too?

NELSON: I don't know where the white school, cause all I know was Giddings. And I know nothing there, cause I was active in the PTA and there wasn't nothing there but us. [Laughter.]

MISSIAEN: [Laughter.] And so Hine was white. After the Supreme Court decision, Hine was...

NELSON: I think, I think when I moved here, Hines was white, but I don't know where the elementary white school was. But I know Hines was a white school. Where the elementary white was, I don't know.

MISSIAEN: But then, it became mixed.

NELSON: Yes. Then they became mixed.

MISSIAEN: So your children, after they went to Giddings Elementary School

NELSON: They went to Hines, yes, uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: All right. In sports, did your children play on a team, sports team?

NELSON: Uh-huh, football. Football, uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: And those were teams that were associated with the schools?

NELSON: Yes.

MISSIAEN: Were there any neighborhood teams that you knew?

NELSON: No, because there weren't that many children, you know, around, for them to play with.

MISSIAEN: Were there many children on the block when your children were growing up?

NELSON: No, uh-uh [indicating no]. No they were not many. And the one, I can't think of her name now, she had girls and [chuckle] and .

MISSIAEN: You had the boys.

NELSON: I had the boys.

MISSIAEN: Were Sally Collis's children...

NELSON: Sally didn't have any children when I moved here.

MISSIAEN: Ok. So her children were younger than your children.

NELSON: Uh-huh, yea. Sally married since I was here.

MISSIAEN: Oh, really?

NELSON: Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: Did your daughters ever do any babysitting for Sally.

NELSON: No. Cause when, cause one of my sons with Sally's brother, he was younger than Sally I think, he went out to the People's Drug Store then. And they went out, they were going out to get something cold to drink. And he came back, he was so excited and he said, Mommy, I said what. They wouldn't serve me, they wouldn't serve me. I said, Where were you? I was in, Dicky [Everett] and me went out to get something cold to drink but Dicky got his and they wouldn't give me any.

MISSIAEN: Where were they? Do you know where they went?

NELSON: Right. It was People's Drug Store.

MISSIAEN: Just to People's?

NELSON: Yea, they used to have a food counter there. And he said they served Dicky, but they wouldn't serve him.

MISSIAEN: Had he never gone in there before?

NELSON: No. That was the first time. They was somewhere. Oh, they were in the backyard and they decided they were going there to get something to drink. And he said they served Dicky but they wouldn't serve him.

MISSIAEN: Ok. Did that change then?

NELSON: Yea. That changed after all the years, but I don't know long afterwards, but I know it's changed. It didn't stay like that. Everything changed since, almost since I was out here. Cause a lot of things you couldn't do and, and you start doing in the later years. Yea, I've seen the change since I was here.

MISSIAEN: How did you know where you could go and where you couldn't go?

NELSON: Don't worry, you'd know, because we would go around and stand around for a long time and nobody would ask you what you want, you'd know that you'd not wanted [chuckle]. [Laughter.]

MISSIAEN: Right, right. [Laughter]. People's Drug Store was one where you couldn't get service at the counter.

NELSON: No.

MISSIAEN: What about over at Kressge's? Did Kressge's have a food counter?

NELSON: Yea. I don't know about Kressge's but I know, cause I , I was, stopped in like when I was out and, you know, I'd bring a sandwich or something home, but I never did go in to sit around and eat.

MISSIAEN: How about places downtown?

NELSON: I've never gone down there.

MISSIAEN: You went down to the department stores.

NELSON: No. I didn't start any problems. No. I've never had any problems down at department stores. Always, cause I heard they had problems, but I've never had any.

MISSIAEN: I guess it was more a problem with places that served food?

NELSON: Uh-huh. Yea, but back in the year, it was certain places you know you couldn't go in. You didn't even try. You go where you know you're supposed to go.

MISSIAEN: Were movie theaters ever a problem?

NELSON: No. No. Them was the years, things was getting better anyway. It wasn't as bad as it used to be, no way. And, in the forties and things and the fifties and sixties, things were changing.

MISSIAEN: Right.

NELSON: Yea. But I never forget, one time I was coming from home. I went to visit my mother. And I was surprised, they said you had to, if you wanted anything, you had to go around to back room and ask for it.

MISSIAEN: That was along the road?

NELSON: Coming back, you know on the route. I was really surprised. I said, now, why they said no, these people have to go around the back and all the other people sitting down around the nice white table cloth and they enjoying themselves and they telling you all to go in the back. I said, I don't want nothing, myself.

MISSIAEN: So you didn't go around the back?

NELSON: No, I didn't go around the back. I just wait for my bus to pull up.

MISSIAEN: Can you think of other changes you've seen?

NELSON: Yea, because I've lived in, you sure the changes, you know when they changed the grocery store from down this end, that was a disaster. Wouldn't had the Safeway and thing and you'd go to the Safeway but now you can't just walk out and go there, if you go up to the Safeway store, you just have to bring something you can bring back in your hand. But I think it used to be better when they had the Safeway down this end and you could get someone to bring, if it was more than you could bring, was always some little boys with a wagon and they would bring it home for you. Or the store, I think, they done us unjust when they took the grocery store from down here.

MISSIAEN: Right, I used to go to that Safeway, and I was very upset...

NELSON: I and loved, you know I loved that A&P store. Go there, cause I love beef rump roast. And it was cheaper than the Safeway and I would go up there and get my rump roast and the man would cut it as large as I would want it. And then they had this time of year, they had a good fruit cake. And always a good coffee cake.

MISSIAEN: They had a bakery at the store? The A&P?

NELSON: I don't whether they did, they had a bakery counter, but I don't whether they did it in the store, it came in.

MISSIAEN: Did you walk up to the A&P?

NELSON: Yea.

MISSIAEN: Then you'd get somebody to help you.

NELSON: No. Cause when I go to the A&P store, it was certain things that I get in the A&P store that I like and it wasn't too much for me to walk back with. And the Eight O'Clock coffee and things like that, I just get what I could walk home with, unless my husband was here and we would ride up.

MISSIAEN: Are there other stores around the neighborhood that you remember?

NELSON: I'm trying to think of that drug store that came in after the Safeway.

MISSIAEN: I don't remember the name.

NELSON: You know when that Safeway, you know how there was a drug store.

MISSIAEN: Right, I know what you mean. I can't remember

NELSON: I can't remember either. But it was...

MISSIAEN: It didn't last very long.

NELSON: No. Cause it was cheaper than at time this store was People's and they were cheaper than People's cause I stopped going there and I was always going to that store. I don't know whether it was a Drug Fair or what it was. I can't, but I know, like you said, it didn't last for so long.

MISSIAEN: Did you ever go to the hardware stores?

NELSON: It was. Isn't the hardware store now up on Eighth Street, Pennsylvania Avenue, Frazier??

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Yea. And, used to say, if you can't find it at Frager's, don't look for it. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: [Chuckle.]

NELSON: Yes.

MISSIAEN: You said at the Market you used to like to buy fish.

NELSON: Fresh vegetables. And they have good shop. Cheese.

MISSIAEN: Did you buy fresh vegetables from the farmers outside?

NELSON: Uh-uh. No, inside. It was corner, walk off from, come in at C Street. There was a corner right there by that bakery. Boy, he had, he used to have some good vegetables.

MISSIAEN: Ever eat at any of the restaurants in the neighborhood?

NELSON: No. I never have. I have carryout.

MISSIAEN: [What kind?]

NELSON: Chinese

MISSIAEN: Chinese was one of your favorite carryouts?

NELSON: Chinese my favorite carryout.

MISSIAEN: Did you always go to the same place. Which one's that?

NELSON: I don't know, cafe.

MISSIAEN: Where's it located?

NELSON: 600 block of Pennsylvania Avenue.

MISSIAEN: The one on this side.

NELSON: Yea. The one on this side. The Saipan was good too.

MISSIAEN: Saipan [Sanpan] was across the street, and it closed, right?

NELSON: Yea, uh-huh. So, my son, he would go to the Saipan. Cause, my oldest son. He loved Saipan. He said, No, I'm going to the Saipan and get your order.

MISSIAEN: Library on the corner.

NELSON: Oh, well, I think I went over there once when I had to do a paper on locusts.

MISSIAEN: On locusts?

NELSON: Yea.

MISSIAEN: Why were you doing a paper on locusts?

NELSON: It was, why was I doing a paper was, if it was a study we had to do for a class we had at church. They give you different subjects to write an essay on and mine was locusts. And I didn't know nothing about the locusts so I went over to the library. But the children used to go over there all the time. They had their cards.

MISSIAEN: Where does your senior citizens' group meet now?

NELSON: St. Monica's Episcopal Church.

MISSIAEN: Have they always met there?

NELSON: Uh-huh. That's where I joined. After I got some free time, and I don't know who give them my name. She came over here from the Friendship House and she said, I want to talk to you about you joining the seniors. They tell me you just became a widow and that would be something to get you out of the house.

MISSIAEN: So you signed up right away.

NELSON: No. Not right then. I thought about it so long. She said, you think about it. When you decide, you call me. She gave me her telephone number. And you don't have to worry about it cause somebody will pick you up. And then, I thought, I think I'll go. And I called and they started picking me up.

MISSIAEN: Did you go everyday when you first started or 4 days a week?

NELSON: No. I just, I started going two days, Tuesdays and Fridays because you know she was telling me what on Tuesday they had a sewing class and on Friday they had Bible study and I said they can put me down for those two days and I'll see how I like it.

MISSIAEN: And you liked it?

NELSON: I love it.

MISSIAEN: What kind of sewing do you do?

NELSON: You know, they give us basic sewing, you know, the beginner's, showing you how to use a pattern and, and how to run different stitches on the machine and things. But, she died, the one, the girl that used to teach sewing. But it was really, it was good.

MISSIAEN: And they had sewing machines there?

NELSON: Uh-huh, yes. Sewing machine and all the thing you'd need like thread. Oh, it was, iron, and...

MISSIAEN: Had you done sewing when your children were growing up?

NELSON: I used to sew for a Delores and Loretta.

MISSIAEN: Uh-huh.

NELSON: Yes. I used to love to sew at home. They used to have a sewing class down there, Potomac Gardens.

MISSIAEN: Oh, Ok.

NELSON: And I joined that. I used to go there. Potomac Gardens, before all started to go into a seniors.

MISSIAEN: So what you did was make clothes...

NELSON: For myself.

MISSIAEN: For yourself?

NELSON: Yes. Cause like I was telling, like they said your dress too long, they can't hem a dress, they can't sew a button, I said, I think it's a shame when a woman can't sew a button back on a garment. The button was off, and I couldn't put the button back on. I said, Well, I think all, two things I think a woman should learn. Three. How to wash, cook, and do little stuff, small thing, sewing up seams and things and your clothes are ripped and you can't do that, you got to ask somebody to do everything for you?

MISSIAEN: Did your mother teach you how to sew?

NELSON: No. My mother would sew but she didn't teach me. It was friend of hers used to love to sew and I used to admire the things she used to make for her children. And I said, I sure like to learn how to sew like she does. So I watch her.

MISSIAEN: Did you have a sewing machine?

NELSON: I say, yes. I'm going to keep my sewing machine now. Cause sometimes a pillow case or something just rips and instead of throwing the whole pillow case away you can stitch it back up.

MISSIAEN: Right. I do a little bit of sewing.

NELSON: Yea. You can, I think a sewing machine is something to have. And I being plus size, I need a machine, because when I go to buy something, it's too long. I plenty hip through here, but up here I don't have it. And I have to seam it through here so my machine is my friend. [Chuckle.]

MISSIAEN: I noticed you have some lovely robes that you wear, the ones with all the fancy embroidery?

NELSON: Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: Do you make those?

NELSON: No, my daughter, my youngest daughter's married to Africa man and he's, at one time he went home and he brought a lot of them back and I bought some from him.

MISSIAEN: Oh, ok. I lived in Africa a while, I thought they looked...

NELSON: Did you like it?

MISSIAEN: Oh, yes.

NELSON: Yea. Charles brought a lot of African garments back. And some of them were so pretty.

MISSIAEN: Yes, the ones I've seen you wear. And it is Loretta?

NELSON: Loretta. Yea.

MISSIAEN: I've seen her wear them.

NELSON: Oh, she's, I don't know. I don't think Loretta have no regular clothes any more.

MISSIAEN: Oh really?

NELSON: Ah, she just love it. She said it so loose and get in it and feel free. Your husband may want you to start wearing his clothes.

MISSIAEN: [Laughter] So, can she find those clothes here or does she...

NELSON: Uh-huh. She knows somebody here that sells them. Cause the one she had I told her to get one for me. I asked her the other day, she said, it'll be here by Chri, he'll have it ready by Christmas. Yea. She's buy some beautiful things from this man. I don't know whether he has contact with Africa or what, but anyway I'm giving you all, you see that you have it. Yea.

MISSIAEN: Anything else that you... Any other recollections or changes in the neighborhood here that you'd like mention?

NELSON: But, you know, I've always been happy in this block because I, I always like to treat a person like I want to be treated. And I figure when you're [inaudible] you don't have no hangup to be miserable. And I enjoy here.

MISSIAEN: And, as far as you know, there have never been any problems. Everybody got along.

NELSON: Yea. Everybody gotta know, I've never knowed nobody to say, well, I don't like this person because they were one color and I don't like the other. It's always been peace and harmony as far as I know in this block.

MISSIAEN: Before there was air conditioning, did people sit out on their porches more?

NELSON: No. Cause when I first moved here, after first moved here, and the children outside, I used to love to sit on the outside. But I stopped. You know late in the afternoon after dinner, you go out there, that air feels so good. But my husband said that why he didn't like the house cause he says he like the outside but we don't have no back. And he said he wanted a backyard.

MISSIAEN: But he lived here for a long time.

NELSON: Yea. But if were living, I wouldn't be here.

MISSIAEN: Right. Where?

NELSON: Because he built a house just before he died in Maryland.

MISSIAEN: Oh, he did?

NELSON: Uh-huh.

MISSIAEN: You were planning to move?

NELSON: I know he was going, cause he always said that he wanted a house that he could go all the way around and... See, while he was working, he bought six lots in Maryland and four was right together and the other one was separate. And a man was going to build a house but he couldn't get a permit for the house he wanted because he didn't have enough space and he sold that person that lot. And he built this house since he was, he was sick. And he was telling me that he wanted to build a house and I couldn't see it. And after a while, my oldest son asked me if I would sell him two of the lots. And said if I would sell him two of the lots he would sell his house and he would build out there also. And my husband [inaudible]. The thing was so funny, the plan that I picked to build our house, he wanted the same plan. [Sentence incomplete at end of tape.]

END OF INTERVIEW