



Interview with Mildred “Sis” Allen

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

ALLEN: At my age I can't remember a whole lot, but I remember some.

TEAL: We just want to hear some stories, I think. Let me start by saying that we're here at 501 G Street SE.

ALLEN: [ed. Corrected address deleted for privacy] since 1931

TEAL: since 1931. Your full name is Mildred Allen? But you're called "Sis."

ALLEN: My name originally, my maiden name was Hageman and then I got married in '65.

TEAL: 1965. Now the door... the front door says Hageman on it.

ALLEN: That's my mother and father.

TEAL: OK. So when did you first move into this house?

ALLEN: March, 1931.

TEAL: 1931. So you've been here more than a few years.

ALLEN: And my mother and dad...well my mother had one leg. She had an automobile accident on the Bay Bridge going up to Philadelphia to see her brother. He was dying.

So, anyhow, she lost her leg. She was in a wheelchair so she had to sleep down here. Then my Dad got sick and he was in the dining room. So I got myself a lounge and stayed here. Now I'm in there... To get back to the story. The store next door to me, 603,

TEAL: It's now a residence, right? Somebody lives there.

ALLEN: Yes, but when we moved here it was a grocery store. And it was two men worked in there. I forget their names. Well anyhow. It wasn't where you helped yourself. You would tell them what you want and they would give it to you. And then down the corner at Seventh and G there was a grocery store and the man that owned that, his daughter and I went to Eastern High School, so he had us taken there. Then, of course, John Philip Sousa's house, you know about that.

TEAL: Right, across the street.

ALLEN: This corner house, when we first moved here, it was a fortune teller lived in there and I never believed in fortune tellers so I just stayed away.

TEAL: Now you're indicating the big house that's at the corner of Sixth and G?

ALLEN: Right here...Sixth and G...

TEAL: Sixth and G the southeast corner...the big freestanding house.

ALLEN: Then I went to Lenox Vocational School, it was down on Fifth Street...a small one.

TEAL: The building's still there.

ALLEN: Uh huh. My brother and I, Jack. But at those days, we had to learn everything you're doing now. Reading, writing, arithmetic Home Ec, which I didn't take, and sewing and you could do that. And the boys, they had choices, whatever they wanted to take. But theirs was held down at the corner which is now CHAW was called B.B. French.

TEAL: B.B. French was the name of the school....

ALLEN: That's when the boys had to go down there for their vocational studies and the girls stayed at Lenox.

TEAL: OK. So the vocational studies for the boys would have been more like woodworking or things like that?

ALLEN: Yeah, a variety of things for the boys.

TEAL: Now were there any exceptions? Were there any girls that decided to take up woodworking or any boys who want to be cooks...

ALLEN: Completely boys down there and completely girls up here. For vocational studies. But nobody cared about that. Fortunately, I liked typing so that's what I more or less majored in. And the teacher she spoiled me because I didn't like Home Ec...still don't...I didn't like sewing...so primarily I stayed in the typing class all the time. And then when I went to high school, Eastern High, I had to give up typing a couple years because I was too far advanced. But, getting back to the neighborhood, up here at Eighth and G, it was a nice drug store there, a real nice drugstore.

TEAL: That would be the right across from CHAW?

ALLEN: Eighth and G.

TEAL: Oh, Eighth and G, sorry. Ok there's an office supply...

ALLEN: Right across from the Marine Barracks. Right on the corner there, there used to be a drug store and that was wonderful.

TEAL: Now when you say drugstore, was it the kind of drugstore I remember from my childhood where you could go in and get a soda drink or... it wasn't just a CVS....it was a place you could go in and sit down on a stool?

ALLEN: Well you can, at the counter. But they had, you know, the medicine and everything else there. But my neighbor was an elderly gentleman; he would want an ice cream cone every evening and my brother and I would fight on who would go get it because he gave us a nickel to go up and get it. We'd get his ice cream and bring it back. His name was McGinn.

TEAL: McGinn. And he was too old to walk down to Eighth Street?

ALLEN: Yeah. So we got that for him. And those days, though, you didn't have to lock your door. No bars up. And in the daytime and evening, after you got your homework done, most of the parents would sit out on the bench with my mother and so forth and all of us kids would play hide and go seek. That post out there, that lamppost was "base." And we had a wonderful time. But when it was nine o'clock it was over. Everybody had a

TEAL: Summertime or wintertime?

ALLEN: All the time.

TEAL: It wasn't just because it was dark in the wintertime, it was just nine o'clock.

ALLEN: Everybody had to get in. It was bed time.

TEAL: So this was a great neighborhood for children, is what you're saying.

ALLEN: It was. It was very safe and I've been going over to church since 1931. To me it's home. I love it.

TEAL: That's Christ Church.

ALLEN: Christ Church. And it's just, it's just wonderful over there. The people...

TEAL: It's been the center of your life all these years.

ALLEN: Yeah. The minister now is the Reverend, Dr. Judith Davis. And she is great.

TEAL: Now she's on sabbatical at the moment?

ALLEN: She's on sabbatical now. She'll be back September the eighth. I never believed in lady ministers until I met her.

TEAL: She was the first one that you liked?

ALLEN: I'd never give her up.

TEAL: Never give her up?

ALLEN: Never ever give her up.

TEAL: All right. Let's talk in some detail about Christ Church then because it's a landmark certainly. It was built in the...

ALLEN: Yeah, it is a landmark. It tells you on the back of the leaflet too.

TEAL: Right...early 19th century building. I guess Jefferson was a member of the congregation although he didn't attend this building. And you....

ALLEN: Of course I wasn't here when Jefferson was here.

TEAL: No. It was an extremely old building on this block long before you ever came to town.

ALLEN: Well I'm sure....this is a brief history of Christ Church.

TEAL: Good. I think we have this at our house and I think a lot of people of course have it but it was created in 1794 and in 1806 the cornerstone for the current structure at 620 G Street was laid. So it must...that church and its congregation must have been through a lot of changes over the years.

ALLEN: Oh it's been a whole lot of changes and the parish hall wasn't like it is now. They just had a small one. But the minister at that time was Edward Gabler.

TEAL: Gabler, Ok.

ALLEN: And he lived in the rectory with his mother. And I think he was there approximately 20 years. I'm not sure.

TEAL: Twenty years even after you got there?

ALLEN: When I went over...he was there when I started as a kid. And he held your interest so well for the kids' service which I attended. He would tell a story and he would get to an exciting part, the secret garden, and he'd get to an exciting part and then he'd say, you come back next week and see what happens. So the kids, we just had to go back to see what happens. It was just remarkable how he did it.

TEAL: And the church, I assume, was very, the congregation was a big one...

ALLEN: And every summer, in June, they had a cruise, they rented a boat down here and we went to Marshall Hall. All the families, the parents, the children, friends and anybody. And the church had bought tickets for the rides so you just had to pay half price for that.

TEAL: I see.

ALLEN: And it was wonderful, the boat ride, going and coming, the friendship, fellowship down at Marshall Hall. It was great. This is memories you can't forget.

TEAL: I don't think I'm familiar with, is it Marshall Hall?

ALLEN: All I know was that it was in Maryland because all I know is I got on the boat.

TEAL: So you were a child at the time and as an adult now...you're not sure...

ALLEN: I could care less. I was just having a good time.

TEAL: Well that would be interesting to know where that was. It was in Maryland. Okay. Down the Potomac, past the...

ALLEN: They had a lot of activities over there. Well, Judith has a lot of activities going on too.

TEAL: I have a, my personal doctor, who doesn't live in this neighborhood anymore, a guy named Spiegler who used to live a couple of doors down and he used to see the church. He told me that in the '60s the church was part of the general movement of the '60s and it was almost the kind of place where you would say that, not hippies necessarily, but that there were a lot of people there who were young and that the congregation changed during those years. Do you recall that?

ALLEN: Yes. In the '60s. That's when I got married over there, in the '60s. I think that's the year the hippies was there.

TEAL: So you're confirming the story that I've heard.

ALLEN: In the '60s. I recall that. And I think Reverend Seton is the one that was there then. I think he was doing his best to help those kids. He did all he could to help them. I don't know why, but he left. I don't know what happened to the hippies then. Because I never bothered with them. I didn't like the way they dressed, their actions and so forth.

TEAL: Well, tell me about what it was like living on Capitol Hill. We think of America as not being a politically active place with too much turmoil. We don't have marching in the streets the way other countries do. But if anyone thinks of marches they think of the anti-war movement in the '60s. What was it like here in this block on Capitol Hill? Was there any tear gas and people with signs and trouble?

ALLEN: No. It was never anything. And it was not called Capitol Hill when I was a kid. It never was. To me it's still not Capitol Hill. It's G Street, Southeast.

TEAL: Just G Street.

ALLEN: I tell people I live two blocks from the Marine Barracks. And they only changed it to Capitol Hill to raise the prices. In my opinion.

TEAL: Capitol Hill is an invention of the real estate agents?

ALLEN: In my opinion, yeah.

TEAL: And increasingly, Capitol Hill goes further and further till I think it pretty well reaches Eastern High School now...

ALLEN: I don't agree with that. And then, of course, years ago they had streetcars up and down G Street.

TEAL: Tell us about that. Did you ride the streetcars as a girl?

ALLEN: Not too often. My mother took me on them, yeah, but they had a stop right across the street there. It was real nice. What I liked about it, if the seats was all taken they had these here bars hanging down that you could hang on to, everybody. It was very convenient.

TEAL: Now I'm trying to think of where this line would have gone because this is not something like the Metro where there's only one line leading out of this neighborhood because I know it went up Eighth Street and then down Pennsylvania, didn't it?

ALLEN: I don't remember too much where it went. I know we had these streetcars up and down G Street.

TEAL: Right here in front of your house. You didn't have to walk up to Pennsylvania or even over to Eighth.

ALLEN: That was nice.

TEAL: And so for not very much money you could ride downtown if you needed to.

ALLEN: I couldn't anyhow unless Mama took me.

TEAL: She wasn't confined to her wheelchair until you were a teenager or did that happen pretty early in your life?

ALLEN: That happened during Hurricane Hazel.

TEAL: Hurricane Hazel.

ALLEN: In the '50s.

TEAL: In the '50s. OK much, much later.

ALLEN: She had an automobile accident going up to Philadelphia. My Dad was driving and they were on Bay Bridge and the wind got the car.

TEAL: Wow.

ALLEN: My brother Jack and I was over church. And we got a phone call over church. So that's how we found out about it.

TEAL: So your childhood ... your mother would have taken you maybe shopping...down to Garfinkel's or Hecht's.

ALLEN: Oh no. Our shopping was up here on Eighth Street. They had the Darling Dress Shop. They had a lot of little stores up there. Shoe stores. Dress stores. Eighth Street was fine. They had Academy Movie where the church is now.

TEAL: There's a church now that plays music all the time.

ALLEN: That was the Academy Movie. We went there.

TEAL: How often did you go to the movie?

ALLEN: Every Saturday.

TEAL: Every Saturday. It was a different movie every Saturday, of course.

ALLEN: And then up on the avenue. The Avenue Grand was just a couple of doors from where Peoples was. I say Peoples, where CVS is. CVS to me is Peoples.

TEAL: And then that was across the street from the Penn Theater, now where the doctors' building is.

ALLEN: Penn Theater was on one side and Avenue Grand the other.

TEAL: I've seen pictures of it. And, so, well does that mean you had an opportunity to go to the movies more than once a week? Did you like to go more....

ALLEN: No. We would go on Saturdays but we could pick out what movie we wanted to go to. Saturday was our day.

TEAL: So you and your brother...was he a little younger than you? Or a little older?

ALLEN: He's younger. I had two brothers.

TEAL: Two brothers. Okay. You'd walk up there by yourselves or would your parents take you up to the movies?

ALLEN: Where, up Eighth Street?

TEAL: Yeah, up to Eighth Street.

ALLEN: We could go up ourselves.

TEAL: So this is, just to continue that theme. This was a safe neighborhood where you could walk down there...

ALLEN: Oh, definitely. Definitely. There was nothing wrong.

TEAL: And, of course, the freeway wasn't there.

ALLEN: No. No freeway in the back.

TEAL: Until very late here in Capitol Hill's history. So, tell me, you had shops, like the Darling Dress Shop, but how did the Marine Barracks affect this neighborhood. Did you see a lot of young Marines during those years?

ALLEN: Oh, they were nice. They would help to clean up the neighborhood and everything. The Marines were wonderful.

TEAL: Were there any of the types of places that you associate with young men? I don't want to say pool halls, but...

ALLEN: No. They were fine in my opinion.

TEAL: I'm sure that they were the nation's finest. My father was a Marine and I'm not suggesting that they were in any way...

ALLEN: My oldest brother was a Marine.

TEAL: I'm not thinking they were a negative influence, but, after all, 19 year old men have to have something to do besides going to the Darling Dress Shop. And I just wondered what they did.

ALLEN: And they had that project in the back. But now it's beautiful back there. Have you been back to see it?

TEAL: Sure. The Ellen Wilson Dwellings that replaced....

ALLEN: Ellen Wilson.

TEAL: Now that came in before the freeway...

ALLEN: Yeah, I think it was.

TEAL: OK. Well did you have friends who lived in the project there or did you...?

ALLEN: I thought I did.

TEAL: You thought you did. Well tell us about that.

ALLEN: Well, I'm not going to mention names, but there was this lady, she had two daughters. We became friends. She was real, real nice. I enjoyed her. She enjoyed coming in here. And make a long story short. I had to go to Philadelphia for a funeral and nobody knew it but her two daughters and her. Nobody. And I trusted them. And we was only gone one night and came back the next day and when we came in the house, our television was gone. My husband's stuff upstairs was gone. My stuff wasn't touched. It was just his stuff that was touched. So we called the cops and they couldn't figure how they got in, but I have a window fan up in the back room so they pushed that in. They got in. They took everything that belonged to my husband, some clothes, jewelry and so forth. Fortunately, we don't have any money, so they didn't get that. And I was just suspicious because nobody knew that we was gone but these two girls. And the next day one of them came around and she says "Hi, Sis, how are you." And I says, "Not too good. We were robbed." And I told her what was missing so forth.

Never saw her after that. She never, ever came back. Never. Then the day after that, her sister came around. "Hi Sis." And I told her, too, that'd we had been robbed. "Oh," she says, "It's a man around on Sixth street selling a clock." She says, "I wonder if it's yours." I says, "Well, tell him to keep it." There was nothing to do with any of them. From that day on they haven't contacted me and I haven't contacted them.

TEAL: Well that's a sad story because you had a friendship that got destroyed.

ALLEN: I trusted them. And it really hurt to know that they would betray me like that.

TEAL: Tell me a little about the alley-dwellings, as we say now. There were people living in the alley behind the church when you first lived here. At least that's my understanding.

ALLEN: I never went up and down that very much.

TEAL: You just didn't go back there.

ALLEN: But the other day, now this is just....this past week this happened...I was coming from E Street down to G. I had been up to People's Drug Store. I took the shortcut coming down. And it was a young gentleman, he come up facing me like and swinging a shirt around. I don't know, I felt a little bit uncomfortable. And, but there was a tall gentleman standing down here on G Street and I had no fear of him. Anyhow, the young one went in between the two garages and then after I passed by he came out. He could have hit me on the head if he wanted to. But he spied the tall gentleman, so he

left and went on down. And the tall gentleman there he told me, he said, "Ma'am, don't go through the alley anymore." And he brought me on home. He walked right up the street with me. He was so nice.

TEAL: Well, this area of the world and I guess this city in particular and this neighborhood has been a place where African Americans and whites have lived close enough together that they knew each other for a long time. Can you tell us how things changed from the '30s to today? And just start with each decade. It must have been very different....

ALLEN: Well I don't know. Color don't make any difference to me. I don't care whether they're black, white, yellow, green. I love everybody. I don't care....now Noreen has adopted two biracial children and I love those children.

TEAL: Now was that part of your parent's way of thinking?

ALLEN: She was the associate minister of Christ Church, Noreen Seilor.

TEAL: I wasn't thinking of her. I'm asking, when you were 11 years old and when your parents were alive did they teach you this idea that all people are equal or.....

ALLEN: Yes.

TEAL: So that was part of your upbringing?

ALLEN: We were grown up that way. I mean, we all played together. There was no color, you didn't see color.

TEAL: Well let me ask you about the lunch counter down there. The soda fountain. Were blacks allowed to come in and welcomed there and did they go in to get a coke?

ALLEN: Well they came in but, I didn't sit up there to eat so I don't know whether they sat there or not. I only got ice cream for my friends and came on back. But, color makes no difference to me. I don't care. God made all of us. That's how I look at it. I just can't see being nasty to any race.

TEAL: Well how did the 1968 riots affect you then? And how did it affect this neighborhood? You must have seen people you knew, and you knew them well, and here they were police officers, and other people just fighting each other terribly up on H Street, and Seventh Street NW. What was it like living on G Street during the....

ALLEN: Well it never bothered me that much. It never....I don't know. It just didn't bother me at all. I felt safe. It's just these days. And I never had bars put up until my mother passed away, 'cause she wouldn't allow it.

TEAL: Well that's great and glad you've had....

ALLEN: Well I feel safe anyhow.

TEAL: It's a good thing to feel safe. I think a lot of people all over the world don't feel safe and this has been a safe neighborhood.

ALLEN: It's just like getting back to the color, as I say, I love those kids, they're biracial. I love each one of them. Doesn't make any difference. Let me show you....

TEAL: Wait, wait. Just a second. Cause you're pinned down here and I don't want you to walk away with that...

ALLEN: Take this off for a minute.

TEAL: All right. We'll take that off for just a second.

ALLEN: I want you to hear something.

TEAL: Okay we'll pause the recorder. Just press the pause button there.

Okay, thanks very much for showing us that picture of those kids.

ALLEN: I just wanted to prove to you that race didn't make any difference to me. When you saw the picture and heard the voice on it.

TEAL: How about your neighbors? Do you think they all felt the same way during those years?

ALLEN: Well my next door neighbor is Chinese and his wife was Japanese and I think it was in '97 approximately, his wife and I was walking up Sixth Street about 11 o'clock in the morning. I was going to the National Cathedral. I don't know where she was going. We got up there near the alley and it was a car double-parked by the apartments. You don't know, you don't pay any attention to a car double-parked. People getting in or out. But we got right by the car, passing the car, a young guy jumped out and put a gun right up to my chest, right to my chest.

TEAL: Now this was five years ago?

ALLEN: It was, I think '97. '96, '97. And he put a gun right up to my chest like that and he looked at me square in the eyes and he says "money." I says "Shoot me." Because I thought he was going to do it anyhow and when I said "shoot me," Mrs. Liu start running zigzag across the street to go to the precinct. Well that distracted him and he jumped back in the car and they drove away. But what irked me, I caught up with Mrs. Liu, we both went to the precinct. We told them real quick and instead of them going out and trying to find the car, it was a maroon colored car, I don't know if it was Virginia tags or Maryland tags, but anyhow it wasn't District. And we told them real quick, but instead of

them going out to try to find him they made us sit down there for about 15 minutes. They asked me "What color was the gun?" Well I knew it was dark...when you have gun up there, you don't know...

TEAL: You're not taking too many notes.

ALLEN: Then they said "How many millimeters was it?" I don't know what a millimeter is.

TEAL: Right.... Well, that's a bad story. I had a gun pointed at me once and you never forget it. Let's talk about some of these buildings again. You mentioned the building on the corner that's close to us here. There was a very, very old house, and I think it was called the Pierce house. Then it was torn down, a fairly long time ago and just in this year they've started digging a big hole behind the apartment building. I'm talking about Sixth Street just on the other side of Sixth Street. Does that ring a bell with you? Do you remember a Pierce place?

ALLEN: No.

TEAL: Okay, I might try to find a picture of it at some point because I know that it's a house that, it's my understanding, was there before any of these houses were and I don't know when it was torn down, but we can find out more.

ALLEN: Well in this house, from 611 up to here, the same owner owned all of them.

TEAL: Did your parents rent from him?

ALLEN: And we rented from him until he passed away and then his wife said we had to move or buy. So my Dad bought it because of my mother's condition. We had an elevator put in the back yard so she could go up and down to get out. And all the houses were identical. But now they've all been renovated except this one.

TEAL: Well this house is in great shape.

ALLEN: This is same way when we moved in in '31.

TEAL: So, well let me just look around. Is this, this was not a working fireplace in 1931? Is it a furnace?

ALLEN: No. We never used it as a fireplace. Daddy wouldn't let us. It's always been like that.

TEAL: It's a beautiful mantle. A beautiful mantelpiece.

ALLEN: Everybody likes that.

TEAL: Yeah, I'll bet they do.

ALLEN: To me it's just belongs here. It was here when we moved in.

TEAL: It was here when you moved in and it's what you've always known. Were you living in DC before you moved to this house?

ALLEN: I was born and raised in DC.

TEAL: Were you living close to here or...

ALLEN: I lived at 421 Seventh Street SW and that's where the HUD building is now, I think.

TEAL: Do you remember anything from that place?

ALLEN: A meat company was on the corner. On Seventh Street. It was mostly commercial and Tolliver's Funeral Parlor was across the street from us. St. Dominic's Church was around the corner from us. There was a bank on the corner. It was just a few houses. As far as I can remember it was just three girls and two boys. That was the whole thing.

TEAL: In the whole neighborhood, you mean.

ALLEN: I mean for the kids. Most of us, well as I say, it was all commercial. Everything. And we stayed there until my grandmother passed away. We came over here. But I've got happy memories from down there.

TEAL: From Southwest. And Southwest is almost completely changed.

ALLEN: It's all commercial now.

TEAL: There's nothing there that was there 75 years ago.

ALLEN: The only thing there is St. Dominic's Catholic Church.

TEAL: Just the church, I guess.

ALLEN: Because we lived right across...well we lived on this side of the street. Mama would watch us walk across the street and we'd go around the corner to the Baptist Church because if we went to the Catholic Church she had to go down and take us across two streets and we went there for a while, not that long. And then we moved here. Christ Church is our home.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TEAL: You moved over here....you mentioned the grocery store here at 603 or whatever. I guess that's the type of grocery store that was all over America; there weren't supermarkets.

ALLEN: Oh, yeah, you didn't go around and help yourself. You told the person behind the counter [ed. Bruce Morton] what you wanted. They'd go get it and bring it back. Then you'd tell them again, they'd bring it back. And they would pack it for you. There was also in here John McLaughlin, the guy on TV. He and his wife Anne used to live in here.

TEAL: Oh, well that's interesting. I didn't know that.

ALLEN: Yeah. She was lovely. She was so sweet. And also it was a little church in here, I think it was a Baptist for a short time, but they were so nice and kind. Every time they had dinner in there they would send a dinner into my mother. And then my husband and I would go buy one and bring it in.

TEAL: Well that's nice. So you got a variety of....

ALLEN: Yeah, even though we was going over there we wanted to help to....

TEAL: To support the Baptist church as well...

ALLEN: Yeah.

TEAL: I see. Tell me about the grocery store, maybe grocery store isn't really even the right word. Could you buy everything from a sack of flour to a side of beef there? I don't mean a side, but, I mean did you....

ALLEN: You could buy anything.

TEAL: You buy all your food there. And the place up at, I think you said Seventh and G....

ALLEN: Yes. Down the corner.

TEAL: Just on the corner there, that was the same sort of place?

ALLEN: Yeah. It was a grocery store. They had everything in there. But after they closed a liquor store came in. Then is when I think the crime started and the drunks, so forth.

TEAL: There was a Safeway just up the block...

ALLEN: Yeah it was up on that side about two doors from the corner.

TEAL: Do you know how long ago that went in?

ALLEN: No, I don't remember.

TEAL: I don't remember when it went in or when it closed but it's been a long time.

ALLEN: Then, of course, that used to be a hamburger shop up there too. You could get a hamburger for a quarter.

TEAL: A hamburger for a quarter? That's not too bad. That's not too bad at all. Now, you said that when you were growing up no one thought too much about the fact that all the boys went to one school and all the girls went to the other school. But you sort of said to me you had a funny look on your face when you said you didn't go to cooking school and sewing school. Did you think that you wanted to be a typist because you wanted to be in an office and have a real...job.

ALLEN: I was never one that could cook. My mother always cooked. And I loved typing. That's why I did away with Home Ec. But fortunately, my typing teacher, the one that got me excused from the other two sessions, because she knew I like typing.

TEAL: Well, now, I'm trying to get the chronology straight in my mind. You went off to Eastern High School Then you graduated from high school...

ALLEN: Then I went to work.

TEAL: And you went right into work and what time was that in relationship to the war. Was that just before the war or was that during the war.

ALLEN: Let's see...the war broke out in 1942 I think or 1941, something like that.

TEAL: Right, December 7, 1941.

ALLEN: Cause my brother was in the Marines and he was in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, when it started. Then my other brother, Jack, he joined the army. So I was the only left here. But, to get back to the school, my wonderful teacher, she knew that I was crazy over typing, she knew I didn't like anything else and [?] those days, they had the letters on the keys, I guess they still do, I don't know. But if she saw you looking down, she would hit your hand, lightly, you know, because you had to look up, like this. You couldn't look down.

TEAL: Sure. So you were well taught.

ALLEN: Yes.

TEAL: Now when you went into the workforce, I guess both world wars were a time when Washington just swallowed up as many workers as it could and especially young women came to town from all over America I guess to be file clerks and typists and...

ALLEN: Well mine was more or less secretary. That's what I wanted. And my dad he worked over on the Hill, electrician, and when I graduated from Eastern he wanted me to go over there and I refused. He really didn't like it but I didn't want to go over there. I said, Daddy every four years you don't know what's going to happen. So, what I did, I got a job down the Navy Yard as a secretary. I was 20 years down there.

TEAL: Twenty years in the Navy Yard.

ALLEN: Then, after I left there, I wasn't even looking for a job but I got a call from a lady at NASA headquarters. Somebody had told her that I was unhappy and wanted to move. So she called me and, truthfully, I didn't even know NASA was government. And so anyhow, to make a long story short, I had an appointment with her. She was a lovely, lovely lady. And then she introduced me to her boss who was a wonderful gentleman. And he started dictating, well he gave me a letter he wanted me to type. It was in his handwriting. Well, it took me forever. I couldn't hardly read it. Then he was going to dictate to me and I told him I says, well I wear two hearing aids, so I thought I would be done, you know, so he understood. So he dictated a letter to me and I got it just like that. No problem. And so they told me to come back the next morning and see their boss and when I went back the next morning, knocked on the door and I introduced myself, the whole interview was, "You're hired; they get what they want."

TEAL: All right.

ALLEN: And I had over 18 years at NASA headquarters.

TEAL: So when did you first go to NASA headquarter? What year?

ALLEN: In '61.

TEAL: So those were pretty exciting days for NASA?

ALLEN: Yeah, well I went down on one of the flights, I forget exactly which one it was. Down to Kennedy Space Center.

TEAL: Did you go down there to Florida?

ALLEN: And they had to, well, I was one of the lucky secretaries that was chosen. And we had to pay one dollar in case of accident, for insurance.

TEAL: Okay.

ALLEN: We had to go on a prop plane. And I don't know whether it was from Andrews Air Force Base or from Bolling but anyhow it was one of those two.

My husband took me over so I could get on the plane. And I was scared of them. So I went and sat beside the window so another girl sat beside the window and I sat on the inside. And a lot of people were saying they wanted something to drink, you know, so finally, when takeoff they could serve it. So the stewardess asked me what I wanted and I said, "A Coca Cola, please". She says, "I'm sorry we don't have Coke, we have Ginger Ale." "Well, I'll take Ginger Ale." And when she brought it back with all the other stuff for the other passengers. They had to pay for theirs, naturally. I don't know

what it was, 25 or 50 cents, whatever. And I offered her my money and she says, "I can't take your money," she said, "you don't have any alcohol." So I got mine free. I can have all the Ginger Ale I want.

TEAL: That was a good deal.

ALLEN: But then when I got down there, it took us a long time to get there. We could sit up in the bleachers-like. But I didn't want to sit up there. I wanted to go down where the photographers were. So I did. I went down where the photographers were. This one photographer standing there and I stood beside him. He said to me, "Miss, when it takes off will you take this microphone and just raise it up like this for sound." I thought, sure, I'd be happy to. So, when the blastoff happened, I didn't move. The earth shook. My hand didn't go up. And he was furious with me.

TEAL: Well I imagine his microphone picked up all the sound...

ALLEN: He was furious with me because," I only asked you to put your hand up."

TEAL: Well, it was exciting. Did you know a lot of other neighbors from this area who had jobs either at NASA or other federal government jobs? Did most of the people here on this block work for the federal government?

ALLEN: Oh, I don't know, my Dad did, my two brothers did. My cousins did. My brother was at the Library of Congress for over 50 years before he passed away.

TEAL: What did he do?

ALLEN: Electrician.

TEAL: Electrician.

ALLEN: And my youngest brother retired from the Rayburn building.

TEAL: That was the last one to be built, I guess.

ALLEN: But most of the people, a lot of them from Church worked on the Hill too. They still do.

TEAL: Sure, we've got a chief of the Capitol Police, I guess, over there.

ALLEN: Gary Abrecht, he was the chief. Because he retired.

TEAL: Right, well let's see. What else can you tell us about this neighborhood that you know we want to get these things on tape so India's [ed. India Teal, Gary Teal's daughter] grandchildren and India's great, great grandchildren can know what it was like to live here on, and I'll keep saying Capitol Hill, if you'll excuse me, I understand your point.

ALLEN: I don't dislike Capitol Hill.

TEAL: I understand your point. It's a neighborhood. It's got, we'll give it some name,

ALLEN: To me, it's not Capitol Hill.

TEAL: Well, Capitol Hill means the Capitol building and the office buildings around it? Is that what you mean when you say Capitol Hill?

ALLEN: Yeah. As I say, when we moved here it was just G Street, Southeast. It was never, ever Capitol Hill.

TEAL: Well I think that's really important to know what language people used and that's very interesting that they didn't say Capitol Hill.

ALLEN: And I don't feel...when people ask me where I live, as I said before, I never say Capitol Hill.

TEAL: Do you think other people did? Did some of these other neighbors say Capitol Hill or do you think that was...?

ALLEN: I don't know.

TEAL: Did you know anyone who you would say did live on Capitol Hill? If you knew someone who lived on East Capitol Street?

ALLEN: Well, see, these neighbors, most of them, are new around here now from years ago. They've moved away or passed away. So most of them are recent neighbors. It is a nice neighborhood and people are nice and friendly.

TEAL: That hasn't changed, really, for the most part. You think it's been that way your whole life?

ALLEN: Yes. Lucky that way.

TEAL: Well it is a good place to live. It's hard to beat. We moved here seven years ago and I hope that we'll be in our house as long as you've been in this house. Is there anything you can think of that you think that young people ought to know about this neighborhood or what it's heritage is, that I haven't asked you about?

ALLEN: Not that I can think.

TEAL: Well, we might...if we come up with a list of two or three questions that we think of later that we wished we had asked, maybe we can come and visit again.

ALLEN: Oh, yes.

TEAL: We can certainly come and visit without a tape recorder sometime too and we can hear more stories about your trip and all that.

ALLEN: That trip was wonderful, but I was scared, but I enjoyed it.

TEAL: Was that your first airplane ride?

ALLEN: Yes, that was my first one. And I might tell you too, it's no secret, I'm sure, that if India needs the space pictures for school do you know where to get them?

TEAL: You mentioned that to me. Let's end this...we'll just put stop on this and talk about NASA Headquarters...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW