



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Mary Colston

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

SAKS-MCMILLION: Starting at zero. If you could just state your name and address of the house so that we can double-check the sound volume.

COLSTON: My name is Mary Colston and my address is 523 Second Street, N.E.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And Colston is C-O-L-S-T-O-N?

COLSTON: Correct.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Great. O.K. What I've done is to draw up a series of questions on three very broad topics, and one set of questions is about the background of this particular house. The other set of questions is background about this particular neighborhood right near Union Station. And then the last set of questions is more about your life on Capitol Hill over the years. So, I think those are all going to be really interesting subjects, and this should be quite easy, I hope, for you to answer. First of all, the first question I had is when your family moved to this house?

COLSTON: We moved here in February, 1947.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And how old were you at that point?

COLSTON: My goodness! Twenty... I don't know. I was twenty-something...

SAKS-MCMILLION: Twenty-something. O.K.

COLSTON: Wait a minute, I should have... If I had known at first, I would have already figured that out. (Laughs). I was born 1919, so...

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, you moved here in '47?

COLSON: Mm-hmm.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So you would have been twenty-eight?

COLSTON: Twenty... I guess... I know I was in my twenties. I wish I would have known. See, I would have...

SAKS-MCMILLION: That's O.K. Where did you move here from?

COLSTON: I was living on Tenth Street, N.W.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Uh-huh.

COLSTON: In Washington, D.C.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And your mother bought this house?

COLSTON: Yes. My mother bought this house.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And how did she decide on this particular house in this particular neighborhood?

COLSTON: Well, because the house -- when we came to see the house, we thought that it was a nice house, because I had five children -- and due to the fact that it's two floors, that it would be nice for her to move with us, because she had no intentions of moving with us. She was buying the house for me and the children. But once we came here, well, she decided to move here. And that's how she got to be living upstairs, so that she didn't want the children over top of her head, and she chose to live upstairs.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Good for her. Smart lady.

COLSTON: (Laughs)

SAKS-MCMILLION: Who was living in the house when you first moved here? In your family?

COLSTON: Who was living...?

SAKS-MCMILLION: When you all moved into the house, who moved in with you? There was you...

COLSTON: Me, yes, and my five children.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And how old were they?

COLSTON: My oldest was like five, because he just started... he was in kindergarten. And it was five, four, three, two and my baby was just four, three months old.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Goodness. And in that same order, from the eldest to the youngest, what were, what are their names?

COLSTON: The oldest is Alvin, Tyrone was the second, Norman was the third, Ronald was the fourth, and Scheyrle was the fifth.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And how do you spell Scheyrle's name?

COLSTON: S-C-H-E-Y-R-L-E.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Wonderful.

COLSTON: Scheyrle.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Scheyrl. And who did you buy the house from? Who did you and your mother buy the house from?

COLSTON: I don't recall. It's ...

SAKS-MCMILLION: It's been a while.

COLSTON: Yes, it's been a while. I still have those papers, but I don't recall the people's name.

SAKS-MCMILLION: That's alright. Can you help describe the layout of the house? In other words, the rooms on each floor, so that people listening to this tape or reading the transcript can get a visual picture of what the house looks like?

COLSTON: This house has a long hall. And the hall, on one side, are the rooms; all on one side, instead of having...

SAKS-MCMILLION: On the left side of the hall?

COLSTON: Yes, [it's a] one-sided hall. Upstairs is the same way. And, of course, the first entrance is the little vestibule, like. And then you enter into a little hallway, and on the left, the rooms are on the left, are the living [room], the master, I would say the master bedroom, then the second bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchen, and the back room is the dining room. And it's probably one of the largest rooms.

SAKS-MCMILLION: It is a very nice large room.

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then, from the living [dining] room, I'm looking out the back screen door onto the backyard.

COLSTON: Yes, we have a back porch.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then that leads out to into the alleyway of what is now called Capitol Court.

COLSTON: Correct.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And what about the upstairs layout?

COLSTON: The layout upstairs is identical to this one, to downstairs on the first floor.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, you've got this long hallway...

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: ...along the right side...

COLSTON: Correct.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And it's a house with two separate entrances. One for downstairs...

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: ... and...

COLSTON: 523 is for upstairs. 523 1/2 is for downstairs.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Great. Over the years, how has the house changed? In other words, have there been any major changes to interior or the exterior of the house?

COLSTON: No changes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, it's pretty much as it was when it was bought?

COLSTON: Yes. Yes. It has the same walls, the same wiring. Of course, I had the breakers put in upstairs and downstairs, because we had... what do you call those things that you screw in, for the ...

SAKS-MCMILLION: The fuses.

COLSTON: Fuses. We had fuse boxes. And both of the boxes were downstairs for upstairs and downstairs.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Oh, my.

COLSTON: Also, the electrical things, I mean the gas, we had the gas in the basement.

[MR. COLSTON]: Hello, hello!

SAKS-MCMILLION: Hello, hello! This is Sam Colston, who just walked in. We're conducting this interview now for the Ruth Ann Overbeck History Project, just to get Mary's history on tape for all posterity.

COLSTON: The gas meters were in the basement for [both] places. But over the years, they moved them out into the front, so they are out front. And they also moved the electrical meters out front, because they all were in the house.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Have you ever changed the color of the outside of the house?

COLSTON: No, it's always... Well, the trimming, I don't know what, the trimming was a different color when we moved here. But it's always been the red brick, and my mother never changed that. But the green is a different color. I think it was white. Trimmed in white. But now it's green, and it's been those colors ever since she changed the outside, I mean the trimming.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Have there ever been any major repairs that you've had to make to the house since you've been here?

COLSTON: Um...

SAKS-MCMILLION: Repairing the roof, or...

COLSTON: Oh, we've had the roof repaired at least three times. Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Any flooding in the area, since we're on the downward slope of Capitol Hill?

COLSTON: Just the floodings that we had in February of this year. Well, downstairs in the basement sometimes it slightly gets flooded, but not heavy like, you know, to damage anything hardly.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Great.

COLSTON: Also, when we moved here, we had coal heat.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Is that right?

COLSTON: We had coal heat. We didn't have furnaces. And the way it was situated downstairs in the basement, there are two doors. And they used to have the chutes. The coal people would bring the truck there in the alley, and they would put that chute downstairs in your doorway if it was your coal, you know, like that. And my mother, she had it switched over to gas heat.

SAKS-MCMILLION: When did she have it switched?

COLSTON: In '50... I guess it was like in 19... we moved in '47. I guess she must have had it done like in 1949. It didn't last too long because we didn't like... she didn't like that.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Was it smelly, or...

COLSTON: No, it wasn't smelly. It's just the fact that it was kind of like dirty, you know, because coal is dirty. And you have to sift the ashes out, you know. And in the evening, when you get ready to go to bed, you would bank your fire, so the next morning, when you get up, you would like shake it down, and put new coals on it. And that was, you know, a lot of work. Not a lot of work, but you know it's easier when you have a furnace.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Absolutely.

COLSTON: So she had it [changed].

SAKS-MCMILLION: Any other system changes like that, from coal into gas, or other kinds of changes to the house?

COLSTON: What else did she have done? Oh, she had... to the house? Let me see. I don't think she had anything else done to the house, except painting, and she had some of the pipes... see the pipes in here? She had some of the pipes upstairs removed from her part of there. But all of the pipes are still here downstairs.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And the house still uses hot water heat through the radiators?

COLSTON: Yes, we still have the radiators.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Great. Well, I think that will give people listening to this somewhat of an idea of what the house looks like and how it works. The next series of questions are going to focus more about the background of the neighborhood, and how it's changed over the years as well. Do you remember who your neighbors were when you first moved in?

COLSTON: I don't recall their names, it's been so long.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Yeah.

COLSTON: Because they all moved, and I was away for a while, and I just don't remember their names. But we did have neighbors that were very nice neighbors. One thing about this neighborhood, everyone has always been neighborly.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Mm-hmm. Well, that's good to know that...

COLSTON: Look out for each other, and what not. Because during that time, it wasn't like it is these days. We didn't have a lot of cars. And children could play outside. There were a lot of children in the neighborhood at that time. As you know now, there isn't. And all my children and all the kids -- Ms. Freeman and all of them, they used to play, run up and down the alley, and they -- like I said, it wasn't like it is now. Not a lot of cars, and people doing different things, and we didn't.... We left our doors unlocked!

SAKS-MCMILLION: Is that right?

COLSTON: We could leave our doors unlocked and go off to the store and what not. And at that time, we had the park across the street. It was a park from F Street to Massachusetts Avenue, and that little street right there, there was a street that's called California Street.

SAKS-MCILLION: Which was the extension of E Street?

COLSTON: No. Right in front here.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Oh. Right in front?

COLSTON: Yes. Where this alley is.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Where Capitol Court...

COLSTON: When you cross the street, there was a little street that goes from Second Street up to the Union Station called California Street.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And that goes right under what's now the Thurgood Marshall Judiciary Office Building?

COLSTON: Correct. Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Well, you're anticipating some of my questions. I was going to ask, you know, what was there before the Thurgood Marshall Building.

COLSTON: O.K. Yes. Well.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, that used to be a park?

COLSTON: Yes. When we moved here, it was a park. Then, they turned it into a parking lot for the Senate Office Buildings, and things like that.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I remember that.

COLSTON: Yes. O.K., you saw that?

SAKS-MCMILLION: And they had this wonderful line of trees...

COLSTON: Trees.

SAKS-MCMILLION: ...between the two. There were two parking lots, as I recall.

COLSTON: Correct. Yes. They still had some of the trees on there. Even though they turned it into a park[ing lot], they still had some of the trees.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And what was in the park? Was it all grass?

COLSTON: Nothing. Just grass. It was grass. And a lot of people would just go over there and sit when it was real hot, and spend the night, and everything. You didn't have to worry about anybody mess... you know, bothering with you, or anything like that.

SAKS-MCMILLION: This was before air conditioning.

COLSTON: Well, we had fans, yes (laughs). Yes, fans.

SAKS-MCMILLION: How would you characterize the neighborhood in the late 1940s and the early 1950s? Were most of the residents older, or younger? Did they have a lot of children or not? And the racial composition at that point?

COLSTON: We had a lot of children. You said the '40s?

SAKS-MCMILLION: The '40s and '50s.

COLSTON: And the '50s. We had a lot of children, because the school down there ...

SAKS-MCMILLION: Logan School?

COLSTON: Logan School. It was children all over. All on F Street, where you are, and everything. Children lived in where you are [223 F Street], next door, because my children, you know, they all played together. They all went to school together.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Now...

COLSTON: They...

SAKS-MCMILLION: Go ahead.

COLSTON: As far as being racially... There were on this side of the alley, there were two white couples, because the third building was a restaurant. And the name of the restaurant was called the Rail Bar and Grill. And it was white.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And that's at the corner of Second and E?

COLSTON: No, it was the third house from here.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Going up towards E Street?

COLSTON: Yes. On the other side of the alley. You know the alley, and I'm on this side.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Right, you're on the north side of the alley.

COLSTON: Right. Yes. Right. O.K. But the third house from the alley was the restaurant called the Rail Bar and Grill. And they played country-western music.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Is that right?

COLSTON: And every night, we had a lot of people coming in from Virginia on motorcycles. Guys. And the restaurant had to close at two. Well, around one o'clock, they would start those motorcycles up, and it would be maybe five or six, or maybe eight, and on the weekend, it could be ten. And they would start those motorcycles up, and boy, it would wake you up [she makes high VOOM-VOOM-VOOM! sounds], you know, making all that noise.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I can't imagine!

COLSTON: It was really, yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: When did that close?

COLSTON: I think that closed in the '50s, the late, you know, '50s, because it turned into another restaurant. They didn't have all of that; it was just a regular restaurant. But they did have music, you know. On the weekends only. But this was everyday, when the Rail was there. The Rail Bar and Grill.

SAKS-MCMILLION: What was the successor restaurant? Do you know what restaurant took its place? What the name of the next restaurant after the Rail closed?

COLSTON: I don't recall. I don't recall the name of that restaurant.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Interesting, interesting.

COLSTON: And also, I wanted to say when we moved here, the last house on this side, Jimmy Dean lived there.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Jimmy Dean, the country singer?

COLSTON: Jimmy Dean, the country singer.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So he was living next door to you?

COLSTON: Yes. Well, down, on the last house.

SAKS-MCMILLION: The last house on your side of the alley, or the last house before E Street?

COLSTON: On the other side, going toward E Street.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I'll be darned.

COLSTON: He and his mother lived there. And he used to sit out and play his guitar a little there...

SAKS-MCMILLION: So it was real convenient for him to get over to the Rail to play some music?

COLSTON: Yes, (laughs), yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: How long did he live there?

COLSTON: Well, they, I think they moved a couple years after we moved here.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Uh-huh. So, '49 or so.

COLSTON: Mm-hmm.

SAKS-MCMILLION: That's interesting. I had no idea. Well, what about the rest of the neighbors in the immediate neighborhood? You said there were a lot of children?

COLSTON: Yes, there were a lot of children. A lot of children.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And when you started also talking about the racial make-up of the neighborhood at that point.

COLSTON: Yes, at that point, well, there was two white couples in the first two houses, and then there was the restaurant, and, I'm trying to think, from there, there was black people. On this side, where we are, was all black.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Down to F Street?

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then around onto F Street?

COLSTON: Same thing. We had, I don't think any whites lived on F Street. Not to my knowledge. They were all black.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And how and when did that, did the neighborhood start to change?

COLSTON: The neighborhood started to change, I think, like in the '60s. I would say in the '60s. Like the late '60s, people started moving. The whites started moving in, because they started refurbishing the houses, and selling them, because a lot [of black families] was moving out of the District into P[rince] G[eorges] County. I don't know why, but they started to move into P.G. County. The black people started moving out there, and that's when the whites started moving back, because they, like I said, it was all

black, mostly. And then in the '60s, it started vice-versa: the blacks was moving to P.G. County, the whites started moving back, taking the houses and started, you know, to build, refurbishing them and turning them into, you know...

SAKS-MCMILLION: When you first moved in, going back to the '40s and '50s, what kinds of jobs did most of your neighbors have? I know that we're very, very close...

COLSTON: Government. Government jobs. A lot of the people worked for the government. Or, some was domestic. And some, I don't know, probably were professional people. But I really couldn't tell you too much. And there was a couple of people that didn't do any work, you know. We had some, like, a person that just was a neighbor around the corner [and] they were heavy drinkers. And they had two children. And they were about the only ones that drank a lot, you know, and used to sit over in the park and drink, and all. But they were nice people. I don't know how they survived. Maybe they were on welfare. Because didn't either one of them work. But they drank a lot, and they had a boy and a girl. And she eventually died; she passed away. But he was still around for a long time. And he was a nice person, because he didn't let anybody mess with my mom, you know.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I'll bet you appreciated that.

COLSTON: Yes. He liked my mother very much. Yes, she liked him. And his nickname was Club.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Club?

COLSTON: Club. Just called him Club. Everybody called him Club. And his wife's name was Mary.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Do you know their, do you remember their last name?

COLSTON: I don't recall their last name. Now, my children might remember, because they were going to school with them. All the children that lived around the corner, and I had some... Every May Day, every first of May, at Logan School, they had May Day. And I had some of the photos where the children were doing the May pole, and things like that. I think they do that in some parts of what, England, or somewhere over there? They have May Day?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Oh, certainly. Yes, absolutely.

COLSTON: Well, we used to have May Day, too. The children did, in the District.

SAKS-MCMILLION: If you, when you unpack, after your move, if you can find some of those photos, and if you would like, you know, to lend them to us to photocopy...

COLSTON: Yes, I think I still have those with... I'm not too sure if I have those with the May Day, where they'd be wrapping the pole, and all like that. But some of the children that lived in the neighborhood... I might have some of those photos, because my children take a lot of the pictures. They be looking, and they be just saying, "Oh, I can't believe this!" And they just go ahead and take a lot of the pictures.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I'm going to ask you a little bit more about the neighborhood. Just at the corner of Second and E, there's a new organization that took up in that building, called the Safari Club International. And before that, it was the Fertilizer Institute. Do you remember what was...

COLSTON: It was a liquor store.

SAKS-MCMILLION: ... in that... It was a liquor store?

COLSTON: A liquor store.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And what else has been in there over the years?

COLSTON: In that same spot?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Mm-hmm.

COLSTON: Only thing was the liquor store. And after the liquor store, I think it was just a building. But downstairs, as you come onto Second Street, downstairs, was the restaurant. And I can't think of the name of that restaurant.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Was it the Gandy Dancer?

COLSTON: It was the Gandy Dancer at one time. Yes. But before that, it was not the Gandy Dancer. It was something else. I can't think of it. Because people just ate there; it was just for eating. But when the Gandy Dancer came in, it was music, and everything. It was really a club that had a lot of, you know, people in there. They had quite a crowd, too. But something happened. I don't know what happened.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And when...

COLSTON: They had to disappear out of that building.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And when did that happen?

COLSTON: That was in the '60s and the early '70s.

SAKS-MCMILLION: At the other corner of your block, at the corner of Second and F Street, as you know, the building has just been purchased by the National Community Church to turn into a coffee house. [The] green cinder block building with the brick fence around the front?

COLSTON: You mean right here on the corner?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Right here on the corner.

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: What can you tell us about that building and how it's changed, if at all, over the years?

COLSTON: That building, when we moved here, was like a little restaurant. I can't even think of the lady's name, but it was the first three houses on F Street, the first three houses... No, I'm sorry, the first two houses belonged to Miss, I can't think of her name. It belonged to a mother and her daughter, and the restaurant. So they had the first two houses and the restaurant. They ran that restaurant. And the mother passed away, and when the mother passed away, which she passed away, I think in the early '50s, her daughter sold one of the houses. Not the first one, I mean, she sold the second one. Like the first one behind the restaurant, next to the restaurant. She kept that one, and she sold the one next to that.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Just east of it.

COLSTON: Yes. And she closed the restaurant. It didn't stay open too long afterwards, after her mother passed and everything. But she ran it for a short while. And it was just there, just empty. But eventually, they had a bus company there. A bus company, a sightseeing bus company, and I can't think of the name of the company. But that stayed there, I don't know, about four or five years. And when they moved out, nothing else was in that building, and that's how it started deteriorating.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, it's been vacant for a good long time.

COLSTON: Vacant for quite a few years.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Since the 19...?

COLSTON: '70s. Early '70s. Like '71 or '72. After that, it was empty. So I would say it was '72. Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Interesting. We're just a few blocks from H Street, and I was curious about what it was like in the 1950s and the early 1960s.

COLSTON: H Street has always, was always a busy, business street. It had a lot of stores, and it was like, you didn't have to go downtown to shop, because they had everything up there. Clothing stores, and

all kinds of, I guess we used to call them five and ten-cent stores. They had one of those up there. They had all kinds of stores up there. And a laundromat, because I used to go to the laundromat myself. And, any store you could name, I would say. Different kinds: clothing stores, food stores. And it was just like a little, just like downtown.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, would you do most of your grocery shopping or your clothes shopping on H Street, or would you go downtown, or do both?

COLSTON: Oh, I would go downtown and do my clothing shopping. But I would just go up there maybe to the five and dime sometime. You know how people used to -- they don't have those anymore in D.C. -- and get certain things. Because you could get, you know, little things that you couldn't get, that you could get downtown, but why go downtown when you could get them [here], you know.

SAKS-MCMILLION: How did you actually get to H Street? Did you walk?

COLSTON: I would walk. Walk to H Street, 'cause it's not that far.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And would you do your grocery shopping there, too? Was there a shopping [store]?

COLSTON: Oh, no. No, I didn't do grocery shopping there. When we moved, there was a Safeway around the corner. You know where the market is now, the Capitol Hill Market? That was a Safeway.

SAKS-MCMILLION: That's on Massachusetts at Third?

COLSTON: Massachusetts and Third. That was a Safeway. It was a small Safeway; it wasn't a big one. But my mother and I, we used to go around there and shop. But on the corner of Second and E, where the liquor store was on this side, on the other side was a corner store.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So that's where the Ronald Reagan Republican Center is right now?

COLSTON: Correct. Yes. And that man, he was a nice man. He was an elderly man. And he would wake up every morning around five o'clock, and take a bike ride. He would go bike riding, and he would come back and then he would open up his store. And he was a nice man.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Do you remember his name?

COLSTON: I wish I could. We called him Pops. Pops. I don't know his name.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, he must have been older than you were then?

COLSTON: Oh, yes. He was white-haired and everything. Yes. But everybody called him Pops, and he knew your children, like he knew my children. Things like that. He was very nice.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And when did that store close?

COLSTON: I really... You know, like I said, I moved away for a while. But when I moved away in '56, it was still there. But when I came back to visit my mom, he had closed. I guess he must have stayed a couple of years after I moved away.

SAKS-MCMILLION: When did you move away, and when did you return?

COLSTON: I moved away in '56, and I moved to Connecticut for a while. Then I came back in 1962.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So there were some changes in the neighborhood already at that point?

COLSTON: Mm-hmm.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I'll bet you were sad to see that little corner...

COLSTON: Oh, yes. He was such a nice person. He could have passed, I don't know, 'cause I didn't ask my mom. And she didn't say. But he wasn't there. So he could have passed, 'cause he was rather old. But he was such a nice man.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And you say you did your clothing shopping downtown. Do you remember some of the stores that you used to shop at?

COLSTON: They had, we used, oh my goodness. We had... I wish I could remember. We had Jelleff's,

SAKS-MCMILLION: Jelleff's, J-E-L-L-E-F-F 'S?

COLSTON: Yes. Jelleff's. They had a Lerner's. F Street just had a lot of stores. And I just can't think of the names. Shoe stores, I know they had a Massey's shoe store. And they had a Rich's shoe store.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Massey's, M-A-S-S-I-E- or E-Y?

COLSTON: M-A-S-S-E-Y. They were noted for large and small [sizes]. You would get from a size three up to a size twelve for women. Now, the larger sizes were upstairs. They had an upstairs for women with like, [sizes] ten [and] up. But for size three to nine, I think, was down on the first floor. But you had to go upstairs for the, you know, women with large feet. And they still send me books. They moved. They closed, of course. And they, I get books from them now.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Where are they located now?

COLSTON: They're located in Missouri someplace.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So you shop by catalog now?

COLSTON: Sometimes. Yes, because I like their shoes. Because whatever I order, it always fits, because they have my size. Because, see, I have a size four-and-half and five.

SAKS-MCMILLION: You've got tiny little feet!

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Dainty.

COLSTON: Yes. So they always carry those sizes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: How did you get downtown to shop? What was transportation like for you?

COLSTON: Buses.

SAKS-MCMILLION: By buses?

COLSTON: Yes. Well, we had streetcars at that time, but the streetcars also went down there, that went down F Street. And buses.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then, the streetcar would have... F Street ended at Second Street?

COLSTON: F Street?

SAKS-MCMILLION: The trolley car. When it came down F Street...

COLSTON: No, we headed over to Union Station. You caught the trolleys over to the Union Station, where the cabs and things are in there now. Well, the trolley used to run down through there.

SAKS-MCMILLION: In front of the station?

COLSTON: Yes, mm-hmm.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I had heard that F Street was also a trolley car line, with tracks down F Street.

COLSTON: Yes. F Street. Of course.

SAKS-MCMILLION: For those people who have never seen a trolley car, can you describe what one looked like?

COLSTON: O.K. The trolley cars that I remember, they had two men on there. One was the driver, and in the center of the trolley, they had another man there that would open the door from the back by hand, or some kind of knob. He would pull it like this when you stopped, to open the door, and you would get out. But you paid up front. And the fare was ten cent; three tokens for twenty-five cent; children could ride free on Saturdays and Sunday, because my mom... You could get a pass; they were called passes. And they would be, I think they were one dollar and twenty-five cents a week. On Sundays, sometime, I would take my cousins, the same ones I'm talking about now [before the interview], the one that passed and everything. I would take them my mother's pass, and we would get on the trolley. I wasn't living here then. But I mean, when I was a kid, you know, a young girl. And we would ride anywhere in D.C. where the trolley would go, and they didn't have to pay, because I had the pass.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I'll bet they were very glad to invite you along (laughs).

COLSTON: Yes. But we had the trolleys in D.C. at the time. And I remember when they started taking up the tracks and making it all buses.

SAKS-MCMILLION: When was that?

COLSTON: And that started, they started that in the early '60s. They started taking up all the tracks, because Eleventh Street, that was the last one of the streets that I can remember that [had] the tracks; I didn't think they were ever going to cover them. They covered them, you know what I'm saying?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Just paved over them?

COLSTON: Correct. But Eleventh Street, they still were there for a long time. Even in the '70s.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, if we were to dig down a little bit under F Street, those rails would still be there, or did they tear them up?

COLSTON: Oh, I don't know about F Street. But I know Eleventh Street, they just paved over them. I don't recall what they did to F Street, but they might have just paved over them, too. Or they might have moved them. I can't really recall what they did with them. And sometimes the streetcars would back up. Like maybe one streetcar would break down, and there were other streetcars coming behind, and that was a mess. That's why they finally got rid of them, because you would be just standing there. They couldn't pass like buses. So then they got the buses. And we had the buses and the streetcar over to the Union Station.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Interesting, that's really interesting. Over at Third and H [Streets] is the Capital Children's Museum; it's a large brick building there. Can you tell us what was there before?

COLSTON: The nuns.

SAKS-MCMILLION: The nuns were there?

COLSTON: Yes. They used to call it the Little Sisters of the Poor, I believe. The Little Sisters of the Poor, something like that, because they used to feed the homeless. They would go there, they could go there and eat.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Did they have any other outreach programs that you know of?

COLSTON: Who, the Sisters?

SAKS-MCMILLION: The Sisters.

COLSTON: I don't recall. I do know that they fed the homeless.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And when did that close? When did the convent close?

COLSTON: I don't really recall when it closed. Evidently it must have been in the '60s, sometime in the '60s, because it was there in the '40s and the '50s, so it must have been in the '60s.

SAKS-MCMILLION: This is fascinating insight into the history of the neighborhood. We've talked a bit about the history of the neighborhood, and I'm just going to check the tape to see if we still have some [time left] on this side. How would you characterize the nature of the neighborhood today? We talked about what it was like when you moved in in the '40s and the '50s.

COLSTON: Today, I think the neighborhood has come a long way. We now have... we don't have children like we had then. And we have all the houses are updated like Marilyn and Charles [McMillion's] house, beautiful home. And I can imagine a lot of the other people that are buying these homes are doing the same thing. The neighbors, as far as I know, they are all friendly neighbors, professional people. We have a lot of professional people around.

SAKS-MCMILLION: You don't leave your door unlocked anymore, though?

COLSTON: Oh, no. I can't do that anymore. Plus, everyone now has bars on their windows. There are very few houses around here that don't have bars. Of course, I only have one to the front.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

SAKS-MCMILLION: You were just saying that a lot of the houses have bars on them, [and] you can't leave your door unlocked anymore.

COLSTON: Doors unlocked like you once [could]. When we moved in, you could leave them unlocked. But not anymore. And even your plants, or anything that you have in your yard, they even take those. And in fact, I've read where they take the bars off the window.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Have you had any problems in this house with people burglarizing or breaking into the house?

COLSTON: A couple of times in the back here. This window. When my aunt, she was sleeping back here, and before my mother put that little bar there, my aunt was sleeping back here, and she had the window cracked because it was summertime. And someone was trying to get in, and it woke her up.

SAKS-MCMILLION: When was that?

COLSTON: That was in the '60s. Probably like 1963 or '64, like that. And one time, they tried to break in here, in the back door, but they couldn't get in, because they tried to get into the screen door. So that was the only two times we had anyone trying to get in. No one ever tried to get in the front. But the back door, yes. Back way, yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: But that's been quite a while?

COLSTON: Yes, oh yes. It was quite a while.

SAKS-MCMILLION: That's good, that's good. Well, I have another series of questions about your life on Capitol Hill. We've talked mostly about the neighborhood. You've mentioned one of my questions, you've already answered, which is where did the neighborhood children go to elementary school, and you said that was the Logan School [at Third and G Streets]. Now, I know there are three [two] different building that have borne the name of the Logan School.

COLSTON: O.K. When we moved here, where there's the condominiums now, the Logan Condominiums, or whatever they are? That was Logan School. And they were building the [new] Logan School [across the street] when we moved here. And my son, my oldest child, he was the only one in school at that time, because he was five years old. And he went to the old Logan School where the condo – I guess they are condominiums?

SAKS-MCMILLION: They are.

COLSTON: They are apartments or whatever they are. O.K. That was the Logan School, old Logan School. That's why they named it that, I suppose.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then the new one opened when? The one right across the street.

COLSTON: Yes, well, we moved here in '47, and I think it was '49 they had completed the school and transferred it over. Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And when did that stop being a school and start being an administrative building for the public schools?

COLSTON: You know, I don't know when they closed that school.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Did all five of your children graduate from Logan School?

COLSTON: All five of them went to Logan School, yes. They all went to Logan School.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then where did they go after elementary school?

COLSTON: They went to a school around here for junior high, Stuart.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Stuart, which is now Stuart-Hobson? And that was where? What street was that on?

COLSTON: Fourth and F, between E and F.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then after junior high school, where did they go to high school?

COLSTON: We had moved then. Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So if they had stayed in this neighborhood, what high school would they have gone to?

COLSTON: They would have been going to, what's the high school? No, when you get in high school, I think you could go to the nearest high school around here...

SAKS-MCMILLION: Would it be Eastern?

COLSTON: I guess it would be. No, because they didn't go to high school around here. Because, like I said, I moved away to Connecticut, and when I came back, they were going to Western. You know Duke Ellington [School for the Arts]? That was Western High School then.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Were the schools segregated at that point?

COLSTON: No, they were desegregated. When? When my children started to school?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Mm-hmm.

COLSTON: Oh, yes. Yes, they were still segregated. But, starting in, when did they desegregate? In the, I know they desegregated in the '50s, that's when they started. Even the movies downtown on F Street, they were segregated.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Until the '50s?

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: What was it like going through that whole period from segregation to integration, desegregation?

COLSTON: It was rough. It was, the children wasn't used to it, you know. And they still would fight and carry on for a good while. It just wasn't used to being desegregated because it was always segregated. So they had to get used to it, and a lot of people still didn't go downtown to the movies, because we always had movies on every corner around. We had a lot of movie houses. On H Street, and on Benning Road, and over here in Southeast, over here on Pennsylvania Avenue. It was movies all around. Washington had more movies than anything. So, I mean, so they went to their own movies in their own neighborhood. But then, being small children, they still went to [the neighborhood movies], 'cause the whites just didn't come over in this area then. They just stayed in their area, like the high schools, like Cardozo [High School] and all those schools. So it was different. Like Dunbar [High School] and all those. They still stayed, the blacks still went to Dunbar and Armstrong and those schools. I don't think the whites started going to those schools. Not that I can remember, until maybe when they started moving around in the neighborhood, you know, like in the late '70s and '80s. It was more or less where they all went to any school they wanted to. But before that, they still stayed even when they desegregated them. They still went to their schools.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Do you remember any particular incident that comes to mind that maybe epitomizes what that whole transition was like for you and your family?

COLSTON: No, not really. I don't recall too much about that.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Did the quality of schooling go up or down afterwards, in your opinion?

COLSTON: I think it went down for a while. For a while, it went down. It's not like it is now. It went down.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Did your family go to church while you were living in this area?

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And where did you go to church?

COLSTON: To the same church I'm going to now.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And what's that called?

COLSTON: Walker Memorial Baptist Church, on Thirteenth Street, N.W.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Walker?

COLSTON: Walker Memorial Baptist Church.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And how did you get to the church?

COLSTON: By the bus.

SAKS-MCMILLION: By bus. And you're still going there?

COLSTON: I still go there. But I used to send my children around the corner, here, to Sunday school. There's a little church on Third Street [Unity Baptist Church, 424 Third Street, N.E.].

SAKS-MCMILLION: Just north of Massachusetts?

COLSTON: Yes. Between Mass[achusetts] and E. Yes, I sent them around there to Sunday school.

SAKS-MCMILLION: It was a lot closer.

COLSTON: Oh, sure. They could just walk around there on Sundays. But as far as me going to church, I would go to church up there.

SAKS-MCMILLION: How did you find that? Is that the church that you had gone to before you moved here, when you live in northwest?

COLSTON: Mm-hmm.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So you just continued staying with the same church. Can you describe what the services were like?

COLSTON: The services?

SAKS-MCMILLION: On Sunday. You go to services on Sunday morning.

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And what are the services like there?

COLSTON: Well, Baptist people, they just have singing and praying and they have [a] long service.
(Both laugh).

SAKS-MCMILLION: And you all say Hallelujah when they're done?

COLSTON: Oh, yes. And they said, yes. And we have our communion every first Sunday. We still have it every first Sunday. We have all kinds of clubs, like the Flower Club, the Senior Action Group. We have so many clubs now. At that time they had choirs, with Men's Choir, Women's Choir, and then the mixture. And then they had the Junior Choir, then they had the Young Adult Choir, and what else? And [they] always had something on Sundays for you to come back to service. (Both laugh). Two collections.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Two?

COLSTON: At that time. But now, they only have one. They broke it down to one, and now everybody was happy. Because they'd come around with the plate one time, and come around [again]. And then if we had a visiting minister, they'd come around again! So. They don't do that anymore; we just have one collection. And occasionally, if it's something special, they might have another collection, because the pastor we have, if it's children going to school, like graduating, he always has -- and some of them be going over, like going overseas, or going to a foreign country, or something -- he asks us to maybe donate a little something to help them toward their trip, and things like that.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Sounds like a very active church.

COLSTON: It is very active.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Where did your family go for fun?

COLSTON: Really, since we've been living here, we didn't go to many places anymore.

SAKS-MCMILLION: But you used to go to movies, or to the park across the street?

COLSTON: Or just to the movies, or something like that. But so far as going anyplace, I don't think we really did too much going. My mother, she worked like five days, six days a week.

SAKS-MCMILLION: What kind of work did she do?

COLSTON: My mother did domestic work. Yes, she worked for this lady for like thirty-seven years.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Wow.

COLSTON: And she would get up. And she paid for this house doing that domestic work.

SAKS-MCMILLION: That's quite a legacy.

COLSTON: Yes. Was the family that she worked for in northwest?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Yes. Lived up on Linnean Avenue, [they] lived up off of Connecticut Avenue. The name of the street was Linnean Avenue.

SAKS-MCMILLION: How do you spell that?

COLSTON: L-I-N-N-E-A-N Avenue. And the lady and her husband, when he stopped working, you heard of Brimer's Ice Cream?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Breyer's?

COLSTON: Brimers. Yes. You know those trucks, what was the name of those trucks that they had?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Little ice cream trucks with the bells?

COLSTON: Mm-hmm. Anyway, that was Brimer's Ice Cream Company. He owned that. And the main office was in Baltimore, Maryland. I guess you would call it the main office. But that was the...

SAKS-MCMILLION: Was that where they made the ice cream? In Baltimore?

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And then they sent trucks here to Washington?

COLSTON: Mm-hmm. And he passed away. And he left... my mother still worked for them until, like I said, for thirty-seven years.

SAKS-MCMILLION: What a long time.

COLSTON: She was in her seventies when she stopped working.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Is that right?

COLSTON: That's right. And Mrs. Brimer passed away. Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Wow. Do you remember when D.C. residents got to vote in the presidential elections?

COLSTON: Oh, my goodness.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I mean, do you remember that change, from not being able...

COLSTON: I remember the change, but I don't remember the year.

SAKS-MCMILLION: That's alright. How did you all respond to that? What did that mean to you personally?

COLSTON: It meant a lot to me, because I thought, you know, that you would have your rights when you could vote, you know. At least.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, when D.C. got enfranchised, and was able to vote, did you go out and register...

COLSTON: I certainly did.

SAKS-MCMILLION: What about the rest of your family?

COLSTON: Yes, as far as I know, they all did.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Do you remember who the first president was that you voted for?

COLSTON: Uh-uh. No, I don't. Let me see, no I don't remember.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Would it have been Eisenhower or Kennedy?

COLSTON: No, it must have been Eisenhower.

SAKS-MCMILLION: There have been a lot of further political changes in Washington, in terms of local government. There's now an elected mayor, and a city council, and the advisory neighborhood commission. Do you remember when all of those changes came in?

COLSTON: I remember the first mayor was Mayor Washington. That was the first mayor. And when was that? I don't recall that, either. Mayor Washington, I know was the first mayor. Because at that time, he was living up in [the] Le Droit Park area That's where he lived. And his wife was the principal of Cardozo School.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I didn't know that.

COLSTON: Mm-hmm. Yes, because one of my sons graduated from there, Cardozo, and she was the principal.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Was he still mayor when your son graduated from high school?

COLSTON: Was who still there?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Was the principal, you say the principal was the wife of Mayor Washington. When your son graduated high school, was he still mayor?

COLSTON: Yes. Yes, he was.

SAKS-MCMILLION: An interesting historical note.

COLSTON: And like I said, I believe I have a picture of her, but I don't recall. Because when my son graduated, you know how they go to the graduation. I mean, they take pictures and things like that. And I had a picture of her with him, you know. But I don't even know if I still have it. Because, like I said, the children take pictures out, and I forget. But as you recall and talk to me, I remember those things, because we had a picture of her.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I would love to see a copy of it. If it surfaces after you move and unpack. Did you work outside the home, with five children?

COLSTON: At first, I didn't. And my first job was with High's Ice Cream Store, on Pennsylvania Avenue.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Where? In southeast?

COLSTON: In southeast. Seventeenth, no it wasn't Seventeenth and Penn. I think it was Eleventh and Penn. There was a High's ice cream store. And that's where I worked. That was my first job.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And what did you do?

COLSTON: Scooped ice cream! (Both laugh.) Scooped ice cream. That was my first job.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And where did that job catapult you to? What did you do after that?

COLSTON: After that, I became a waitress at a restaurant up on Eighteenth Street, N.W.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Do you remember the name of the restaurant?

COLSTON: The lady, I can't think of the lady's name that owned that restaurant. But it was named after [her], you know, it was in her name. I did that, but I didn't do that too long. And after that, then I went to school for nursing, for nurse's aid. Yes, and I did that. Then I went to school in Connecticut for a P.N., you know.

SAKS-MCMILLION: L.P.N., you mean like a licensed practical nurse?

COLSTON: Yes, uh-huh. No, first, it was just a P.N., and then you go to school and become [a] licensed practical nurse.

SAKS-MCMILLION: I see.

COLSTON: And I did that. And after that, I did secretary work, and then I retired.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Where did you go to school in Connecticut?

COLSTON: I went to the hospital. Lars Memorial Hospital was giving the classes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And how did you find out about that class here in Washington, up in Connecticut?

COLSTON: No, no, no. I had moved to Connecticut for a while. My husband was in the service, and I moved there for a while. And while I was there, I went to the... [where] they were giving the classes. And I went there and [was] taking that up. And I worked with the elderly and I said, "Well, you know, I don't know so much about that." So they said, "Well, why, would you like to work with children?" I said, "Well, that would be better." (laughs) So, that's how I got into [working with] the children, working with pediatrics.

SAKS-MCMILLION: And where did you do that?

COLSTON: I did that in Connecticut. And then when I came back, I worked at Children's Hospital for a little while. And then I went over to being a secretary, because they were doing secretaries, and I went over to that.

SAKS-MCMILLION: At the Children's Hospital?

COLSTON: Mm-hmm. That's where I retired.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Ill be. So how long did you work at Children's?

COLSTON: Oh, I retired in '76.

SAKS-MCMILLION: So, since 1976, you've been retired and here at home and caring for your mother.

COLSTON: Yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Very, very full and very interesting. You're going to be moving in a couple of week, from so many years in this neighborhood. What are your thoughts on moving and leaving all of this?

COLSTON: Well, I really didn't want to move. But since so much, [there are] so many changes, like the buildings around here. And as you know, this new building that's coming up, and everything, [the] Security and Exchange [Commission], right?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Yes, the SEC.

COLSTON: The SEC is coming up. One reason is parking. That's another thing. We can't keep any place [to park]. I mean, if we go someplace and come back, we don't have any place to park, even though you're paying ten dollars a year for a zone six [parking] sticker. And it doesn't do any good, because what good is the zone six sticker if you move your car and you don't have any place to park when you're a senior citizen, and you have to walk blocks away from your house? It's just getting too much, and we're getting up in age. The house is old; I have to keep it up the best I can. It's getting [to be] quite a lot, and I just can't do it anymore. I've had new furnaces put in, you know. In November, I had one put upstairs. Five years ago, I had one put down here. Water heaters down here. Had the back porch fixed last year. Painted. And it's just too much, and I just can't keep it up. So, I decided that maybe I'd just move.

SAKS-MCMILLION: We're going to miss you.

COLSTON: Yes, and I'll miss my neighborhood. Because I've been here so long. And I'll miss all my new neighbors. Well, I call you all new, because you know...

SAKS-MCMILLION: We've only been here since 1987.

COLSTON: But you're such a good neighbor, you know. We have some good neighbors, I can say. Thank goodness for that. And we don't have a lot of children now. In fact, we don't have any children in our neighborhood; I don't recall any.

SAKS-MCMILLION: There are some new ones on F Street.

COLSTON: Really?

SAKS-MCMILLION: There are some babies.

COLSTON: Really?

SAKS-MCMILLION: Yes, and on Third Street, definitely.

COLSTON: Oh, O.K.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Yes, they're coming.

COLSTON: Well, maybe there will be a lot of children again running around. But, like I said, I just can't do it. And then I miss my mom. It just brings back a lot of memories. Because every time I pass that room, taking care of my mother for eight years... I just want closure.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Any words of advice to those neighbors staying behind?

COLSTON: Oh, well, I hope they, you know, stay here and enjoy the neighborhood, and everything. Just keep up the good works like they are doing now. Try to do the best they can, such as you and Charles, and all, you know, around the corner, you know who I'm trying to say, on E Street...

SAKS-MCMILLION: The Wirts?

COLSTON: The Wirts, yes, yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: John and Karen Wirt.

COLSTON: Yes, they are such nice people. Also, the people next to them, Margaret and her husband [Frank Withrow]. And then we know Ernest and those, you know, just some of the people, and Leo [Pinson] and all of those. Just such, you know, nice people and good people, you know. And if it just wasn't for the parking and the neighborhood is just changing a lot, and I just want to get out where it's maybe quieter or something like that. Even though it's a long way from here.

SAKS-MCMILLION: It is a long way. You're moving up to...

COLSTON: Germantown [Maryland].

SAKS-MCMILLION: ...to Germantown, in northern Montgomery County.

COLSTON: Yes, yes.

SAKS-MCMILLION: We're going to miss you. We're going to sure miss you and Sam.

COLSTON: I'll miss you, too. But I'll be coming back, I'm sure, as long as my husband can drive, 'cause I don't drive anymore, as you know.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Well, you keep him in good shape. As long as he keeps walking as much as he does, he'll be in good shape.

COLSTON: Yes, he tries. He says he's going to do the best he can to stay alive and healthy.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Good, long life to you both. Well, thank you so much for sharing these memories with us. I know that whoever listens to the tape or reads the transcript is going to just learn a lot about this little corner of Capitol Hill called Swampoodle near Union Station. And I thank you for your time.

COLSTON: Oh, I'm happy to do this. Happy that I could, you know, tell you all that I know about this little neighborhood.

SAKS-MCMILLION: Well, thank you.

COLSTON: I wish I knew more.

END OF INTERVIEW