



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Lola Beaver

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

BRADEN: Today is July 22, 2003, and my name is Renee Braden, and I'm here for the Capitol Hill oral history project. I'm interviewing Lola Beaver, who owns the Costume Shop and lives at Eighth and A [Streets] N.E. She's been a longtime resident of Capitol Hill. We're going to start the interview now.

Before we talk about your life on Capitol Hill, you've mentioned to me a few times in the past about your life before you lived here.

BEAVER: Well, I went to school in D.C. I went to National Cathedral School—it was a boarding school then. And I went to boarding school there.

BRADEN: So you were born in Washington?

BEAVER: No, I was born in Baltimore for some reason [laughter].

BRADEN: But your parents sent you to school here?

BEAVER: I think my mother was passing through Baltimore at the time... No, I went right from school to New York.

BRADEN: But your family moved here from Baltimore?

BEAVER: I didn't have a family. I didn't live with my father after I was 14 years old, when I first went to boarding school. And then my mother had committed suicide when I was four years old, so I didn't have a family. I had a brother, one brother.

BRADEN: So, how many years were you at the Cathedral School?

BEAVER: Five *long* years.

BRADEN: Did you like it when you were there?

BEAVER: No, I hated it.

BRADEN: Because of the other girls, or why?

BEAVER: No, it was that they were very indifferent to—it wasn't like things are now. You know, they just ignored the girls. And if they were in any kind of trouble, they just didn't bother with them.

BRADEN: Were you a good student?

BEAVER: No.

BRADEN: Did you get in trouble a lot?

BEAVER: I tried. [Laughter] I tried everything, I tried to run away and everything else, but nothing worked. I had to stay. So I stayed and graduated. And of course then, I graduated in '29, and you know what happened in 1930. There was the big stock market crash. So everybody had to go to work, no matter what their circumstances were. So that's what happened—I went to New York, I was going to study, and, uh, ended up taking any job I could get. So that's...

BRADEN: You went to New York all by yourself?

BEAVER: No, my brother—my brother graduated from MIT the same time I graduated from the Cathedral School. He got a job on Long Island with an aviation company there, and I lived with him for awhile. So that's the story of my life.

BRADEN: Did you take the bus to New York?

BEAVER: Huh?

BRADEN: Did you take the bus or the train to New York?

BEAVER: Did I take the bus or the train? Everybody rode on trains then. Trains were very popular. I always loved trains. People rode on trains all the time. But of course I had a car, I got a car as soon as I got out of school. I had a car from then on. I drove everywhere. Soon as I got out of school I had a car, and I had one until recently. [laughter]

BRADEN: So when you left the school and took off for New York, did you have any particular plan of what you wanted to do?

BEAVER: Yes, I was going to study.

BRADEN: To study what?

BEAVER: Dancing and art.

BRADEN: You knew from early on that's what you wanted to be involved in?

BEAVER: Yes.

BRADEN: You took that at the Cathedral School—dance and art and things like that?

BEAVER: No, they had a good art teacher, but they frowned on dancing, I think.

BRADEN: Drawing or painting or—in what way art?

BEAVER: The art teacher told me I had a knack for portrait, and I was going to study portrait, but I wasn't too good at it. I guess it was just as well I couldn't continue. [Laughter]

BRADEN: Where were you going to study art in New York?

BEAVER: Grand Central Art School.

BRADEN: Is that still there?

BEAVER: I don't know. I don't know.

BRADEN: So you had applied and gotten into the school?

BEAVER: Yeah, I had already registered at several places, but then I went to Europe for the summer on the last of my inheritance, and then there was nothing. All of a sudden, everything was wiped out. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, not a penny anywhere. People were jumping out of tall buildings. People were really, really poor—they really were—not like they think they're poor now, you know.

BRADEN: That's right—we only think we are now. So your inheritance allowed you to be fairly comfortable. I mean, if you bought a car right out of high school—

BEAVER: For three months, it was great.

BRADEN: What kind of car did you get?

BEAVER: A Chevrolet roadster with a rumble seat.

BRADEN: Wow!

BEAVER: Yes, ma'am.

BRADEN: What color was it?

BEAVER: I think it was black.

BRADEN: How fast did you go?

BEAVER: Faster than I was supposed to, I know that. [Laughter] I bought a French horn in Paris and screwed it to the outside of the roadster, you know, it had a kind of melody...

BRADEN: So you went to Europe for the summer before you were going to start your art studies in New York.

BEAVER: Yes, and when I came back, everything...

BRADEN: Where did you go in Europe?

BEAVER: Oh, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany.

BRADEN: Did you go alone?

BEAVER: No, I went with a friend from school and her mother.

BRADEN: On an ocean liner?

BEAVER: Yes.

BRADEN: Do you remember the name of the ocean liner?

BEAVER: It was the Holland American line, I don't remember... But it was called student class, and students got a big discount fare, and there were a lot of students on the ship going over.

BRADEN: Did you like the passage?

BEAVER: Oh, I loved it. It was fun.

BRADEN: Did you meet other interesting people?

BEAVER: I guess so, I don't really remember much about people on the trip.

BRADEN: Did you focus on seeing museums and art-related things?

BEAVER: What the girl's mother, my friend's mother wanted to see—she wanted to see museums, all right. We saw just about everything. But she didn't believe in staying in big hotels, she stayed in little pensions and small places, which was nice.

BRADEN: Had you studied French? Did you speak French at all?

BEAVER: I took French in school, and I got along pretty well with French, but since then I've lost it all.

BRADEN: It's often—we're all like that, I think. Did you ever think of staying, when you were there that summer, of not coming back here?

BEAVER: I wanted to stay in Paris, yes, but for some reason I came back, I don't remember why exactly. It's just as well, I guess. I'd have starved in a garret in Paris, I guess...

BRADEN: Starve in New York or starve in Paris!

BEAVER: I couldn't have gotten a job in Paris, could I? Not very well when I didn't speak French very well. So it's just as well I came back.

BRADEN: So you came back to New York, and got an apartment, and were going to start school...

BEAVER: And then it happened. Then I started working right away, anything, just anything that came along.

BRADEN: Where was your first apartment in New York?

BEAVER: Well, my brother was working on Long Island, so we lived on Long Island. Later on, I lived in New York. I've lived in about—I think I counted—about 35 different places in my lifetime. I couldn't tell you—please don't ask me when and where and what they were, because I really can't remember. Every once in awhile something comes to me, but that's hard for me to remember.

BRADEN: Do you remember much about the first job you were able to get when you were in New York?

BEAVER: Not really. I don't remember what the first one was.

BRADEN: Just to help pay the bills...

BEAVER: One was cleaning a dog kennel, and there were several department stores that I worked in. They were suburban stores on Long Island that... You know, I'd work, like, for four weeks and they'd fire you, and then you'd get a job somewhere else, and you did—oh, and then I worked in New York City, you know, anything that came along, anything. I worked in dance schools, so-called dance schools, and dime-a-dance, that kind of thing. And anything, you know, that—

BRADEN: You were one of the dancers for the dime-a-dance? You would do that?

BEAVER: We all—they didn't like me very much in those kind of places, because, I don't know, I wasn't very cooperative, I guess.

BRADEN: How cooperative do you have to be?

BEAVER: Well, I can't say it in public. [Laughter] I don't know what would happen now, if something like that happened. Like now, what would people do? Because they wouldn't take any old kind of job—they wouldn't be like that, you know they wouldn't.

BRADEN: Oh, I know.

BEAVER: They'd be too good to do that, you know, they'd say they were too smart or too educated or they were overqualified, or... I don't know what—they'd starve, I guess.

BRADEN: You're right, things have changed quite a bit.

BEAVER: Can't you ask me something that's not so depressing as the Depression?

BRADEN: You stayed in New York throughout the Depression? Did you, or...

BEAVER: Oh, yes.

BRADEN: But you eventually...

BEAVER: No, I came here—yes, yes, I guess so. I'm very bad on dates.

BRADEN: Well, that's OK. But you did end up building a career in art or theater and dance—the things that interested you?

BEAVER: Then I got married.

BRADEN: Let's talk—you're still involved in art, and those sorts of things. Did you get a job at a theater working on costumes, or how did that come about?

BEAVER: No, I didn't get into costumes at that time. I didn't get into costumes for a long time because I really didn't care about sewing at all when I was young. I had no experience in sewing whatsoever. I learned all this after I was old.

BRADEN: So how did...

BEAVER: The only way I got interested in costumes was show business—you know, just being around costumes. Then I had a dancing school, finally.

BRADEN: But when you were in show business, what did you do?

BEAVER: Danced—or did choreography. I danced as long as I wasn't too old, and then I had a dance school and did choreography. I worked with the USO during World War II.

BRADEN: So you put together dance shows and things like that?

BEAVER: Yeah, I did a lot of work for the Army and for the USO, both. A lot for the Army—Special Services would do shows. And after the war was over, we did a lot of work for Special Services shows in the Far North, you know, in the Arctic, and down the Caribbean where they were just starting to track missiles—they were just starting to make missiles, you know, and they would—tracking them, they called it, down range. All those little islands that are now just full of nothing but golf courses and big hotels were just deserted islands with a few military on them.

BRADEN: And your group would show up and do song and dance?

BEAVER: Fly around and do a show in those places.

BRADEN: And you went to the Arctic as well, you said.

BEAVER: Oh, yeah.

BRADEN: Did you like that?

BEAVER: The polar bear capital of the world. Churchill, Manitoba.

BRADEN: You've been to Churchill? Well, not many people have.

BEAVER: Well, now they have tourists there to see the polar bears. And one of my old friends who did those shows in her youth—I said, if we had known about those polar bears, do you think we would've gone? It was in *National Geographic*, an article about them and how they have those big buses that come, you know, sightseeing polar bears!

BRADEN: Yeah, things have changed, it's amazing—

BEAVER: It was cold up there, it was cold.

BRADEN: Do you remember any of your favorite songs or dances or routines? Did you do skits, or how did it work, exactly?

BEAVER: Oh, I don't remember. I remember some of the people—some of the Army guys did pretty well afterwards. Hal Linden, for instance—he was one of the kids on the show. I would furnish the girls—dancers—and do the choreography for it, and go with the show. He was a singer. Then there was Jack Norton, who later was on one of those big shows on TV. Several others that were in the Army then—you know, just...

BRADEN: You said you furnished the girls. How did you find the girls?

BEAVER: Well, I had a dancing school.

BRADEN: So it was through the school that you got—how, now, if it's the Depression and everything is really rough, how did you start the school?

BEAVER: Oh, I didn't start the dancing school till after the Depression and after I was married.

BRADEN: How did you meet your husband?

BEAVER: I don't really remember exactly how I met him. He was in a show in New York, and he was—the Depression was over, but it was very bad—Broadway was doing really badly because they

would have a show and open—he'd open—and then it would close in about two weeks, and they'd open and close and open and close. He got disgusted and joined the Marine Corps. And then I had twins, which set me aside for awhile. They both died.

BRADEN: When they were still very young?

BEAVER: They died in infancy, yeah. And then after that, I went ahead and still had a school. And then I gradually, with the school—well, I did choreography—say for instance somebody wanted to do an act, and then I would design a costume for them. And that's how I got into costumes. I had a very good seamstress for awhile and she taught me a lot about making stuff. I sort of gradually got into sewing—I didn't... I had dancers, professional group of dancers, a group of professional dancers, and any of that that came along, and gradually got into the costume business.

BRADEN: What was the name of your dance school?

BEAVER: Lola Beaver Dance School.

BRADEN: Did you advertise in *Variety* or trade magazines?

BEAVER: I advertised just locally.

BRADEN: And it was just for adults, not for children?

BEAVER: Oh, yeah, I had children.

BRADEN: Did you teach all sorts of dance?

BEAVER: Ballet, tap, acrobatic, and jazz. And I was still studying. I mean, I would run up to New York and study and that's how I kept up.

BRADEN: So eventually, you went from the dance toward the sewing and costumes and all of that sort of thing.

BEAVER: Oh, I sort of gradually eased into it. And at first—I always had some good seamstress and I learned a lot from them, you see. I would try making things, and I finally got so—it's just like anything else, if you do enough you get so you're good at it, you know. Most things.... Anyway, are we getting to Capitol Hill now?

BRADEN: Mmhhh. Well, tell me how you came from New York to Washington.

BEAVER: I got married, that's when I came back.

BRADEN: Because your husband was stationed here with the Marines?

BEAVER: Yeah.

BRADEN: With the Marines down on Eighth street—that Barracks?

BEAVER: Yeah, he was on the Elite Guard—sounds like Russia, doesn't it? Stalin or something. They drove celebrities around, you know, and had to wear dress uniforms all the time and that kind of thing.

BRADEN: That's a nice job, isn't it?

BEAVER: I don't know—I don't remember much about that...

BRADEN: That period? Where was your first house in Washington?

BEAVER: I didn't buy any property til I came here.

BRADEN: But where did you live when you first moved here?

BEAVER: When I first came to Washington, we had an apartment on Harvard Street right close to the Zoo, and then we lived in Georgetown, and then next—the dancing school was on 20th Street, I had a studio on 20th Street. That was the best—no, I'm sorry—before that, I had a big, big wonderful studio on Massachusetts Avenue right next to the Catholic Welfare Building, but that's been torn down now. On the underpass on Massachusetts Avenue, coming from 14th Street up?

BRADEN: Oh, nice, yeah.

BEAVER: It was a nice place, and it was big. Then I moved from there to 20th Street and had a studio there. That consumed about 20 years of my life, those two places. So then I went from there—now I'm getting gradually into the costume business. So I went from 20th Street to K Street NW, between 10th and 11th. And then I came here. I liked Capitol Hill. It had a nice small-town atmosphere. It was lovely, there was lots of stores and lots of nice people and everything. Now they've made it into a suburb! It's not a nice small town anymore, it's a suburb where you have to have a car and go long distances to get anything—to buy anything. And when I first bought this place in '72, there were grocery stores all over, I could walk anywhere. There was a Kresge's on the corner of Seventh and Pennsylvania, which is now Bread and Chocolate, and there was a Safeway right across from that—across from the Market. There was a store right down the street here, back of little St. James' Church—there was a grocery store, a big one.

BRADEN: I didn't know that.

BEAVER: The drugstore on the corner here of East Capitol and Eighth had a soda fountain. That was one of the wonderful things of that era that has been eliminated in favor of McDonald's.

BRADEN: Has it always been called Grubb's?

BEAVER: No, I'm talking about this one, right here.

BRADEN: Oh, it's not called Grubb's—what is it called? Morton's!

BEAVER: Morton's, yeah. They're all a chain now, there are no privately-owned drugstores anymore. I forget what they call it now—Grubb's is on the same chain. So anyway...

BRADEN: So you moved here in 1972. Nixon was President, and it felt very much like a small town.

BEAVER: It was—it's changed a lot. Almost every house in this neighborhood has been changed or redone or something.

BRADEN: Did lots of Senators or Congressmen live here in this neighborhood then?

BEAVER: Not so much then, I don't think. See, I think what has happened—you'll get someone who knows more about it than I do to tell you more about that—but I think what happened was that it used to be a very good neighborhood way back—Capitol Hill—and a lot of wealthy people lived on Capitol Hill. Then I think it started to disintegrate, as the houses got old and nothing was done to them. Then I think it went way down. Now of course it's gone back up. So I don't know what to tell you about Capitol Hill, except that we had more crime then. There was quite a bit of crime.

BRADEN: And you say this house was boarded up when you first bought it?

BEAVER: No, this was a dry cleaner's.

BRADEN: It had been a dry cleaner's.

BEAVER: See—this is not too long after the riots, you know. One reason I moved, I had to get something fast, was the riots affected me where I lived on K Street. So I was in kind of a hurry to find a place. When I looked at this, it was a mess. That whole side there—downstairs, on the A Street side—was a store window that was smashed, and the front was a store smashed window, a cracked window, anyway. And it was just a mess—the floors were a mess, the plumbing was a mess, everything was bad. I'm afraid to tell anybody what I paid for it.

BRADEN: [Laughter] That was going to be my next question!

BEAVER: Oh, God. You think I ought to tell?

BRADEN: If you want. You don't have to.

BEAVER: Well, when I came to look at it, at that time, 45 [\$45,000] was a pretty good price. That's what \$200,000 is now, you know, kind of a reasonable price. And when I saw it, he wanted 45, and it was such a mess, I figured I had to put about \$10,000 in it. So I walked away from it, and then the real estate lady—her name was Mrs. Jones—and she was in that house where Constitution and Massachusetts come together there, across that little park thing there. I think she's died since then. But after about three or four months, she called me one day and said that the man at the Eighth and A building you saw wants you to make an offer, and I said OK. So I made an offer—25—and he took it! You can't buy a pigpen for 25 now.

BRADEN: That's a great deal.

BEAVER: So I didn't know, I was sort of depressed about it after I did it. I thought, oh my God... But I got my brother to look at it—he was in Atlanta at the time—and I got him to come up here and look at it, and he said the building was very sound and it was worth doing over because he thought it was well-built. Being an engineer, he knew a little bit about it. So I started working on it, but I've never done everything I wanted to do to the place. As soon as I'd get one thing done, something else would go wrong, you know. Have to have it repainted, or something would happen, or need another furnace or a hot water heater or something would—you know, it goes on and on like that.

BRADEN: Do you remember who your neighbors were at that time?

BEAVER: Well, in this block [800 block of A Street NE], in the house two doors down—there's an apartment building, then a small house, then another very lovely little house, and then the storefront church. It was a storefront church—Reverend and Mrs. Mims—and they had some grandchildren and children. They were very nice neighbors. But the house this side of that was a shack, it was a wreck, and the lady who lived there used to sit outside starting on Saturday morning and laugh until early Monday morning without stopping. [Laughter]

BRADEN: What was she laughing at?

BEAVER: Oh, I don't know—she was drinking, I guess. But there was no air conditioning, so she'd sit outside. The other two houses were—I don't remember much about them—but across the street, the one where Donna lives—I shouldn't mention names—was a whole bunch of—three or four families were living in the one house.

BRADEN: That's not that big of a house!

BEAVER: No. A bunch of children. The apartment next door, they had trouble sometimes there...

BRADEN: Has the same person owned that apartment building ever since you've been here?

BEAVER: No. No, no. It was fine for awhile, whoever bought it after—they cleaned it up, you know. I don't know who owned it then, but it was very good for about ten or twelve years, there were real nice people in there, and they had a janitor and he kept the place looking so nice. He had a garden in back—and it was very nice. That was the biggest improvement from when I first came, you know, that was one big, big improvement, that apartment being fixed up like that. Now it's gone to seed again. The lady that used to live in this house next to the corner...

BRADEN: Was her name Louise?

BEAVER: Lucille. She had lived here longer than I had. You ought to interview her. She doesn't live here anymore, but she comes and visits her daughter sometimes. She comes to see me.

BRADEN: I didn't know that. Where did she move to?

BEAVER: She has a place down in Virginia, she has some property down there. But she knows more about the neighborhood than I do because I'm fairly a newcomer—'72, you know!

BRADEN: Well, that's not *so* new...

BEAVER: And I'll tell you who else—my friend on East Capitol Street was here. You should interview her.

BRADEN: Oh, she lives at 10th and East Capitol in the blue house—

BEAVER: 1010 East Capitol. She was here, but that's the only two people I know that were here then that are still around.

BRADEN: Were there lots of families, there were lots of families here though, lots of children on the Hill—

BEAVER: There were children, then all of a sudden, there's no children, you know. For a long time, there was not a child anywhere. And now we're full of children again, which is nice. That's one of the good things is seeing children around. Adds some life to the community. I like that. But I don't know what else—I don't remember much else. Oh, that one house in this block was vacant for a long, long time. The house with the balconies sticking out? The one next to the corner. It was vacant for a long time, and somebody holed up in it at one time who was running from the police. They had some excitement there. But finally, somebody bought it and fixed it up.

BRADEN: Did you know the family that had the Oriental—the Chinese restaurant?

BEAVER: I didn't know them, no.

BRADEN: That was on the corner of Eighth and Massachusetts.

BEAVER: Someone told me that that had been a grocery store at one time.

BRADEN: Oh, I didn't know that.

BEAVER: Oh, and another interesting thing—a gentleman came here, in fact, the man who sold me this house came. You'd think he'd be perturbed at what it'd be worth now and what he sold it to me for—but he was very jolly about the whole thing. A friend came with him, because he had lived in this neighborhood and he wanted to see what the neighborhood was like. They all lived in Silver Spring. He said the apartment building next door here, which is a building with six apartments in it, was a dwelling-house when he was a little boy. Now this man was, I suppose, in his 70s. When he was a little boy, he said he played with the children who lived in that—it was a house. I said, "You mean to tell me one family lived in there?" and he said yes. That was when I guess things were good—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

[TAPE 1/SIDE 2]

BRADEN: Let's talk about some of the shops. Do you remember any particular shops or your favorite shops on Pennsylvania Avenue, favorite restaurants, and things like that that you had around here?

BEAVER: I don't really remember... much about...

BRADEN: Did you go to the movie theater that was on Pennsylvania Avenue?

BEAVER: No. Well, after I came over here, I was working very hard when I first came over here, of course, you see, because I had a terrible time getting a license for this place, getting an occupancy permit. It took me a year to get one. They couldn't understand what kind of a business it was.

BRADEN: That you were furnishing costumes to the theater industry here.

BEAVER: They couldn't understand—or masks to parties or whatever... They couldn't understand that kind of business. There's no category for it—you know, even on the Federal income tax, there's no category for costume rentals. I always have to put it on—odd—you know, they have a million different—and then there's nothing. It's just one of those businesses that—of course, my business is so small here it's not even recognized as a business. I make such a little bit of money that they don't even

recognize me. The Capitol Hill business association doesn't even think I'm here, and they wouldn't ask me to join because it would embarrass them, I guess.

BRADEN: Have you had some famous people come into the shop, to rent costumes?

BEAVER: Well, back... the Kennedys—except for Jackie, she got, all her clothes were high-style fashion—but the other Kennedys, the Bobby Kennedy family, they got a lot of costumes from me.

BRADEN: For parties and things like that?

BEAVER: They were always having something, you know, benefits and so forth. They got a lot of stuff from me. Then around that time, the Women's Democratic Club had a big show, they did it at the Arena Stage, and I did costumes for that, and they had somebody representing all the Democratic Presidents' wives, all the way back. Margaret Truman represented her family. And we made a '40s—a very good-looking '40s dress for her, very good looking—the hat and the brim and so forth. She said she'd never had anything like that when she was in the White House. And it was true—she did not dress that well! The rest were Senators' wives, Senators' or Congressmen's wives, that represented the different Presidents' wives. Oh, they did it again—Humphrey was—

BRADEN: Senator Hubert Humphrey?

BEAVER: Hubert Humphrey's wife was in it, or some member of his family was in it. They came for fittings, and they were just like anybody else. I stuck pins in them just like anyone else! [Braden laughs.] They did it again at the Arena Stage, later, and they still had some of the costumes. But I had to make a few more things because there were different people. Jimmy Carter's daughter-in-law was in it—she was representing the Carters, I guess, Mrs. Carter. I went to see it, I went down there to help them with the costumes, and she was in the wings and she was very nervous about when—her time to go on. She was saying [perfect Southern accent], 'I declare, I've never done anything like this before...' [Laughter] She's a very pretty girl, very attractive. Then the Johnson girls—just to skip a little bit back—the Johnson girls did a lot of—got a lot of costumes from me. They had parties a lot. They dressed up the band, they dressed up themselves, and everything, you know, a lot. And then—my main claim to fame is that I made neckties for President Johnson. This was in the late '60s or early '70s—when did Johnson quit?

BRADEN: '68, he finished in '68.

BEAVER: So this was close to that, the late '60s. It was when blue tuxedos just came in style. They hadn't had blue tuxedos. And, of course, he had one but he couldn't find a bow tie. They frantically looked all over the United States, and they couldn't find a blue bow tie. So one day this man came in my shop on K Street and said, 'Do you make bow ties?' And I said—I was making things then, you

know—and I said, ‘Yeah, I guess so.’ And he said, ‘Could you make about four or five of them?’ And I said, ‘What is it, a singing group?’ And he said [whispering], ‘No, it’s for the President.’ And I said [loudly], ‘The President of what?’ And he said [whispering], ‘The President of the United States.’ So I almost had a nervous breakdown, you know, making those ties, but I made them. He bought a tie like the one he liked, it was black, a wide tie, like a butterfly thing, that was in style then, in black. I took it apart and used it for a pattern. I got plenty of material because I was going to have it perfect or not at all. I worked one whole weekend, and I was exhausted. He came to pick them up, asked me how much, and I said, ‘There isn’t enough money in the world to pay for this, so I’m not going to charge him.’ And I said it was an honor, anyway, to make something for the President. So then, a little while later, he comes back with a signed picture. And then, later on in the fall, he sends me a pen, one of the pens he signed treaties with. I thought that was very nice.

BRADEN: Wow! And you still have the pen?

BEAVER: Yeah, it doesn’t work anymore. [Laughter]

BRADEN: You can sign your tax forms with it!

BEAVER: Anyway, that’s my claim to fame. Oh, I forgot—I forgot one more! Clinton. I made a Clinton costume.

BRADEN: What was the costume that he rented?

BEAVER: An old-fashioned cutaway.

BRADEN: Explain that a little more, in case someone doesn’t know what that means.

BEAVER: Well, in the 18— well, around the turn of the century, I guess, somebody was having some kind of...

BRADEN: Like the slim trousers and the long coat that’s angled off—

BEAVER: They cut away from— Well, they still wear them, but this was supposed to be old-fashioned, I think it was turn-of-the-century or 1912, or something like that. Like “My Fair Lady,” about that period, the Titanic period. Of course he didn’t come.

BRADEN: What size was he?

BEAVER: Larger than I thought. He was bigger than I thought he was. He must’ve worn a corset when he had his picture taken. [Laughter]

BRADEN: I thought you were going to say he rented Little Bo Peep or something!

BEAVER: No, but Senator Birch Bayh and his wife were here when the Watergate scandal came, and she came—Mrs. Bayh—she was very, very nice—she wanted costumes for them for a party. You probably don't remember, but there was a big thing about Rosemary—Rosemary had lost—she was a clerk or something and she lost something... Anyway, Rosemary was a big name at the time, and also "Rosemary's Baby" was a big hit in New York. And I said she should go as Rosemary's baby, and put him in a baby... But she wouldn't do that. [Laughter] So it ended up that she went as a bug—you know, things were bugged—bug was a big word—

BRADEN: Oh, from the Watergate scene.

BEAVER: The Watergate office was bugged... I got her up as a bug, and all he did was wear a cap with an eye mask, for a burglar. That was the way they ended up.

BRADEN: That was a very political costume, wasn't it?

BEAVER: Yeah. That's about all I remember about celebrities. But the Republicans, naturally they're wealthier than the... Though I thought Johnson was pretty wealthy, wasn't he?

BRADEN: He was pretty wealthy.

BEAVER: And Kennedy wasn't exactly a pauper.

BRADEN: No.

BEAVER: But—like Nancy Reagan and all her fancy, fancy clothes. She and also Mrs. Kennedy had all the big designers dying to give them things for nothing you know.

BRADEN: Before, you said that you thought Capitol Hill had changed a lot, that it felt more like a suburb. Can you describe more about what you mean by that?

BEAVER: I mean that you have to have a car. When I came here, you didn't have to have a car. Even the doctor's office was down the street. There were any kind of stores you wanted—ten-cent stores, grocery stores, hardware stores, everything walking distance from where I am now. I didn't need a car you know. I ditched my car when I came over here. But I actually didn't have time to use it anyway, I mean I was working so hard when I first came here.

BRADEN: You mean there were more businesses sprinkled throughout the neighborhood, on each block, so you could do a lot of things within your own few blocks. And now I guess it's more

concentrated—Massachusetts Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, things like that. [Beaver affirms these statements throughout.]

BEAVER: And what is on Pennsylvania Avenue... Bread and Chocolate. I mean, that isn't...

BRADEN: There are restaurants all the way up to the Library of Congress.

BEAVER: I know, but restaurants—that's not my idea of...

BRADEN: Real businesses?

BEAVER: Well, I've always gone to restaurants, but I've gone to restaurants that I would pick and go to, but I never considered restaurants as having to be walking distance. There are an awful lot of restaurants on Capitol Hill, more restaurants than anything else.

BRADEN: Not so many stores.

BEAVER: I'm talking about conveniences, I'm not talking about pleasurable things. Capitol Hill is really no place for an old person like me—it caters entirely to youth. Although I think that old people should be in cities where they're close to hospitals and things like that, and doctors. But Capitol Hill is for the young definitely, everything's for the young, everybody's young. I'm the only old lady on Capitol Hill! That's my main claim to fame, I think.

BRADEN: You're not the only—I don't think. There are lots, don't you think?

BEAVER: Not as old as I am.

BRADEN: And how old are you?

BEAVER: 93.

BRADEN: And your friend on East Capitol—you said she's lived here longer?

BEAVER: She's been here longer. She's about 90. She'd kill me for telling her age.

BRADEN: I know—her name is Linda, isn't it? I know her a little bit.

BEAVER: She has a big German shepherd, and the German shepherd, Cindy, is ailing.

BRADEN: But she has good neighbors that help her?

BEAVER: Yeah, and she has someone helping her, someone that helps her.

BRADEN: I think her hus—not her hus—her son is a physician?

BEAVER: She doesn't have a son. She's never been married. She has no children. She has a nephew.

BRADEN: A nephew? OK.

BEAVER: She has a twin sister in Philadelphia, and this is the twin sister's son.

BRADEN: What do you think you like about the Hill most now, even though you say it's changed a lot?

BEAVER: The people. This is a wonderful neighborhood for people, it really is, right around here. That's why I love it—I really wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Now that I'm getting old, I don't have as much desire to shop—I just have to get my groceries one way or another, and that's all I care about now. As far as shopping for clothes or anything, I don't care.

BRADEN: We have a neighbor here, Donna Brazil, I know that you're very close to.

BEAVER: Oh, yeah, she looks out for me.

BRADEN: She's a good person.

BEAVER: If my lights are on too late, she calls me and asks me if I'm all right.

BRADEN: There are lots of nice people on the Hill.

BEAVER: And Doug and Jack are very good to me. And Pat Morgan has been just wonderful.

BRADEN: Just one last question. You said when you moved over to the Hill, even though the riots had been just a few years before that—you never thought about moving to Virginia or Maryland, you stayed—

BEAVER: Oh, no, I wouldn't think—

BRADEN: —one side of the city you moved to the other side.

BEAVER: —never to the suburbs, never. I'm just not that kind of person. I've lived in cities all my life. I was raised in the country when I was a child, I was in the country, but—I would either want to be way off on an island or just in the middle of the woods or something, but that's never been practical for me, I've never been able to do that. But otherwise, I want to be in the city.

BRADEN: So you never thought of leaving the city, even when times were a little bit rough?

BEAVER: Oh, no, never, never. It was rough, too, because when the dancing school and everybody quit, that's really—going into the costume business... Yeah, that was rough, it was very rough.

BRADEN: So you've always loved Washington?

BEAVER: I love this city, I really do. As far as coming from New York—the city has changed. The city has changed for the better, so much for the better. When I first came down here, it seemed a very dull place, compared to New York. There didn't seem to be any entertainment, any fashion, any art, except the good old Smithsonian and the good old [National] Geographic, you know. But now we have millions of theaters and museums, we have new museums all the time. We've got three or four new museums, right?

BRADEN: It's a very creative place now.

BEAVER: One thing about New York, you always felt in New York there was always something to do and you never got it all done. I lived in New York for years and years and never got to see everything that I could have seen. I never went out and saw the Statue of Liberty in all the years I lived in New York, and there was so much to do and see in New York. And that's why I thought Washington was so dull at first. But now I think we've just got all kinds of things—you could go forever, days and days, and not cover everything. So many interesting things going on.

BRADEN: Sort of come of age, or really matured as a big city, I think.

BEAVER: And in the arts, I'm so happy that it's getting somewhere with the arts. See, there was the National Theater that's been there for a long time. I remember when the Arena Stage started on Eighth Street or Seventh Street NW, in a little funny place. They weren't much when they first started, they didn't have any money or anything. But we had movie theaters, we had big—Capitol, was it the Capitol Theater, on F Street? Huge movie theater, just wonderful.

BRADEN: I've heard about it...

BEAVER: Great big, very elaborate. It had stage shows. And the Warner Theater, which is a theater again, which was dark for a long time—it was a movie theater with stage shows. It's back now with stage shows, drama and so forth. When I was in school, I remember going to the National and seeing Helen Hayes as a young girl. There was one—in the park across from the Capitol, on the right-hand side, there was a theater called Poli's Theater. I remember that when I was in school. And then during the war, that had gone dark, and it was taken over as The Stage Door Canteen. I worked there during the war, off and on. The waiters were all Senators and Congressmen, and the people who gave out the food were Senators' wives and Congressmen's wives. They had girls dance with the fellows. I did a show every other Saturday for them. I had to do it—I mean, I did it, and I don't know how I did it, because they had all these great stars from Hollywood and Broadway coming to entertain the fellows, and I had to fill in in between these big names. There would be my name with some big celebrity... But it was fun, it was a lot of fun. Now a lot of people have never heard of the Stage Door Canteen. You know, I still have my apron. I wanted to give it to the Smithsonian, but I think it's faded a lot. I don't know whether they'd want it.

BRADEN: They possibly still would, even if it's faded....

BEAVER: Everybody wore these little red-white-and-blue aprons with a blue ruffle around it. Red, white, and blue. This lady that lives across the street works at the Smithsonian—maybe I'll ask her to ask them if they would want it.

BRADEN: Who is it that works at the Smithsonian?

BEAVER: Her name is Fay and she lives downstairs on the corner.

BRADEN: Oh, I didn't know that. Well, Lola, thank you very much for agreeing to do the interview. You'll see a copy of the transcript when it's written and you can look at it make any edits or corrections that you like—or additions—or if you want to talk again.

BEAVER: So you edit it?

BRADEN: I don't edit it, they have someone else that works on it.

BEAVER: So they'll take out all the nasty things I said?

BRADEN: But you didn't say any nasty things.

BEAVER: But I shouldn't have mentioned people's names.

BRADEN: Oh, yeah, that's fine. On an oral history, you should mention people's names. I mean it's OK to mention exact dates, explain—

BEAVER: But I shouldn't have mentioned Lucille's name and Linda's name...

BRADEN: Oh, no, that's fine. They want you to do that.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW