



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Thomas V. Kelly

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Material contained in brackets [] has been added by editors subsequent to the interview.

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

KERR: Talk about your childhood on Capitol Hill.

KELLY: Okay, well, I'll just do it chronologically and I'll sort of ramble. I was born on August 2, 1923 at [what] was then 404 B Street NE [404 Constitution Avenue NE]. I was possibly the last of the home babies. I don't know. But we were born in the front bedroom, I was born. I still have the bed I was born in, and it's upstairs in one of the bedrooms. So, when I feel death approaching I intend to get back in that bed. [son of Michael A. and Anna R. Kelly]

KERR: {Laughs.}

KELLY: So, a little circle. A beginning and end. And the house that I was born in, 404, was built in 1913 and it's one of five houses there in a row [with] similar construction, and they're still there of course. They all had front porches and one now, only the one in the corner, has a front porch and it looks much better when you only have one porch—otherwise you have this monotony of five porches. And to the best of my knowledge that I think it's... and makes sense, the lots on which those houses were built had been... a farm, a farmer had grown something there, and the explanation of that—again of course you never know how accurate these explanations are because they get embroidered, but supposedly the people who owned the land east of the Capitol over-priced it, they thought it was such a choice thing, so the city developed much more to the west. On the other hand it would be logical for the city to develop toward the White House you know. I think it wasn't simply that they had intended to develop to the east and were forced to develop to the west. But at any rate the Capitol Hill, what's now Capitol Hill, as I'm sure you know already, but it was pretty much untouched until the Civil War and indeed the Army of the Potomac bivouacked around now what is now Lincoln Park [a large tent hospital] so it was open country pretty much. And Major [Samuel H.] Walker who built the house that I now live in and he built most of the other Victorian houses in the immediate along Constitution Avenue and Fifth Street [NE], there's a dozen of them that he built. Those were pretty much the first, there probably had been farm houses here and there but they were the first densely row houses built and he built them in the late 19th century. This house we're in right now—420 Constitution—is his own house and that was built in two parts. And the first part as far as we can figure it I think it's accurate, 1875, and that's the part on the corner. The second part, which more or less doubled the size of the house, was built probably in the 1890s. We have a picture upstairs of the house in the 1890s with a carriage in front of it and so forth. He built the second part supposedly, well no, he built the second part of the house because had a lot of children. He had 13 children, I believe, and I think two of them died and 11 of them reached adulthood. He built the house

next door to this one, 418, for his brother when they were pretty much old men ... and again, supposedly he built it so that they had windows within a couple of feet of each other out in the front, they could open the windows in the summer and talk to each other. He lived to be, I think it was, 85 [85 in 1930]. He certainly lived to be in his 80s which was a great age in those days. He was a remarkable man, if you want me to go off on Major Walker I will go back to my own we'll pick him up later.

KERR: No, yeah, let's go back to 1923 you said and...

KELLY: Yeah, 1923. This was a prosperous time. My parents had both emigrated [1906 and 1908] from County Roscommon in Ireland. They hadn't emigrated together, they had emigrated... they hadn't met, they were born 11 miles apart but they had not met each other until they came to Washington. And of course, not surprisingly, the Irish from Roscommon and Mayo—my father was part of a football team. They had social clubs and so forth so that's how they met. This isn't particularly Capitol Hill but he had been—I like to think of him as—a terrorist. He had been a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood when he was 16. And had gone to England for whatever he was up to and had obviously attracted the attention of the authorities because when he tried to come into this country they wouldn't let him in so he was sent back to England and he changed his name to Gannon, which was his mother's name and came back in since they had no computers or DNA or anything else in those days.

KERR: So, he actually immigrated to this country under the name Gammon?

KELLY: Gannon, G-A-N-N-O-N

KERR: Gannon, Gannon...

KELLY: And he remained Gannon only briefly. He had an aunt and various cousins and a couple of sisters in Washington. So he came to Washington and changed his name back to Michael Kelly.

KERR: How old was he when he came?

KELLY: This is a little... because I'm not sure how long he was in England. But he was on the Irish football team, I mentioned, in 1913. At which point he would have been about 33 years old. But he had been in the country sometime before that. I don't know if it was a year, five years, or ten years [born about 1880]. He worked as a bartender at his Aunt Nelly Folliard's bar room/saloon on K Street [2029 K NW]. Fitting into the stereotype, all my relatives owned bars. My Uncle Bart Roddy [Bartholomew J.] owned a bar and my Great Aunt Nelly Folliard owned a bar and my father owned a bar and my cousin Tom Flynn owned a bar on H Street [417 H NE?]. So it was a familiar business and of course there were relatively few Irish in Washington. It was not a port town and so forth. So I think my father knew all the bar owners, Irish bar owners, and he probably knew almost all the Irish in town if you know, they knew

cousins of each, in other words it was a relatively small community. There were two sponsors that I know of, one was Drury, Peter [A.] Drury was a banker. He was a real estate operator. The other fellow was, can't think of the name at the moment, I might think of it later. They owned a furniture thing, so they to a degree hired the new, the ones that didn't become bartenders, they hired them, got various jobs for them in town. It was for the immigrants, the Irish that I know of, it was relatively easy life. They were not in the depths of poverty or so forth. They were petty bourgeois pretty quickly. Nee, P.J. Nee was the furniture company. They still have a furniture store I think on Connecticut Ave or some place.

KERR: Now were they from Roscommon also, do you know?

KELLY: No, most of them would be from—Roscommon is a fairly obscure county. It's near Galway and so it's the west where they still spoke Irish so we said our prayers in Lent in Irish for the obvious reason it was a language God would understand.

KERR: {Laughs.}

KELLY: He had trouble with English but could understand the Irish and also, as you probably know, people say "Gaelic" meaning "Irish". There are various kinds of Gaelic. There is Cornish, there is Breton, there is Scots, there's Welsh. They're all Celtic languages but the Irish language is separate. They can more or less understand each other somewhat but they're different languages. So I was born there and my father was out of the bartending business at that point and was an automobile mechanic. Which was sort of a glamorous business I suppose if you remember "*Upstairs, Downstairs*" as the young man who was the chauffeur. And that was sort of like being homeless, like an aviator would be a few years later, not quite, but that sort of thing. My parents being thrifty, they didn't marry until they had saved enough money to pretty much to buy 404 [Constitution NE] for \$6,000 or at least a substantial part of it. That's the way people bought homes in those days, for that was much more difficult...

KERR: No mortgage...

KELLY: ...to get extended 30 year mortgage, I assume. My aunt Kate, my mother's sister, married name was Kane, K-A-N-E, and her husband James Kane [611 Fifth NE] had a plumbing business. They lived on the other side of Stanton Park and so did my Uncle Bart Roddy, Bartholomew Roddy, who had a bar on Sixth Street on the other side of the Park there pretty close in [house: 401 Sixth Street NE]. We would walk over and visit him, they would. Kate, who was a woman who greatly admired herself, had a car...

KERR: {Laughs.}

KELLY: ...so she'd drive over. She had a car and went straight up [vertical sides]... as cars did in those days. The neighborhood back then was...the people who lived in the various houses, the Soos who lived

on the corner [400 B NE], they were Chinese, Mr. [Charles] Soo was Chinese. He was married to a woman [Nora] who had been a missionary, I'm not sure what denomination, Protestant but I'm not sure if it was Methodist or—I assumed she had been a missionary in China but he had immigrated to this country and had worked in the hop fields in California which is a very gruesome type of labor. My father had worked in the hop fields in England so he—it's hard work. Mr. Soo did very well, he came here and he eventually became the, as they always do, he was the so called mayor of Chinatown. He owned a restaurant which was sort of a poor man's restaurant, all you can eat for 10 cents or something and he owned a hotel which was sort of a poor man's Chinese hotel down in Chinatown, in those days was at the foot of Capitol Hill, that's where it was and that's where he owned his things. His family lived in the house, his descendants lived in the house until I suppose 20 years ago something like that. [Soo is listed as an importer in 1928 at 335 Pennsylvania NW and in 1940 as an importer at 605 H Street NW.]

KERR: Really?

KELLY: We grew up, in fact, my children called his son "Daddy Soo" because the families were always on quite good terms. For one thing, not surprisingly, but the original settlers on the Hill were, they managed to accept the Irish if they were sober, and they were afraid to a degree of the Italians who were over on C Street, and the Chinese were just mostly beyond their ability to grasp a changing world. Now everybody on the Hill... {phone ringing} Is that my phone?

KERR: That is your phone, do you want to stop and get the phone?

KELLY: Yeah, that might be for my wife.

KERR: Now, let's see if we've resumed ... okay, looks fine.

KELLY: I remember Mrs. [Nora] Soo who was a kind of, I don't know how to phrase it, she was very matter-of-fact, very candid, very forceful woman with her opinions. I know that she and my mother got to be good friends and she would bring us, bring my mother Chinese tea and bring us Chinese cookies which were not very good. I was disappointed in their cookies. They lived there, Ray Soo, their son, lived there up until, it's a little hard to, I'll say 20 years ago and he was as old as the century. He came to the block when he was 19 years old... 1919. That's also when my parents bought the house. They were built in [19]13.

KERR: So this was on B Street?

KELLY: It was called B Street in those days.

KERR: In Northeast?

KELLY: Northeast, yes. The 400 block of B, Northeast. And they were in 400 and then in 402 was Mr. Nokes, N-O-K-E-S, who was a bodyguard for the gambler Jimmy LaFontaine.

KERR: Oh my.

KELLY: Jimmy LaFontaine. Very, very proper looking man who looked like a Senator. Very mild, quiet man who kept himself to himself. We were in the next house. Then the Beucherts were there [201 Fifth NE]. Mr. [Charles] Beuchert, his mother was an immigrant from Bavaria and managed to own a lot of property, ran boarding houses, and made quite a bit of money. He was in the plumbing business. The plumbing business was a good business. He made a certain amount of money. I think he inherited quite a bit of money from his mother. They had a daughter, Yvonne, one child [born 1915]. Mrs. [Margaret] Beuchert was from Louisiana. Yvonne was a... she and Margaret Miller [408 B] who lived in the next house [?] were in a very mild way, flappers. Yvonne died a few years ago and she and I were in touch but they were fringe flappers but they sort of dressed like flappers and so forth. Then the next house which is a house that is different construction from anything on the block. It's in its own way quite a handsome house. It was occupied by Major [Joseph H.] Wheat [410 B], who had been a major in WWI and was a pioneer in aerial photography and, as a result of that, was a member of the Cosmos Club which at that point was mostly like scientific achievement rather than... Mrs. [Minnette] Wheat, they had no children. Mrs. Wheat had gone to St. Cecilia's Academy over on East Capitol Street [601] where my sister would go and do time. In those days I guess they taught young women. I remember she painted, she had an oil painting of roses that she gave to my mother, of red roses that looked quite good. I think that's what you learned in school when you were a young woman if you went to that kind of a school. The next house then would be I think Miss [Ida] Greenwell [412 B]. Miss Greenwell was a spinster I'm pretty sure, obviously Miss. And she had a sister who was somewhat retarded but was very... these were old Americans from the rest of the block and then you had... in other words the older people I'm describing weren't necessarily in residence at the same time in the 20's. This is the people from my childhood.

KERR: Uh huh.

KELLY: There were along... the house would be 18, 16, 14... 414 [B] was owned by a lady [Laura A. Turner] who came to the block when she was 12 years old and lived to be 104 although her last years she spent in a nursing home. She at one point—I was the fourth oldest resident on the block, I mean not too long ago. Ray Soo had gotten here four years before me. Katherine [daughter of May] Turner, across the street [415], had been born there and she was I think four years older than me. She stayed there until she died. The lady I'm talking about whose name I hope will come to me in a minute, she had gotten here when she was twelve but she got here early and lived to be 104 so I was—all of those outranked me in seniority. Up until a few years ago. Ray moved off with one of his daughters to the suburbs and actually, I

left out Waring Myers who lived across the street [407 B] and he was probably two years older than me and was also born at, it would be 401... 403... 407. Mrs. [Susan] Enoch was one of the ladies down the street. Enoch that was her name. Waring Myer's mother [sic, aunt] whose maiden name was Gantt, G-A-N-T [sic], and the Walker girls [420], Rosalie and—they had all gone to Eastern High School together. And in those days going to high school was at least as much of a distinction as going to college now. To have been a high school graduate, the phrase was still used when I was a kid, they would say somebody was a high school graduate. I guess they can still say that because a lot of people still have trouble graduating from high school.

KERR: Really, this is true.

KELLY: But in those days it was economic. People went to work when they were 16, so people may have gone—there were also vocational schools. So if you went to Eastern High, and they had sororities, you were... it was a class distinction to a degree. Mrs. Myers and her sister, a maiden lady, Ms. Gantt [Helen W. Gantt] who taught music together. She was divorced, Mrs. Myers was, which was rather unusual in those days. She raised Waring and adopted a girl named Colma [her niece] which I think is a Scots name. They were the old settlers, although as I say, most of the houses were built in the 1890's so they weren't that long in residence but still...

KERR: Settlers that might have been the children that had moved in originally, such as the two sisters. I wonder how they...

KELLY: Well, they had an established air about them and Katherine Turner's family, her grandmother was Mrs. [Kate] White who was the widow of a doctor. They had moved in whenever the house was built. It was an all girl orchestra. Mrs. White was a widow, her daughter Mrs. [May] Turner was a widow, and Katherine went off and got married and came back, almost like a queen bee I might say, having been impregnated she came home {laughs} and had a boy and so there was a woman's—three generation of women living there together.

KERR: And she didn't go back to her husband?

KELLY: Oh, she had no intention of doing that. They got divorced. I don't know what the cause of their—but uh, the boy is a nice boy and I'll think of his father's name... Harrison, Harrison. He was a pilot in the Coast Guard and crashed in the South Atlantic there and died. But he lived obviously long enough to be a pilot but died in his 20's.

KERR: So, you're painting a picture of a very stable neighborhood.

KELLY: Oh, an extraordinarily stable neighborhood. I can't imagine a more stable neighborhood. The same people lived here for their lives out here. There were some more or less transients. Major Walker built this house [420 B NE]. He built the house next to it and he built the house next to that and he owned those houses. Those were rented during the 30's and so forth. People, and again... this was, I'm trying to peg it for years, I decided, not very good description, it was artisan class rather than working class or middle class. Although in those days neighborhoods were much more fiscally integrated, you might say.

KERR: Yes, well you can tell that.

KELLY: A doctor here and there. There was almost a doctor in every block. There were a lot of drug stores. Relatively few lawyers. Waring Myer's father was a lawyer. I think he was a patent attorney. A lot of the fathers were machinists at the Navy Yard or printers at the printing office or like my father, small business men [who] owned some kind of a retail, in his case a restaurant [1801 L NW]. Some there were house painters. There was a... various people. Skilled labor, most families were, the fathers were skilled artisans of some kind.

KERR: Which would pretty much describe most of rising middle class American, wouldn't it?

KELLY: I would think so, it wasn't... nobody went around saying what an odd collection of people. It was very much village-like in that it had a range, but a limited range. The richest people were probably the Walkers. Although there were some of those big houses on East Capitol Street. But nobody was anything like Rockefeller rich or even remotely like it. They were, as the phrase was "well off," and it was a very stable, as you say, society. People grew up very familiar with the world they lived in, and the old phrase "everybody knew their place" without even thinking, they knew their place. It's a kind of group of people that have, I think, disappeared from America, in that... it was a great stabilizing influence. The sons and daughters of the machinists and the printers and the small business men are very, very likely across the country to be members, at least the middle or in many cases the upper middle class so the whole artisan class is almost gone. There are still artisans but it isn't the same kind of stability.

KERR: No, it's a different world. Now did the men socialize in the evening? Did they pitch horseshoes or...?

KELLY: Not, no there was very little socializing as you would call it. The children socialized. People—if you had someone to your house to dinner it was almost sure to be a relative. You didn't do that every day of the week but if our fellow cousins from New York came down of course we had them to dinner. Socially, for lack of a better—the kind of social intimacy, if you can use the phrase, which is an exaggeration of itself, was pretty much... you associated with people from your church. What was then called the Metropolitan Baptist Church is now Capitol Hill Baptist [Sixth and A Streets NE, southwest

corner], was possibly... it was also, my friend Amos [James Holmes], who was an amusing fellow, he referred to it as the “mother church.” He was being funny but it was a church that was the Southern Baptist church in town. I think it still may more or less be that, so it had, if not missionaries out in Northern Virginia, at least it was—that was the Vatican of the Southern Baptists as far as it went. The Catholics, who were largely Irish, but there were a good many Italians and then there were some people who were neither one or the other who were more or less generally Americans. For one thing in WWI, as I’m sure you know, the Bavarians, the Irish Germans, like all Germans, may change their name from “Schmidt” to “Smith”, from “Baum” to “Tree” and so forth. So it became less obviously German but their—St. Joseph’s, as I’m sure you know...

KERR: Right.

KELLY: ...was originally a German national church [313 Second NE]. All the priests and parishioners were Germans.

KERR: Sermons in German?

KELLY: They were immigrants, maybe second generation, and they built St. Joseph’s with the intention of duplicating the Cathedral of Cologne which they—it didn’t work out that way. That was the idea they had in mind. But there was very little social life. One reason I guess people were too busy. You washed your clothes on Monday and you ironed them on Tuesday. And Mrs. [Mary] McCauley on Fifth Street [215 Fifth NE] baked her own bread which was—people preserved various tomatoes and things. You did a lot of dusting because the windows were open in the summer and so forth. Women were not, in this neighborhood, were not inclined to belong to women’s organizations or whatever. It was very much a family-oriented place. Looking back, it seems much more a working type of community, but that’s hard to judge. But for example, if you left home when you were a 12 year old boy in the summer time, [he] would do whatever household chores he had which he did reluctantly, probably when you dusted the furniture in the living room, which was called a parlor. Then you were on your own all day and you didn’t necessarily come home to lunch. You ate at the home of whoever, like Amos’s home [621 Massachusetts Avenue NE] or something. And parents, as far as I can tell, they never gave a thought “I wonder where my child is.” The kids were on their own and it worked very well. {laughs}

KERR: So, what would you do in a day? A summer day that was all your own.

KELLY: Well, it would depend how old you were.

KERR: Twelve, think twelve, that’s a good one. And when you were twelve you’d leave home...

KELLY: It got very hot and of course there was no air conditioning. And I was just writing about this. You would listen to Arch McDonald broadcast the baseball game in the afternoon if it was really hot. If it was less hot and you were 12 years old or 13 or 14, you would go, nobody called it courting, but you would go in pursuit of girls. It was formalized almost like a ritual dance of some species of bird. Although the ritual I think... Amos, Amos was a very original person, and we would go and sit in or stand in the yard of some girl's house and she would either come out and sit on the porch or she wouldn't and so forth. We would have these vague, wandering conversations which were strictly boy and girl conversations but it was much more restrained, restricted, whatever, than what it would be now, but it was very flirtatious. That's what you did in the summer. In the evening if you were still interested in girls, and you surely were, you would go down to the concerts at the Capitol and try to pick up girls, but you had very little success picking up girls. You'd say "Hello girls" and they would say "Hello" back to you but they'd whine and whine to go out in the back of the Capitol and neck with you. Some were, but not very many. So it was an interesting way of life.

KERR: Now they had concerts where and how often?

KELLY: They had three concerts a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It was the three military bands. There was no Air Force. It was Army, Navy, and Marines. The Marines were, of course, were the band with the biggest reputation. Up until fairly recently they played on the east side of the Capitol. People sat on the steps and it was strictly a neighborhood thing. The audience was almost entirely from Capitol Hill. There may have been a music lover from Alexandria but this was strictly a neighborhood thing. And it was rather nice. Amos's father [Amos E.] was a supervising maintenance person of the Capitol. So we used to wander around the Capitol all the time.

KERR: Around inside you mean?

KELLY: Inside and up in the dome and all that sort of stuff. You could go up on the catwalk up inside the dome. It's a double dome. And nobody ever told you "What are you doing here kid?" Go down where Amos's father was, down in the various catacombs down there and wander around. It was so hot that in the midsummer relatively little baseball was played. It was played in the spring. People really slowed down in the summer. You're a kid... a 12 year old... you'd sit under the tree and talk. You wouldn't be running around particularly but of course when the weather got down to the 80s or low 90s you'd be more active. As you got older, there were excursion steamers on the Potomac, and that was a great boy meets girl operation. They would leave the waterfront down there and probably take two hours to go down to Marshall Hall or there was another place, what was it? Marshall Hall was a frequent... and the other was a... can't think of it.

KERR: Another amusement park? On the Maryland side.

KELLY: Marshall Hall was an amusement park [on the Maryland side] and so you went down and you came back. That's where people sat around in the moonlight and tried to meet strange girls. Which was not that difficult to meet them. They were out to meet strange boys I guess.

KERR: Did they have music on the boats? Did you dance?

KELLY: No. I don't remember. I don't think so. Of course everything was segregated. They had excursions for what were called "colored" people then before they were called "black" people. They had their excursions.

KERR: Different boats? Different times?

KELLY: Well one boat might leave at seven and the other at eight or something.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

KELLY: The boats catering to the black people went to amusement parks—I don't know. There may well have been a black [amusement park]. I just never heard of it. There was one fellow from C Street, where the Italians lived, he was very dark. He used to go on the black excursions. Pick up black girls.

KERR: Interesting. Interesting young man.

KELLY: He was a social experimenter. He was not a particularly comely youth. I think he was—he showed a certain ingenuity. I'll say that for him.

KERR: Now tell me this, you went to school where?

KELLY: St. Joseph's Parochial School [319 Second NE]. They tore it down a good many years ago. It had been originally, when the Germans were building the Cathedral, they built the school and originally the instruction was in German. But by the time I got there, of course, it wasn't at all. And I started at St. Joseph's when I was five years old, which would have been 1928. I was naturally, both my genetic and my age, I was the shortest kid in the class so I had a cigar box to put my feet on when I sat at a desk.

KERR: You were five? You were five when you started first grade?

KELLY: I was just five. I was five in August and went to the first grade in September.

KERR: They took you a year early?

KELLY: At least a year you could say because it would work out [to be] about a year and a half. Which had its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages in the parochial, in the primary school, was I was the teacher's pet ... Sister Doreena who was a dear, dear woman. I was the baby of the class so I got made much of by the nuns and so forth. I was always very talkative and so forth so I was on display quite a bit which I enjoyed. I had nothing against that.

KERR: I imagine modesty is keeping you from saying you were a precocious little boy.

KELLY: Well, I was a precocious little boy.

KERR: Yeah, I would think so.

KELLY: {Laughs.} Well I was, and Father, later Monsignor [Edward P.] McAdams, said that I was the keystone of the third grade. So I came home and told my mother and she looked up keystone in the dictionary. And of course it gave the engineering definition.

KERR: {Laughs.}

KELLY: Which mildly [?] —I don't think she was familiar with the term as a term of... well, which the down side of it was I was not inclined to do any work. I never learned the habit because I got by without actually doing any work. When I got to the Jesuits at Gonzaga it was a shocking difference. They really expected you to do a lot of work. {Laughs.}

KERR: I can imagine that.

KELLY: We never really worked it out between us. It was... my friends went to, most of my friends, Amos went to Peabody [southwest corner Fifth and C NE], which is still there, Stuart Junior High School [400 E NE], and Eastern [northeast corner 17th and East Capitol]. Amos and I were both learning disabled in our different ways. I managed to survive but Amos had an awful time in school. And he was very funny. He did very amusing things. He always had to go to summer school but he had no use for school. So the project at one summer school was, he was supposed to compile [his] English notebook. So he didn't do anything and the last day he went into a trunk that his older brother Carl had, in it he had a lot of old school papers, and he just took all the school papers, put a cover on it saying "My English Notebook" and handed it in. {Laughs.}

KERR: And did it work?

KELLY: It got him off the hook that day. She said "Thank you, Amos." She was probably surprised to see it. Later, I'm sure she took a look at it and she figured out it wasn't Amos' work. But he just wanted to get out of there.

KERR: What became of Amos?

KELLY: He dropped out of Eastern. His family, in mild despair, sent him off to Fork Union Military Academy when he was probably about 14. He stayed there a year and he came back, and he went back to Eastern and it was hopeless.

KERR: He may have had a real learning disability.

KELLY: He was a very, very smart guy. He was very smart, and if you want to look for small tragedies—tragedies are neither here nor there, but he was the funniest person I've ever met. Totally original sense of humor. He spent most of his life as an air conditioning maintenance man at the Capitol Building. He got a job through his father and his uncle and that's what he did. He would write short stories, and I would encourage him. They would be very short, and they would get... if not obscene, they would get very unacceptable on the third page. He sent them to big magazines who write a note back saying we liked your writing very much but this is much too short and we can't possibly use it but we'd be delighted to see other works by you. And of course if you don't try you can't fail so he had gone that far and he wasn't going to push it. And he did win some kind of Maryland state short story contest once but he never did anything, he just couldn't. So, he died just a couple of years ago down in southern Maryland, Saint Mary's County where he had gone to live. As I say, I'm not sure that his life was a tragedy because I've known a lot of GS-12's that had more miserable lives than Amos did. Amos was his own original self anyway, and that's something.

KERR: So he was a good friend growing up. Who else was in your circle of friends?

KELLY: Who was my closest friend? Paul McCauley who lived across on Fifth Street [215 Fifth NE]. His aunt Mrs. Linda Green, she and Paul's mother, Mary, were both Irish immigrants but Linda had married very well, a descendant of Nathaniel Green's. And her son went to the Naval Academy and then became a businessman. She had the house over there. And Mary's husband [Thomas] who was a structural, he was a foreman on a high rise or something and he fell off and got killed. So Mary and her two younger sons came down here to live with Linda. Of course, that's what people did in those days. People took care of each other. If your mother died, the aunt took you in, that sort of stuff. And there was Paul McCauley and Jim was a couple of years older... There was Ed who was a Jesuit and there was at least one other brother but they were older.

KERR: Now did you have siblings?

KELLY: I had a sister, Mary Theresa, who was three years older than me. Mary Theresa went to St. Cecilia's Academy and then she went to a Catholic school called Dumbarton which is out of business like

most Catholic girls schools or colleges are out of business long since. And she got a job in the government as an executive secretary. In those days that's about what girls did. She married a fellow named Merrill Markly who was from the state of Washington. He was raised by his aunts, they owned pear orchards, I think. He was a biochemist, I think, in the government. They both worked in Beltsville, experimental, where they had great big horses. That was interesting, I was going there and they had all that stuff. He was an unfortunate fellow, people are either lucky or unlucky, and he was a mild man. He went into the Navy. He was a scientist. His job was to go ashore with the Marines and capture small mammals to see if they were disease carriers. So he was in on Iwo Jima and all that stuff and he was not the temperament for, he was no Marine. And it really left him half shattered. He functioned, he remained in the government and so forth and so forth but it obviously was more of an emotional burden than he could really handle. And I guess also, I don't want to... It wasn't contrast, he was raised by two maiden aunts, I think, and always had a bad heart, although how he got in the Navy with it... so I guess it wasn't that bad. And had been overly sheltered. Well, of course, he married into a family where all the males owned bars and it's a different world and so forth. The word "timid" is not totally inappropriate. They had an anxious life.

KERR: Did they live on the Hill?

KELLY: No, when they first married they lived out near Lincoln Park briefly but then they went out to... uh... oh whatever...

KERR: Oh, one of those suburbs? {Laughs.}

KELLY: {Laughs.} Over there. Yeah.

KERR: Tell me about what you did, now we talked a little about summers and going down to hear... what would you do on a snowy day on the Hill when you were 10, 11, 12?

KELLY: You had sleds, everybody had a sled and you would slide down the back of the Capitol, the hill there. And Paul McCauley, being from Buffalo, brought a pair of skis with him. Not the kind of fashionable skis that you see now.

KERR: No, I know about those skis.

KELLY: We would ski on them. You'd just strap them on your feet and went down the back of this hill. That was unusual, we were probably the only skiers around. We played football. I played football night and day doing that and in those days we were highly organized. Sandlot is the expression which you probably are familiar with, not that we actually played on sandlots. We played on flats in Anacostia. This is something else that is missing and I obviously think it... The boys from 12 to 18, there were highly

organized sandlot football teams by weight. Like I played 135 pound ball as it was called. You were not supposed to weigh more than 135 pounds. Now every team probably had some kid that weighed 145; you couldn't overdo it too much. And we played very scheduled games. The papers ran results in agate type. We had sponsors like the delicatessen owner would buy jerseys that some of them would say..."David's Deli" on it. You know that was the only support we had. But it seemed to me, this is all of these organized little leagues...

KERR: Who did the organizing and the scheduling?

KELLY: The kids. The kids did.

KERR: The kids did! I mean how would you know where the other teams were?

KELLY: By the time we were doing it, it had been going on for years. But Billy Murphy, who lived over on Massachusetts Avenue, and who was our star athlete, although he only weighed about 135 pounds, he was very quick. You would call up the other teams and make up a whole schedule and you'd play in Anacostia, we would, that was... And as I say after the game Billy would call the newspaper and say—we had various names, the Northeast Ramblers and Ivan's Biscuits and so forth. We almost always won I might add. We had a couple of seasons in which we won all of our games.

KERR: What did you have for equipment?

KELLY: Well, Amos...?? the statute of limitations would... and Amos is dead...? When he was down in Fork Union he was living apart from the dormitories and like the stadium where they stored all the football equipment and when he left Fork Union he brought a trunk load of uniforms back with him...

KERR: {Laughs.}

KELLY: So we were better equipped than most teams. We had actually complete uniforms. But kids you... acquired... and in those days the uniforms were much bulkier and so forth and so we were well equipped. And the teams would be, you would have cleats and football shoes and you would have football pants and a jersey and a helmet and shoulder pads. In fact, the team wouldn't be let in the league if came there just... you know. I think it's a great big hole in everything now. Kids, you found a lot about the reality of life, you lived in a boys democracy and Billy was our leader because he was our best athlete. He was not the smartest and in after life. Clearly he was a better, faster runner and he was fearless. If anybody looked cross at him he would offer to fight him whatever size they were. He was a natural leader, and this is what the life is. In other words, it was not parents trying to prepare us so we could outshine the other kids by whatever dubious means we might. No, you were on your own. You were on your own in school and you were on your own socially with girls and very quickly you found out whether

you were a winner or a loser or just a person in the middle in any of those fields. And if you were poor with girls but good in school it was some consolation. {Laughs.}

KERR: Probably not as much as you'd like it to be at that age.

KELLY: Oh no, but again you wouldn't know it but 20 years later it might have worked to your advantage. {Laughs.}

KERR: This is true but would not console a young man.

KELLY: Not a lot, no.

KERR: So, you had football, but what about church and church activities for kids?

KELLY: I was an altar boy mostly because, I was a prize altar boy if I may say so, because I was the shortest altar boy and I also memorized the Latin faster than anybody else. If you had a procession the short boy was in front and the tall boy was in back and you had a slope. You were carrying a crucifix or an acolyte or whatever. And as I said I memorized the Latin very quickly so I was allowed, I still remember the Latin, of course you never forget those things, I don't remember all of it. If you were fortunate enough to be an altar boy at a wedding the groom or the best man usually gave you fifty cents or something. Which was a tidy sum in those days... it was probably close to ten dollars. Certainly more than five. If you were at a funeral it was much rarer that they gave you a tip so I got a lot of funerals, very few weddings because the taller altar boys were all grabbing the weddings. {Laughs}.

KERR: Right. Right.

KELLY: ...I'd say it was a very good way to grow up I think. You were very familiar with death which is a Irish thing anyway. Death is not a stranger.

KERR: No, the Irish sporting news.

KELLY: When your grandfather dies and you see him there in the front room and you're not afraid of death. It's not some great, mysterious unknown. And if you're an altar boy then you see a lot of dead people. And the Italians, you go to an Italian funeral they're much more emotional. The old lady would want to throw herself in the grave. Father McAdams would announce ahead of time if that anyone wished to throw themselves into the grave they could go right ahead. {Laughs.} He wasn't going to stop them. So, nobody did and that curbed that instinct. You were being educated all the time and you're learning in a limited way but a very real way the different kinds of people there are in the world.

KERR: Now were there fights between, I mean were there ethnic group fights? Did the Italians from C Street fight the Irish from...?

KELLY: No, no, Father Murphy was our—there was a group [we] called the “park bums” which were wayward adolescents. Some of them had, one boy had a cause because he had no parents. He lived on his own. But they left us alone and we left them alone. The excuse was [that] Billy would have fought any of them and they were afraid to fight Billy. We were all football players ourselves. No, there were no fights like that. I remember there was one racial clash that I remember when I was probably about 13 or 14 over off Pennsylvania Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Street [SE] there’s a little park where the subway is now. We were going by and there were a group of black boys and there was words were exchanged but that’s all. It was sort of—it was probably like “what are you doing over here, this is our area here” or something. But that’s the only thing like a clash. I had no fights. I was a good boxer at Merrick Boys Club [of Christ Child House, 611 C Street NE]. So, one summer I had three bouts and I won them all because, if I may say so, I was very fast. I would hit the other kid about 50 times and he would hit me once. {Laughs.} So I wasn’t hitting him very hard but I just won by sheer...

KERR: {Laughs.} Volume.

KELLY: Quantity. Yeah. So I was considered a big boxer.

KERR: Now what did you say, what boys club?

KELLY: Merrick. It was founded by an unmarried woman named Ms. Merrick whose daddy was I believe a prominent lawyer. She started Christ Child House which was taking care of unwed mothers, I think. Somebody just bought it and re-fixed it. It’s at Eighth and East Capitol [800]. The big Victorian, handsome. Well, that was once Christ Child House. Then Christ Child House became Merrick Boys Club and they built a new building over on Mass[achusetts] Avenue which is still there with a gymnasium and pool tables and that sort of stuff. Now the whole idea of boys clubs—Friendship House called itself a settlement house, but of course there weren’t anybody to settle. First of all they were all white. Second of all there were practically no immigrants. The immigrants that were here, the Italians, were all stoneworkers and masons. They had come from Cambria to build Union Station. And the Irish owned bars or plumbing operations or the richer Irish were contractors or so forth. So there wasn’t any immigrants to take care of. {Laughs} So Friendship House really didn’t have much reason for being and in time it sort of became a young adults. They had plays and that sort of stuff. My wife was on the board for years.

KERR: It was like a youth club then I gather.

KELLY: Yeah, They have been in search of themselves for years and they may have found themselves. I haven't been in touch with them lately. This was a very middle class neighborhood so the idea of a settlement house appealed to some people who wanted to do good but there was no real need for a settlement house.

KERR: No, but a boys club obviously did fill a hole.

KELLY: We did play teams is what you did. You boxed and played baseball and football. Now you didn't play football. The football we organized ourselves but the Friendship House and Merrick had baseball teams.

KERR: They did? Was there a girls club too?

KELLY: If there was they were—no, I don't even think—it was called Boys Club. Later it had a girls branch. Much later. I'm talking about the [19]50s. I don't think the settlement houses in New York had a lot of girls. I think girls were considered less likely to get in trouble.

KERR: There could have been a girls club on the Hill. Someone I talked to talked about going to a girls club when she was a girl. Did you know Virginia Myers?

KELLY: Not offhand, no.

KERR: She probably lived two blocks from here.

KELLY: Well, I'll be 80 in August. So, a good many old people are still pretty young. In other words if I was 15 years older than somebody it would almost be a different world. But I don't remember any girl—my sister didn't belong to any girls [club] but of course she went to St. Cecilia's and they all were palling around together.

KERR: Now, she would go to a private school says something...

KELLY: A local school...

KERR: Yeah, but this was tuition.

KELLY: It would be but like... Gonzaga tuition was \$135 a year.

KERR: Which would be a lot.

KELLY: Well, it wasn't pennies but it isn't anything like it is now. {Phone rings...tape stops}.

KELLY: Let's talk about the girls. There was Nancy Winter and her sister Sally Winter, who were the grandchildren of Major Walker. In the depression as a lot of Major Walker's children came home. They were very upper middle class by nature and custom but obviously times were tough all over. And Max Winter, who had been some kind of out in the open engineer, maybe geological, out in Wyoming. They all came home and Nancy and Sally were more or less my age. And Phillip and Maxine were older. Major owned that big house across the street, the one with the dome. So they lived there and Jean Munro lived next to me at 402. Her father was a printer in the printing office. Rosemary Brown lived at 401 on the corner. They were from Indiana. Katherine Turner lived at 415 there and... there wasn't a lot of kids in those days. Amos had two sisters, Mildred and Ethel. Ethel was still in high school. She was like in the fourth year of high school when Amos and I were 12 or 13 years old. She seemed very glamorous to us. She wrote songs which were not bad and wrote lyrics. I think she borrowed tunes and wrote lyrics. They had a general familiarity to them; they didn't sound...

KERR: And where would you hear these songs performed?

KELLY: Oh, she would sing them. She was not a shy girl at all. She married a fellow who eventually in the Navy became an Admiral. Now, this is interesting, 'cause Amos' family were strictly farmers from Purcellville and so forth but girls had been more upwardly mobile than boys, and of course the whole country was. Sally and Nancy both married Annapolis boys. That was almost arranged. The Annapolis boys probably couldn't date until they were—so they would go down to the proms or whatever they were called and sure enough they both married graduates, ensigns. Nancy's marriage, she had a lot of kids, didn't work out very well. She got a divorce. He was a Captain. I don't know how familiar you are with Navy...

KERR: Of course, yeah.

KELLY: That's pretty good. Sally's husband stopped at Lieutenant Commander, which as a Annapolis graduate and who stopped at Lieutenant Commander is not a big success. There was also their cousin, Nancy Lee Shantz [daughter of Warren] who lived over [at 119 Fifth NE]—she was the granddaughter of Major Walker's oldest daughter, Mrs. [Lucretia W.] Hardy, who lived over on the Bay... He built her a house. She was the first to get married. Mr. [H.L.] Shantz [her uncle?] was something fairly high up in the government [assistant chief, Forest Service]. Some kind of upper level bureaucrat. There were obviously very clear class distinctions here, but also like a village; everybody was around but it was very clearly well liked. It would not have occurred to Jean Munro or my sister or Rosemary Brown to go down to the dances in Annapolis. They probably would have been willing but nobody suggested it. Girls... there was very little organized... I guess there were girl scouts or something but nobody particularly belonged to either the Boy Scouts or the Girl Scouts. What they did was... teenagers would go skating, roller skating,

on a summer night. Little traffic like on Fifth Street and they'd skate right down the street. Ten or twenty of them all together and that was a form of social recreation for the boys and girls both.

KERR: Boys and girls both skated?

KELLY: Yes, this was a big deal. You would almost be dancing while you're skating all together. And we used to go to the beach. North Beach on the Bay. Chesapeake Beach. North Beach became Chesapeake Beach and they merged into each other. There was a steamer from Baltimore...

{Phone rings; tape stops}

KERR: So, girls. We're talking teenage years. You went to a boys school.

KELLY: Yeah and my sister went to a girls school...

KERR: Oh, you were telling... you went to North Beach and Chesapeake Beach. How did you get there?

KELLY: On the train. On Wednesdays it cost ten cents. An excursion train. We would spend one year at least we went to Colonial Beach, probably a couple of years, which was on the Potomac. You went down by train and you stayed at a hotel. At a very old, primitive hotel for a week or two. This was before the Depression in the [19]20s. People went less to the beach, less on vacations, still go to the beach during the Depression. Although the Depression really didn't hit Washington at all. As the Depression got worse the government got bigger. My father had a restaurant. The customers, a lot of them, worked for the government and so forth. It was a very stable time. You said the neighborhood was stable, the city in that sense was very stable. Girls got married of course. You were supposed to get married pretty soon. My sister, I would think she got married when she was like 22 or something. Well she was born in 1919 and Merrill went into the Navy probably in [19]42. She got married before he went into the Navy. That was probably pretty much the norm, 22. Relatively few girls got married at 16 and very few at 30. That's what girls did.

KERR: Were there girls in the neighborhood who went on to college?

KELLY: My sister went to Dumbarton [Upton Street NW, east of Connecticut Ave.]

KERR: Was that up in Georgetown?

KELLY: No. One reason my sister went to Dumbarton might be... we had a lot of aunts who were nuns. My aunt Sister Theresa ran the leper colony in Louisiana for about 30 years. She was director of the hospital there. And Sister Helen, her sister, ran an orphanage in St. Louis. And Sister Julianna, who was the underachiever, was sort of a house mother in a boys school in Baltimore.

KERR: Now whose sisters are these? Your father's sisters or your mother's?

KELLY: These are my father's sisters. The previous generation, Sister..., her name slipped me, she started a hospital in Long Island and became sort of a famous nun. Sister Theresa got a medal from Eisenhower. She and another nun, Sister Hilary [Ross], they had done the research on curbing leprosy, not curing it... sulfa drugs. They had done the first research on that. They were both pharmacists among other things. And I think Hilary probably did most of the—Theresa was head of the hospital and the chief pharmacist, and Hilary was the other pharmacist but I suspect Hilary did most of the actual work.

KERR: What order were they?

KELLY: They were Daughters of Charity. They used to wear the flared hats... habits. In other words is was perfectly natural for the girls among my family, cousins, all went to Catholic girl colleges. I assume they probably got scholarships... at least they weren't overly taxed. My wife went to Visitation, for example, but she was a New Orleans Creole, that's a whole different business. In those days, it's sort of interesting, and this seems to be true of black people, girls were much more likely to go to college than boys. For one thing girls were supposed to get married and that was one way to bide your time until you got married. Boys were supposed to earn a living. They were supposed to learn a craft of some kind or something.

KERR: Well, I gather that you had the idea, oh well, no, what did you do? You went to Gonzaga.

KELLY: I went to Gonzaga. If you graduated from Gonzaga, which I did with some difficulty, you got an automatic half scholarship to Georgetown. But I won, unfortunately, I won a scholarship to Strayer College of Accountancy [721 13th Street NW]. One of the most miserable... because I was never meant to be an accountant. I had taken this exam, this competitive exam... and I had come in second in the city wide private and parochial...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

KELLY: The highest score, he didn't want it so they gave it to me. They really need some... corrupt people in the world. Strayer gave me this scholarship... which was wrong, I had come in second and got in. But I had to work in the office the summer before I went to school, so I didn't mind particularly. And of course then, I could never get any of my books to balance. I was the one {laughter from both} I could add very, very quickly but the results were poor—so after about six months they found it difficult to believe that I had actually won the thing so gave me the same exam again, or a similar exam, and I got the same score so that baffled them. Because how could I be smart if I couldn't make books balance? And,

there's an answer to that question but it didn't occur to them. So I stayed in Strayer for a year and at that point the War fortunately came along. On the day after Pearl Harbor a kid from... and I skipped school from Strayer and we went up to the Capitol, and I think you mentioned that story Ken Ringle wrote... I think it's in there, we were—we got in before they put the cordon of soldiers around, so we watched all that, also watched the Supreme Justices come over for the joint session. So that was an adventure. And then we went out to Massachusetts Avenue and watched the Japanese burning their papers in the Embassy outside. And at that point I had fed up with Strayer and Strayer was fed up with me. So I got a job in a general accounting office punching a card machine, which was no rhyme or reason to it. All the money orders in the country were copied—the amount and number on cards—and filed someplace. And I punched the card, me and several other people. And I got so I could punch 3,000 cards a day, which is a lot of cards. I was there, oh, about a year when I got to be 19 years old and I joined the Navy. So then the Navy was very good to me. I loved the Navy. The Navy was such a contrast with Strayer. {Laughs.} I was a natural sailor! So, if I may boast, I went up—I was a first class Quartermaster within a year. I think Ken had the story... it's a big distinction, right arm or left arm rates, and the Quartermasters and the Gunners Mates and the Bosuns Mates... they're the upper class of the enlisted men. {Laughs.}

KERR: Sure, right.

KELLY: And so then after a while the Navy then sent myself and some other guys from the fleet to college to become Ensigns. So I went there and became an Ensign for four hours [?]. My roommate, Hibbs stayed in the Navy and retired as a Captain. I was talking with him the other day. But I—the Navy and I was—I was no more meant to be a part of a formal Navy—see, I was on small craft which was very informal—than I was to be a Certified Public Accountant.

KERR: Right.

KELLY: I sensed that so I got out of there. And I had worked as a copy boy on the *Post* when I was 16 years old. So I figured this is the best way in the world to make a living.

KERR: How would you have done that? How would you have gotten a job as a copy boy when you were 16?

KELLY: Well at that point nobody particularly wanted it! {Laughs.}

KERR: Really!

KELLY: Yes, it wasn't glamorous. I mean, it was considered a good job, but it wasn't like Woodward and Bernstein. I had gotten a job when I was 16 and the economy was picking up all over and I got a job

as a laborer, I guess you would call me, at Sears and Roebucks. And I went to work and the first day on the job some kid football player from someplace, he and I are unloading a freight car and the...

KERR: A freight car?

KELLY: A freight car, yeah. The elevator stops between floors, so we've overloaded it. So I'm passing out the merchandise like, cold steel chisels, to the kid on the other side of the hatch—one of them comes down and hits me there and I start bleeding and I... "matter of fact we're all done," the guy said, you know, patch me up and get back to work. So I was covered with bandages and I come home {laughing} there I am, my mother sees me and says I can't go back anymore. Which is okay with me, I wasn't that crazy about the job. Then a couple of weeks later there was an ad—somebody told me there was an ad—copy boys wanted at the *Post* and I went down and got a copy boy job in the sports department for \$14 and a street car pass a week. They had a streetcar pass because you had to go out and pick up advertising copy, and ride the streetcars. So part of your salary was a streetcar pass. Of course, you could use it for your own purposes.

KERR: Well, that's very nice. Now, where did the streetcar go?

KELLY: Well, any place you wanted to go.

KERR: I mean, did you catch it right out here?

KELLY: When I was working I would be downtown. I remember one—I was picking up ad copy more than I was running sports copy. And Whalen's [Way's, 1325 E Street NW?] Corset Shop was one of the places where I picked up copy. And that was pretty—for an un-sophisticated young man, I was in there with all these ladies trying on corsets. {Laughter from both} I was the only male, you know, they weren't expecting any male visitors. And you could also go up to any theater and say to the lady in the box office "copy for the *Post*" and walk in.

KERR: Aha!

KELLY: There wasn't any copy for the *Post*, but she didn't notice, she didn't care I guess. So you could go in and see the movies. You could also go in the Gayety Burlesque house [513 Ninth NW] the same...

KERR: It worked? It worked, "Copy for the *Post*"?

KELLY: "Copy for the *Post*" you said and walked in.

KERR: Now where were the movies here on the Hill? Where did you go?

KELLY: Well, there was a lot of movies on the Hill. There was the Apollo on H Street [624-632 H Street NE], there was the Avenue Grand on Pennsylvania Avenue [645], there was the Penn [650 Pennsylvania Ave. SE], which is still there—the Art Deco building.

KERR: Uh huh.

KELLY: And, on a summer day, Amos was a very original guy and we would—I'd like to think I'd say "he would"—he would steal his Uncle Rufus's car and we would drive to the theater. {Laughs.}

KERR: You'd drive to the movie?

KELLY: Yeah. {Laughs.} And we'd park the car and go into the theater and walk home and we'd get to his house and Uncle Rufus would be saying "Someone stole my damn car again." {Both laughing} And of course this time the cops knew just where to look for it. {Laughs.} So he never realized that it was his nephew who was stealing the car.

KERR: You only drove it one way because you thought he'd see you coming home with it?

KELLY: Well, it was mostly for the adventure of driving and {chuckles} one day...

KERR: And how old were you and Amos at this point?

KELLY: Oh, probably 16 or something. Fifteen, sixteen. And Amos—since these will be not widely publicized—Amos... Well, I will say a girl who shall be nameless, but who lived in the neighborhood and {Laughs} he offered to drive her or something and they ran out of gas right here on the corner and she lived a half-block away. And he said "I'll buy the gas". She said "Don't pull that on me" she said. "I know your tricks!" {Both laughing} She's a dumb girl. She had read someplace that fellows who took girls out ...

KERR: A block from her house. That's a very funny story. Oh my. So...

KELLY: It was rather fun to be young in those days. And it was much more...

KERR: Innocent?

KELLY: Innocent. And Mike Clark was a strange neighborhood character. And he claimed he had a girl in Georgetown or something. So for a short period we'll all go over to Georgetown and we'd have one streetcar pass. The first person, whoever had it, would go in and come back and pass it out through the window to the next person. Like if there were five people going, only three of them would be able to go: the other two would have to chase after the streetcar to the next stop! {Both laughing} And so forth. So that's how we went to Georgetown.

KERR: {Laughing} Oh. Where did the streetcar run? Down the street?

KELLY: It ran everywhere.

KERR: I mean did it...

KELLY: “Thirteenth and D”. It went on the other side of park and went to 13th and D Street NE. The “Lincoln Park” went to Lincoln Park. There were streetcars... Connecticut Avenue, I used to go down to my father’s restaurant, near Connecticut Avenue on the streetcar. And, oh there were streetcars everywhere. There was no place you couldn’t... There was a streetcar line on Eighth Street and...

KERR: So you could walk up to Eighth Street and go—when you say the park, you mean Stanton Park?

KELLY: Well, you could catch a car either at East Capitol or at 13th... at D Street, Fourth and D.

KERR: Oh, Fourth and D.

KELLY: Yeah. The car was called “13th and D”. That was what it said on it—it was going to 13th and D. And the “Lincoln Park” one actually went to the Car Barn, right there, which is now apartments [1400 East Capitol].

KERR: Oh yeah, the thing that’s called the Car Barn. Right.

KELLY: Yeah. No, you could go anyplace on a streetcar. It wasn’t much fun. In the winter the streetcars would be jammed on F Street downtown. For half a mile one streetcar would be so crowded with Christmas shoppers and they would be all overheated. So it wasn’t all that great. People get nostalgic about streetcars—they weren’t that much fun. On the other hand, they had as you know the open-air streetcar that went to Glen Echo [Maryland, north along the Potomac], which you picked up on the other side of the Park. And it went out through Georgetown and then it got out in the country and went about 40 miles an hour, and it was all open so there was this wind blowing in your face. That was all nice.

KERR: Had to be really nice.

KELLY: It was a lot of fun.

KERR: Did you go there often?

KELLY: Oh yeah. Every chance you got, more or less... and it was very pleasant. And the fellow would walk along the thing and collect tickets as he walked. But you were sitting on benches. You know there was—wide open. The conductor probably had some kind of a windshield but other than that it was just an open car.

KERR: And what would you do when you got to Glen Echo?

KELLY: Oh, they had all the stuff. Cotton candy and hot dogs. And I remember they had this Spanish Ballroom where they had what would be called “big band” things and they had the crystal swimming pool, which was about the only public pool around at that point. And, you know, they had merry-go-rounds and roller coasters and all that stuff. Which was standard all over the country I guess, pretty much.

KERR: And did you ever sleep out in the parks during the hot summer nights?

KELLY: No we didn't. We were too bourgeois for that.

KERR: Too lace curtain?

KELLY: Too lace curtain. But a lot of very respectable people did because there was no air conditioning. So you would carry a blanket over there and it was social. You know, it was very pleasant. There would be a hundred people sleeping around, on the grass, on their blankets and talking to each other until they went to sleep. And of course it got very hot if you didn't, because you had fans maybe, but no air conditioning. So it got pretty hot. But again, that's why we had front porches. People sat on their front porches until 10 or 11 at night talking to each other. So it was very easily community-oriented that way. Yeah, people would walk by and say “hi there” and so forth.

KERR: Yes. You said there wasn't organized socializing, per se, but obviously you knew a great deal about all of your neighbors?

KELLY: Oh yes, people went shopping. Like everybody went shopping at Eastern Market and I remember being there when I was probably just barely three years old with my mother. We bought a chicken for Sunday dinner and the farmer wrung its neck... a live chicken and then you took it home and plucked all the feathers out. Cooked it. {Laughs} But there was no big stores, so a housewife would go shopping every day. So that was a social kind of thing.

KERR: And the deli was a deli I gather?

KELLY: Well, there were very few delis, but there was a deli on the corner, Nick's Deli, on the corner of Fourth and C Street there, right on this side of the park [401 C NE – George Filiakas]. And there was Clagget's butcher shop on C Street [517 Stanton Place NE]. {Someone comes in and says hi and a dog barks} There was a lot of small merchants, you know. And again, obviously this had a social aspect to it. Of course people were going around shopping and they ran into each other. It was very formal but friendly. Everybody was very polite to everybody else, you know. But the whole idea of having dinner parties didn't occur to 90 percent of the people.

KERR: No.

KELLY: And, nobody thought of putting flowers in the tree box. {Laughs} You know flowers cost money. They're not crazy. That's not your tree box.

KERR: The milkman came I gather...

KELLY: The milkman came every day and left a... my cousin Johnny Keegan came over from Ireland and he was a milkman. And he was a very successful milkman. He was a good-looking fellow, full of fun. And milkmen got a commission. Not for the straight milk, but if you sold the housewife...

KERR: The cream, the...

KELLY: The rest of it, you got a commission. So he did very well selling housewives cream. There was also Holmes [and Sons] Bakery, delivered bread to your door: "From Holmes to Homes." Fred Libby who lived across the street [419 B], his parents were dead and he was raised by his aunt and uncle [Fred A. and Annie E. Willis] who were "Salvationists"—Salvation Army people. And I guess they obviously didn't have a lot of money, so Fred went to work probably when he was 16. And he was working much more than I. I got this copy, but just in the summer. Fred was working year round as a Postal Telegraph boy, but he had a job with the Holmes guy and the bakery. He'd jump off the car and run over and see what the housewife wanted in the way of bread.

KERR: Did they indicate that they wanted the bread man to stop by something hung in the window? Or...

KELLY: As I'm sure you know, the ice man you had a card in the window that said how many pounds. It said 50, 100. So you put the one up that said the pounds of ice you wanted. And the milk bottles, you picked up the milk bottles from the day before and it would either be the usual or if there was a note that they wanted cottage cheese too or something. And we never subscribed to the bakery, so I don't know how they worked, but it was a similar thing.

KERR: Did you have a milk chute in the house or did they put the milk on the porch?

KELLY: Put it on the porch, and in the winter it would freeze and the cap would be two inches in the air.

KERR: {Laughs}

KELLY: Frozen solid. We bought eggs from Miss Rosalie who lived in this house [420 B NE]. Miss Rosalie Walker [born 1877]. And they had this place out to Washington Grove and they raised chickens.

So, Miss Rosalie would sell eggs every week and they were 40 cents a dozen, which was pretty expensive in those days. But they were very fresh eggs, you got them right from the country.

KERR: Did she sell butter too, or just the eggs?

KELLY: Just the eggs. They wouldn't have had a cow. It was just... first they had a tent for the Chautauquas, and then they built cottages that sort of look like tents. And they were not insulated. They're still there—people are now paying fairly handsome prices for them.

KERR: Truly?

KELLY: And trying to insulate them, I guess. Yeah, it's very picturesque. It has no... They're all paths. There's very little traffic, no traffic in most of the place.

KERR: Out on Shady Grove?

KELLY: Near Shady Grove, yeah.

KERR: My goodness, I didn't know that. I've seen Forest Glen, which is very interesting.

KELLY: I'd seen something in the *Washington Times* some years ago about it. About Major Walker and all that. But Nancy, his granddaughter still lived there, she died about three years ago. But she lived out there in the old family cottage. And so did her brother, I think. He had built a house out there, so they remained there a long time.

KERR: Now were the Winters girls the last of the Walker family to live here or did they...

KELLY: Yeah. Well, Nancy Lee Shantz was about the same age, and at one point Max Smith, who was a grandson, he and his mother and father came to live... This was the Depression and I guess a lot of people were glad to find... The [Henry J.] Walters lived up in this house [420 B NE], there was another daughter [Florentine] had married a fellow named Walter. Mrs. Walter used to pay me a dollar a week to pull weeds out of the lawn. Plantains, just plantains, was my specialty.

KERR: {Laughs}

KELLY: Also, I would occasionally stack firewood for the fireplace. And every once in a while Miss Walter would want me to wash her car for her. A dollar a week didn't seem like a big impression in those days, but it was bigger... it would be probably about the equivalent of say 15 or 16 dollars now.

KERR: I was going to say, it sounds like a pretty generous... you were pretty young.

KELLY: It wasn't bad. I also used to sell newspapers at Lincoln Park for a penny a paper. I sold 20 papers every morning.

KERR: What paper?

KELLY: The *Herald* and the *Times*, I guess it was—at any rate, morning papers would have been the *Herald* and the *Post*. And for some reason I always sold 20 papers, not necessarily to the—mostly to the same people. You'd never sell 21. I got a penny a paper, so I had 20 cents at the end of the morning. And you could go over and get all the root beer you could drink for, I guess it was a nickel. So I would do that every morning. Drink as much root beer as I could.

KERR: {Laughs}

KELLY: No, I was not particularly poor. I was certainly not... the rich kid in the neighborhood was Jimmy Lake whose daddy [James J.] managed the burlesque house, the Gayety. And Jimmy had more money than us—he was very generous with it—but, he was the rich kid [715 D NE]. The second rich kid would be Billy Murphy whose daddy was a lawyer [William C., 313 Massachusetts Ave. NE?]. But, nobody had a lot of money. You were ingenious—I mean, you didn't need a lot of money to entertain yourself. We drank Kool-Aid, which you got a package for a nickel.

KERR: Oh, I remember that.

KELLY: You could make at least a half-gallon out of it.

KERR: If you helped yourself to enough of your mother's sugar. {Laughs}

KELLY: Well you could. We operated out of Amos' house—whatever sugar, we got it from Amos' mother. Amos was a funny guy. He was anti-social—who can blame him. And like we were sitting at his house one night and some guy calls and it's the wrong number and the guy says something... Amos says, "Hello" and the guy says "You know, there's nothing going here. Can I close this place? There's no business and I'm sitting around here." Amos said, "Sure, sure close it. That's no problem." {Laughs} The guy was excited. The next day, well "he told me I could close it..." {Laughing}

KERR: That's very funny.

KELLY: Oh, Amos was a pretty funny guy. One day Billy Murphy and I and Amos were sitting in this thing, and Amos calls up the White House and he bawls them out for something or another and we're sitting there and suddenly the phone goes dead. {Both laughing} And Billy says, "I think I'll be getting home now." He says, "It's getting pretty late." {Both laughing} I hung around for a while and the White House never came and got us.

KERR: That's quite funny. Imagine such an accessible world!

KELLY: It was, you know. The world was very accessible then. I remember driving by the White House when that street that's been closed many years, West Executive Avenue or something, was a thoroughfare. I remember driving by there and looking in the window and seeing FDR [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt] talking to somebody.

KERR: Isn't that wonderful! And now you can't even drive on Pennsylvania, nor can you walk down that long path through...

KELLY: Well, years later when I was a newspaperman, I used to walk every morning... Harry Truman would be in town, staying at the Mayflower after he was president, and I would go over at seven o'clock and we'd walk for a couple of miles around Connecticut Avenue. Nobody—no Secret Service guy, or anything else. People would walk by and sort of do a double take, and so forth. But it was that informal, and this was in the 50s. Almost half a century ago. {Laughs} But times have changed.

KERR: Still, doesn't sound that long to me, so...

KELLY: No, it isn't. It doesn't sound long to me at all. But the world has changed and the city has changed more than anything. It's interesting, change. The Major Walker and Mr. Soo both had big funerals. Mr. Soo's was a more interesting funeral because they had a big bus with Mr. Soo's picture on the side and some Chinese lettering so all of the mourners came to the house and got on the bus and so forth. Major Walker had a big funeral too, but it was less exotic.

KERR: I would think. Now was Mrs. Soo Chinese also? You said she'd been a... no, she was a missionary.

KELLY: No, no. She was from Baltimore, Baltimore born. They were American, just another...

KERR: ... Protestant missionary who had met and married. That would be unusual you would think in those days.

KELLY: Well, she was a very original person. She did what she damn well... When she was an old lady, I was down—I guess I was covering the Chinese New Year down in Chinatown, and she was down there and she saw me and she took me into her... She said, "You've got to see this" so we went into a Chinese opera. And of course if you haven't been to a Chinese opera, it's not readily assembled by those...

KERR: Yeah.

KELLY: She had a big... She said, "This is no opera at all. You see the ones in New York and they're really something." And that sort of stuff. So she was a Chinese opera critic among other things.

KERR: Whoa.

KELLY: She was a nice old woman. She respected nobody, automatically, I mean. She figured everybody and she made her own judgments. For one thing, I imagine being married to a Chinese, people hadn't thrown their arms open to her.

KERR: No.

KELLY: So she got on her own. I think they had two children, one boy and a girl. Then the girl had children, and one of the boys was a football star out at Eastern [High School], oh, probably back in the 30s. So, the world changes, but it stays pretty much the same I think. We've covered a lot of ground...

KERR: We've done very well, yes. I think we'll stop.

END OF INTERVIEW