



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Goldie Mamakos

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Interviewer: Sharon House
Transcriber: Abigail Poses

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

HOUSE: We're here today doing an oral history interview as part of the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol History Project and we're at the home of Ms. Goldie Mamakos and she lives at 505 Third Street SE in Washington, DC. Today is June 22, 2006. I'm the interviewer. My name is Sharon House. Ms. Mamakos, thank you for doing the interview. Tell me your full name.

MAMAKOS: Goldie Louis Mamakos.

HOUSE: And the Louis comes from?

MAMAKOS: A Greek custom. All children are named after their father as a middle name.

HOUSE: So everyone in your family has that same middle name?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: That's interesting. Can I ask you when you were born?

MAMAKOS: April 27, 1930.

HOUSE: And where were you born?

MAMAKOS: I was born at 667 South Carolina Avenue SE; and it was a week after Greek Easter, which was St. Thomas.

HOUSE: And how did you happen to be born there? Were you literally born there?

MAMAKOS: I was born on a doorstep. My father was hailing a cab to go to the hospital.

HOUSE: And?

MAMAKOS: And I came out at 667 [starts laughing] South Carolina Avenue SE.

HOUSE: Now, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

MAMAKOS: I have two brothers and two sisters.

HOUSE: And where are you? Are you the middle?

MAMAKOS: I'm the middle, third, and the third youngest.

HOUSE: Okay. Well before we go into your personal memories, I'd like you to tell me, if you could, a little bit more about how your parents happened to come to this neighborhood. They weren't born here?

MAMAKOS: My father came [from Greece] in 1908. His cousin Louis Mamakos brought him over. And he lived with them at 667 South Carolina Avenue SE.

HOUSE: And the cousin who brought him over, had he been here a long time, do you know?

MAMAKOS: That I don't know. He had a candy store, I know. But I don't know when, or—

HOUSE: He had a candy store when he brought your father over?

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes. They all worked at the candy store on the Avenue.

HOUSE: Where was that candy store?

MAMAKOS: Fourth and Penn SE. The Tune-In is now there. It was a candy shop.

HOUSE: Oh, that's interesting. Do you remember the name of that candy shop?

MAMAKOS: Louis Mamakos.

HOUSE: Oh, the candy shop had that same name?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: How long was that candy shop there, do you know?

MAMAKOS: I don't know.

HOUSE: Did the Tune-In replace it? Was that what replaced it right after that?

MAMAKOS: I think my cousin, Louis Mamakos, must have converted it into a bar, Tune-In, or—

HOUSE: Were you in the candy shop? Do you remember going in?

MAMAKOS: No.

HOUSE: No? So it was closed—

MAMAKOS: No. That was closed before 1930.

HOUSE: I see, okay. So your father came from Greece and did you say when he came?

MAMAKOS: He came, 1908: he was 20 years old and his cousin brought him over, Louis Mamakos.

HOUSE: And do you remember what your father did? Or do you know what your father did when he first came?

MAMAKOS: He used to work at the trains. He would light the oil lamps in the trains.

HOUSE: At the station? The—

MAMAKOS: At Union Station.

HOUSE: At Union Station because Union Station was built then. And how about your mother?

MAMAKOS: My mother came in 1920. She was 12 years old. Her father brought her over. My grandfather, her father, George Vouyiouklis. But my mother lived with the aunts of 667 South Carolina Avenue. That's where she learned to cook.

HOUSE: I see, so, it was your aunts she lived with?

MAMAKOS: First cousins to my mother, so, we always called "aunt", even if they're not aunts. You don't just say, Helen, or whatever.

HOUSE: And do you know why her father brought her here, or why she came to this country?

MAMAKOS: I think for better. Like I say, she was 12, and he left my grandmother, his wife and son and daughter over in Greece. And when he made money, he would bring over someone and it would be the daughter, Tasia. T-A-S-I-A.

HOUSE: This is your mother's first name?

MAMAKOS: No, that's my mother's sister, Tasia. My mother's name was Eleni, Helen. E-L-E-N-I. Or Helen.

HOUSE: I see. And what did her father do? Do you remember what occupation he had?

MAMAKOS: I don't know if he helped them or if he wove baskets. My mother never spoke too much about her father. I just assumed they all lived at the same house. I think there were nine bedrooms in that house.

HOUSE: I know you mentioned this, Louie Kavakos—

MAMAKOS: Okay, that's my grandmother's, my mother's mother's brother.

HOUSE: Okay.

MAMAKOS: Her name was Efrosene Kavakos and then married my grandfather, Vouyiouklis.

HOUSE: Okay. So we're going to talk about the Kavakos family later, but I sort of want to get to how that's connected in. So, was there a Greek community on the Hill? Did you remember?

MAMAKOS: No. I think most of them had moved to Northwest. I think we were the only ones; when I went to Greek school, there was just one family left, at 13th and Penn, I think. Everybody had moved.

HOUSE: I see.

MAMAKOS: Of course, growing up, this area, wasn't that—that great. So everyone moved, I guess, out of, or bought houses, I don't know. But we stayed in Southeast.

HOUSE: But did you mention a photographer that was called Athenia photography or—

MAMAKOS: Yes, that was at Fourth and Penn someplace. It was called "Athens", or ... I think it was called Athens. I can't even think where it was. I know it was a couple doors from the Tune-In at the time. And everyone went there to take pictures.

HOUSE: Now, presumably, that was Greek-owned, no?

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes.

HOUSE: Yes. But we don't know, that wasn't part of the family. We don't know that, no?

MAMAKOS: No, no, no, no, no.

HOUSE: Okay. Did you do certain things to maintain the Greek customs, or you just did them? I mean, did you have Greek food in your home? Or were there other things, that—?

MAMAKOS: Everything was Greek. And, my mother always spoke Greek to us, and we would answer in English and she became upset because she said, "How are you going to spread your tongue with the Greek language if you answer in English?" and I said, "Well, how will *you* spread *her* tongue because my mother never went to school. She could spell phonetically. And if she didn't know what a word was, she would answer, even before she died. She *always* read the newspaper and if she didn't know a word, she would ask what it was.

HOUSE: So she came here when she was 12, but she didn't go to school?

MAMAKOS: She went one day, and some kids made fun of her, and my grandfather took her out.

HOUSE: Wow.

MAMAKOS: And she never went to English school again. American school.

HOUSE: And then she grew up, knowing your father?

MAMAKOS: The day before she married him.

HOUSE: That was when she met him? So, it was arranged by someone.

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes. It was arranged. He was 20 years older than my mother. Didn't know anything. Her mother was still in Greece. And sister and brother. The sister came over, I think in '30, or '31.

HOUSE: So, you had Greek language, you had Greek food. I assume people didn't dress particularly in Greek costumes. Maybe for special occasions or something?

MAMAKOS: Just for Halloween. Or Greek school, if they have a holiday we may say poems in Greek; ... if you have one of the costumes, you wear it.

HOUSE: Where was Greek school?

MAMAKOS: Eighth and L NW. It was at the basement of our church, St. Sophia, before they moved.

HOUSE: I see. So you went there, what, once a week or something?

MAMAKOS: Three times a week. From four to six.

HOUSE: So after your regular school? Do you still speak a little Greek?

MAMAKOS: I understand it. I try to speak it. I'm the only one though.

HOUSE: Did your siblings also go to Greek school?

MAMAKOS: My older brother didn't, and my younger brother, George, he played hooky with this other Greek guy. I don't know where they went but they never were in Greek school.

HOUSE: How many years did you go?

MAMAKOS: Six years.

HOUSE: Oh, okay. Now, how about on holidays, were there special Greek celebrations at all?

MAMAKOS: In the old days, our holidays were your name days. Like Thomas, or Mary or what[ever] are all Saint names. And you would have people over. You didn't invite them. They know what the name is, and they come, and have a little shot of ouzo. And some Greek pastry. And that was considered—. But today, if you don't invite people, they won't come.

HOUSE: So, on your name day, and then, of course, Easter, Greek Easter, which is a different day, usually, than most people around here celebrate Easter, right?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: Did you celebrate that at the Church, or—?

MAMAKOS: We always celebrated Easter, the Greek Easter. And a lot of times in those days, we used to get inexpensive candy, because it was two or three days later—and we used to get half-priced [laughs] candy.

HOUSE: Oh, that's great.

MAMAKOS: Yes! And we used to roll our eggs at the Capitol grounds, they had a little hill.

HOUSE: Oh! And you would do that on Greek Easter?

MAMAKOS: Of course.

HOUSE: Oh, that's interesting! A lot of people must have asked you questions about that.

MAMAKOS: Well, I think then they did, but now they know.

HOUSE: Now they know, yes.

MAMAKOS: But now it's not the same as when we were small. If you don't invite someone, my mother says, "If I have to invite you, then you won't come. My house is always open to whoever."

HOUSE: Did your family have any other traditions on Christmas, or—?

MAMAKOS: Just the name days, because my brother, Anthony is a Saint Day, and George. And Efrosene, something in February, I don't know what. My name, we celebrated at Christmas because my name in Greek is Christola, is Christ. So my name is Christola in Greek. So, we would celebrate it.

HOUSE: How about, non-particularly Greek customs? I know you told me on holidays— What about Halloween? What did you, as children do on Halloween?

MAMAKOS: Halloween, of course, I had a Martha Washington, costume. And [we] had the, spinned white stuff that itched. I forgot what it's called. My mother put a sheet around her [ed: presumably Goldie Mamakos'/Martha Washington's] head first. A piece where she then put the wig on. And we'd walk up and down the Avenue where the Avenue Grand used to be.

HOUSE: So like in a parade?

MAMAKOS: Yes. Just walked back and forth. No trick-or-treat in those days. You'd just walked back and forth.

HOUSE: Did you do this during the day? Or at night?

MAMAKOS: At night.

HOUSE: Nighttime!

MAMAKOS: Our parents would either go to the drugstore or stay, sit at the Avenue Grand on those—they had columns where you could sit, or whatever.

HOUSE: And the Avenue Grand was a theater?

MAMAKOS: Yes. That was—I don't even know what's there now ... I think they left a wall The Avenue Grand was knocked down; there was a wall that had Coca-Cola written on it. I think they preserved that.

HOUSE: Is that that 300 block of Pennsylvania?

MAMAKOS: It's the 600 block.

HOUSE: 600 block of Pennsylvania.

MAMAKOS: Yes, and they made a glass [ed: glass wall to make the old wall behind visible], and they made a little shopping thing there.

HOUSE: Oh, that's right.

MAMAKOS: And then the Penn Theater, which is the medical building now, opened in 1942.

HOUSE: And that's across the street there.

MAMAKOS: Yes, the Penn.

HOUSE: So, there were two theaters on Pennsylvania Avenue?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: One across—

MAMAKOS: And then there was one on Eighth Street SE, by the Marine Barracks, the Avenue Grand.

HOUSE: I thought the Avenue Grand was the one—

MAMAKOS: Excuse me, the Academy it was called.

HOUSE: The Academy. Okay. So you did Halloween, and you also mentioned something about Christmas. The neighborhood children would get Christmas stockings filled with a gift?

MAMAKOS: Yes! Yes! When I was a young girl, and we didn't have anything, but come Christmas time we would line up at the, precinct. And they had Christmas socks. And there was an orange, an apple, a couple nuts, and a candy cane! That was considered a Christmas sock. Not like today.

HOUSE: And did everybody, all the children in the neighborhood, would come?

MAMAKOS: Yes, they knew to come. So—

HOUSE: Well, that's interesting.

MAMAKOS: Yes, and my brother used to play ping pong downstairs of the Precinct Five. I think it's called Station One or Station Two.

HOUSE: Do you mean the one by Marion Park, there, on E Street?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: I think they call it 1B1 or 1D1, now.

MAMAKOS: It's used to be Precinct Five.

HOUSE: It used to be Precinct Five?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: Okay.

MAMAKOS: And never had any problems. We had a little screen door; a little thin screens and all.

HOUSE: This is in your home.

MAMAKOS: Yes, where we lived at 650, which was right off the Avenue. Never gave it a thought that someone would come and rob us.

HOUSE: Let's talk a bit about some of the places you lived. I know you lived in several homes. Now the place you were born—?

MAMAKOS: Is 667 South Carolina Avenue.

HOUSE: Do you remember when, or do you know when, you left that home?

MAMAKOS: No, but I know we went to five [corrects herself] 650, I must have been a couple years old, and we stayed there until I was about five or six and then we moved.

HOUSE: At 650—?

MAMAKOS: D Street.

HOUSE: D Street SE?

MAMAKOS: Yes. [We] lived in Apartment One, and then we moved to a house at 427 Seventh Street SE. And on the corner was a little grocery store my mother used to go, and she would get her groceries. And they would write it down and keep a tab for my mother until my father would get paid; and you can't do that today. But anyway—

HOUSE: What was the name of that grocery, do you remember?

MAMAKOS: I don't remember. They used to have good candy, penny, the little cups with the little spoons, you'd spoon it out. And the little beaded candy on the strip.

HOUSE: Oh?

MAMAKOS: All a penny.

HOUSE: All right. And then where did you live after that?

MAMAKOS: Okay. We went back to 650, Apartment Four.

HOUSE: Okay.

MAMAKOS: And we lived there until I was 28.

HOUSE: Now, why did they make those moves; do you know why the family made those moves?

MAMAKOS: The house they were speaking about was very inexpensive, but we had to do everything. And we were good at wallpapering and paint. That's what we used to do in our apartment. So, they said that they would rent it to us, but anything happening, we would have to take care of it. And that was at 511. And we lived there until, I think it was 17 years, we lived there. And then this house came open.

HOUSE: 511?

MAMAKOS: Two doors down.

HOUSE: 511 Third Street SE.

MAMAKOS: Yes. And then at 505 Third.

HOUSE: Now, how long did you live at the other place?

MAMAKOS: I think it was 17 years.

HOUSE: Now, did your whole family move there?

MAMAKOS: My aunt came with us and, I think we all did. I think my brother Anthony was the first to get married. Or he might have got married at 650. I don't remember.

HOUSE: But you rented that home too?

MAMAKOS: Yes. And then the lady wanted to live at 511 so we had to move out.

HOUSE: The woman who owned it?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: Yes.

MAMAKOS: Russians owned it. And then this house was closed up. Mrs. Hoffman was sick and needed money. And they thought it'd be nice to have someone live in it and also pay rent so she had money. That's how we came here.

HOUSE: So you were renting this home?

MAMAKOS: And then, let's see, I think that's shortly after we lived here, we, they said the lady needed money so we went to the bank and whatever and borrowed money. And we bought this house.

HOUSE: So you bought this house? So the first house you lived in, that was a *large* house, wasn't it?

MAMAKOS: It's the same size as this one.

HOUSE: But you were renting that one as well?

MAMAKOS: For 17 years.

HOUSE: 17 years.

MAMAKOS: Two big bedrooms, a little teeny (almost a closet) and, just like it is here.

HOUSE: Now you said 17 years. You mean, the house at 511.

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: Now, I was thinking about the house where you born.

MAMAKOS: Oh, no, no, no. We, I think within the year or two, we moved to 650.

HOUSE: Yes, but that was a large house there, wasn't it?

MAMAKOS: Oh, it had nine bedrooms in it.

HOUSE: Now, but you rented that whole house? Your parents did—?

MAMAKOS: No, no, no, no. My father's cousin, owned it.

HOUSE: I see.

MAMAKOS: And he would bring people over, and, to live there.

HOUSE: I see. So they'd live there temporarily ...

MAMAKOS: Oh yes.

HOUSE: So they could get their feet on the ground, so to speak.

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes, yes.

HOUSE: I understand now.

MAMAKOS: And then my uncle, Louie Mamakos, married a Kavakos. And she's the one who taught my uncle to cook Greek. Because my grandmother wasn't here. She was in Greece.

HOUSE: So that initial house had a lot of people coming from Greece that lived there.

MAMAKOS: Oh yes, yes, yes ... I think I must've been two years ... or three ... I don't know, but anyway. We did move to 650, first apartment and then we moved to 427, I don't remember 427 at all so it must've been very, very short.

HOUSE: Okay.

MAMAKOS: Then we moved back the same one, 650, but apartment four. And there was a Greek lady that rented apartment one, which was nice because we used to go down there, and The husband used to teach us to dance Greek.



Wedding photo on the steps of 667 South Carolina SE, probably 1931.

First row from left: Goldie Mamakos' mother, Helen Mamakos; groom, George Chaconas; bride and sister to Goldie's mother, Tasia (Anastasia) Vouyiouklis; and George Vouyiouklis.

Second row: Man in white shirt and dark vest, is Goldie Mamkos' father Louis Mamakos holding Goldie when she about 1 year old; young woman in low cut dress is Mary Mamakos; woman in lighter colored draped collar is Mary DeVakos; and woman in dark v-necked dress at far right has the last name Kavakos.

Third row: Woman in v-necked dress and necklace looking to her right and woman looking to her left, are sisters with the last name Kavakos; next two are unidentified; and child at far right being held is Kathleen Revis (daughter of Lola Mamakos Revis in 5th row and later of Sherrill's Bakery).

Fourth row: Man in white shirt with sleeves rolled up is Harry Riganis who owned Richfield Dairy located at South Capitol and M Streets SE; others in that row unidentified.

Fifth row: Man in striped tie is Spiro Colevas who lived on Eighth Street SE; next to him is his daughter, Cleo Colevas; next to her in print dress with necklace is Lola Mamakos Revis, whose husband in 1941 bought Sherrill's Bakery at 233 Pennsylvania Avenue SE. He, Lola and then their daughters ran it for about 60 years.

Sixth, top, row: Second man from left in light colored jacket and moustache and his wife next to him are Mr. and Mrs. Doukas. The man at far right of the top row is Louis Mamakos who owned the Louis Mamakos Candy store at 331 Pennsylvania Avenue SE (where the Tune Inn is now); he is the father of Lola Mamakos Rivas. Boy at far right is Goldie's brother Anthony Mamakos.

HOUSE: Oh?

MAMAKOS: Before, when we lived in apartment four, he lived in apartment one.

HOUSE: Okay, so there were a few other Greek people on the Hill, at least temporarily.

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: What else, what do you remember about the neighborhood when you were growing up? One of the things you mentioned to me—like where did you play?

MAMAKOS: We used to play in the yard at 650 for years. Plus, in the summer we'd walk over here to Garfield Park and they had a little wading pool, we used to put our feet in. Course it was very deep then, course we were very short.

HOUSE: Yes? [both laugh]

MAMAKOS: And it seemed deep.

HOUSE: Came up to your knees, it seemed deep?

MAMAKOS: But I'm surprised they didn't keep it. I don't know if they filled it in. I'm not sure if, where they have the tennis court now. I think the wading pool is a little further in.

HOUSE: Than from the tennis court; a little farther west, maybe.

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: Now you also mentioned that you belonged to Friendship House. What did you do there?

MAMAKOS: I took art and ballet, and anything that they had, I was over there.

HOUSE: Now what age were you then, about?

MAMAKOS: Okay, I think that's where we used to play, now that you said, basketball in the back, and this and the other. I must have been about seven. Seven or eight.

HOUSE: And did you, was this something for children through teen years? Or just young children?

MAMAKOS: Just young children. Just young children would enter the house. Children that really couldn't afford to pay to have piano lessons, or whatever, and Friendship was a very meaningful place when growing up.

HOUSE: Can you tell us anything else about Friendship House?

MAMAKOS: The only thing I know as I got older the ballet teacher asked if I wanted to help her, and so I told her, I said—(I must've been in my teens, then). But anyway so, I helped her and she says, "You know they'll pay you," and I thought, "Oh, that's okay, a donation." "No, no, no, no, they'll pay you." So I got a dollar an hour for three hours and she'd tell me to do arabesque or whatever, and I would because she got very old at the end. Ms. Griffin. But, every Saturday I used to go there and help teach the little kids. But it was still very inexpensive, nice environment to be able to be part of, really.

HOUSE: When you said inexpensive, what did they charge? Or what did you—?

MAMAKOS: Well they don't.

HOUSE: They didn't.

MAMAKOS: No, just, like I say, five cents a month. I remember when I first started going there, five cents.

HOUSE: Five cents a month?

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: So everybody paid the same thing?

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes, if you could pay. I'll never forget, when I was helping teach interpretive dancing, there was this little girl and she was looking in the window. And so the teacher told her to come on in. And all of a sudden, she disappeared. And she came in and she saw the other people had little clean dresses on and all, so she went and washed her face and washed her hands, you could see from the wrist up how dirty it was ... I don't know where she came from but, she was afraid but she always used to watch from the window.

HOUSE: I see. Now where was Friendship House then? It's not the same place it is now, right?

MAMAKOS: Yes. I never went to the one, Virginia Avenue. I went to 619 D Street, I think it is.

HOUSE: Okay, that's the one you went to. Okay, where it is now. And, did you mention something, where, the mothers or the adults or your aunts did some activities at Friendship House?

MAMAKOS: Yes, during the war, they used to roll bandages for the Service. And ladies would meet at the, I think it was called the Tea Room. It was a lovely room. And every Tuesday, they'd go and help fold

the bandages. My mother and my Aunt Loukia. My father's second first cousin, but I called her my aunt. She brought me into the world.

HOUSE: Oh?

MAMAKOS: She was coming home from work when my mother decided to have me on her doorstep.

HOUSE: Now the Tea Room, it must be they actually had teas maybe, or lunch or something.

MAMAKOS: Yes, it was very nice.

HOUSE: Did they have meals there?

MAMAKOS: I think it was rented out at the time, or maybe it was for nothing. They had a beautiful dining room. Because I think some of the ladies lived there.

HOUSE: In the Friendship House, there were boys and girls both.

MAMAKOS: Yes.

HOUSE: At that time was it still whites only, or was it—?

MAMAKOS: Whites.

HOUSE: It was still whites only. Now where did you go to school?

MAMAKOS: I went to Wallach first, elementary school, which isn't there now.

HOUSE: And that's where the Hine School is now?

MAMAKOS: Hine School, yes. And then I went to Hine Junior High, and for high school I went to Eastern.

HOUSE: I see. So, you went from Wallach to Hine. They must've torn that down and rebuilt the Hine pretty quickly, like over the summer or something?

MAMAKOS: I don't know. I don't remember. I mean, it was a lot for quite a few years.

HOUSE: I see.

MAMAKOS: They knocked the school down.

HOUSE: But you must've gone somewhere, in between. Because you went to school every year, right?

MAMAKOS: Yes, but Wallach, was, in its time, I went six years to Wallach.

HOUSE: But I thought Hine was in the same place.

MAMAKOS: No, Hine's further back.

HOUSE: Oh, I see. So it's the general area, but it was, it was—

MAMAKOS: Yes, I think they built it outward, where Wallach is, was.



Wallach School Fourth Grade class probably 1939 or 1940.

Teacher, Ms. Hawley is standing in center back. Goldie is on the far right of the fourth (top) row. Classmates include Paul Lee in first row, third from left with hand shading eyes; Billy Dowling, fifth from left in first row; and Marcelene Ritchie at the far right of the second row.



Goldie Mamakos is fourth from left in back row. Billy Dowling is seated third from right in first row; Paul Lee is seated just to his right (in shorts and dark tie); and Marcelene Ritchie is the second to his right.

HOUSE: I get it.

MAMAKOS: And then, too, I think, I have nothing against black people or anything. But, when my younger sister went to Eastern, they had a lot [of] problems. That's when they had the protest about black people going to Eastern, or going to school with the others.

HOUSE: That was when they did the desegregation. I guess that was an issue.

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes, yes.

HOUSE: You mentioned your mother's maiden name was Kavakos.

MAMAKOS: No, my grandmother was a Kavakos.

HOUSE: Your *grandmother* was a Kavakos.

MAMAKOS: Yes, and she married a Vouyiouklis, which was my mother's maiden name, before she married a Mamakos.

HOUSE: Okay. Now, I know that Kavakos was well known at the Hill during the '30s, '40s, maybe longer because of—

MAMAKOS: It was a candy place first.

HOUSE: It was a candy place, and then—

MAMAKOS: They decided to open the back. Course it was just the bar up front, years ago. When they opened the back, they made a nightclub out of it.

HOUSE: And where was that?

MAMAKOS: You had to go up the Hill. Up the old Kavakos. Right there, it's part of the building.

HOUSE: But, what's the address?

MAMAKOS: Oh, Eighth and H NW, that's all—

HOUSE: Northwest or Northeast?

MAMAKOS: Northeast.

HOUSE: Northeast, yes. So, this nightclub, and it became quite well known, right? It had a lot of famous people there. Could you tell us some of the people who were there?

MAMAKOS: Nellie Letcher, Patti Page, what's the trombone player? I can't think of the names now. Any popular name was there.

HOUSE: You said Nat King Cole was there.

MAMAKOS: Nat King Cole, that's when they had the problem and they couldn't keep him for three days. Because we had a lot of trouble with the blacks that wanted to go in.

HOUSE: But it wasn't open to blacks at that time.

MAMAKOS: No, no, no. He was excellent.

HOUSE: He was excellent? Now, you know this because you worked there at the time, right?

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes. And you know what's funny though, if you ever saw Nat King Cole, he had the most shiny face you ever saw—black black. And they put a pin light on him when he sang, and I mean, he was excellent, but, like I said, my cousin and I couldn't keep him three days because, at that time, black people were not allowed to come in.

HOUSE: There were a lot of whites who were interested in seeing him, I guess.

MAMAKOS: Oh yes, oh yes.

HOUSE: So it wasn't that, it wasn't that there weren't *people* to see him.

MAMAKOS: Oh no no no no. They had a lot of problems. And then Nellie Letcher and Patti Page.

HOUSE: And Nellie Letcher, I don't know that name. What—?

MAMAKOS: Oh, very heavy black lady, Nellie Letcher, what songs did she used to sing? I don't, I can't even remember. But, the Dorsey Brothers, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and—

HOUSE: So it was a large club.

MAMAKOS: Very large and in the days where the second hand smoking. And I used to tell people, you couldn't even see for the smoking in the nightclub.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

HOUSE: So you were saying it was so smoky—

MAMAKOS: That they had to put the exhaust off because you couldn't see in there.

HOUSE: But they did have an exhaust fan.

MAMAKOS: Oh yes. They turned it on when you couldn't see in front of your face.

HOUSE: And what was your job?

MAMAKOS: I used to check coats. And my aunt was sitting right there making sure that, the tips, I didn't take. And, this one Sunday they had what's called The Big Band with, what's that guy's name, he did a lot, Felix Grant, I think was his name.

HOUSE: Felix Grant had that show on radio, didn't he?

MAMAKOS: Yes, but he, on Sundays he had The Big Band at Kavakos.

HOUSE: Oh really?

MAMAKOS: Oh yes, and why I'm telling, I'm telling you this for a reason. Oh, and we used to always get the big bookies in there. And they would never come in there with their wife, they always had their girlfriend and I was told to greet, if he comes in during the week, "Don't say you saw so-and-so," but this one man was very nice, he was a bookie, and he had a ten dollar bill he wanted to give me and he says, "Do you keep this?" And I looked over at my aunt and looked back at him and he says, "Fine," and he put it back in his pocket. Because I couldn't, I couldn't take any of the tips.

HOUSE: Why not?

MAMAKOS: They gave me a sandwich, I ate, and then they had someone take me home at night. Because it was two o'clock in the morning.

HOUSE: Why weren't you allowed to take any tips?

MAMAKOS: Because it was my aunt's, her daughter had it before she married. But being she had married, the tips belonged all to her mother.

HOUSE: So you just did it to help out the family? You didn't really get anything?

MAMAKOS: He gave me five dollars a night.

HOUSE: Oh, okay.

MAMAKOS: And a sandwich. And he had someone take me home.

HOUSE: And great memories.

MAMAKOS: Lots. I hope I can find that book.

HOUSE: Because, just for letting people know this, you have a book with a lot of photographs in it that we hope to find.

MAMAKOS: Yes, yes.



20th anniversary celebration at Club Kavakos, 727 H Street NE.

Early 1950s (the club opened after Prohibition ended). Left to right: Frankie Donato (Baltimore comedian, making horns with his fingers over the head of the next man), owners Bill Kavakos, George Kavakos, Eleni Kavakos (cutting the cake), John Kavakos. Bill, George, and John were brothers; Eleni was their mother, the widow of founding owner Louie Kavakos.

HOUSE: So, you worked there. How old were you when you worked there?

MAMAKOS: I must have been seventeen ... sixteen, because I was still in high school. And at lunchtime, everybody knew I was going to go work and I used to lay down on the lounge in the ladies room but I think I was either sixteen or seventeen, but I looked older.

HOUSE: Those are late hours for somebody still going to school.

MAMAKOS: Yes, and my cousin would tell me in Greek, "If you see anybody that looks suspicious, go hide yourself in the cloak room."

HOUSE: [laughs] Were there ever any problems?

MAMAKOS: No.

HOUSE: You mentioned the bookies.

MAMAKOS: Oh, the bookies used to come on Sundays, especially with their girlfriends.

HOUSE: I see, but there wasn't gambling there or ...

MAMAKOS: Oh, no no no no no. But they were big bookies of Washington area.

HOUSE: And was there dancing at this club?

MAMAKOS: Oh yes. They had a big dance floor there.

HOUSE: Yes.

MAMAKOS: And then they had the floor show. It's interesting, regular what would I say, whiskey, was 50 cents. But if you got good scotch, a good whiskey, it's 90 cents. You can't get [for] three dollars or four now.

HOUSE: Oh, so you remember the prices?

MAMAKOS: Oh yes. I remember everything. I had good memories of that place.

HOUSE: You do. And you weren't a waitress or anything.

MAMAKOS: No, no.

HOUSE: Did you have to wear a special outfit to check coats?

MAMAKOS: No, no, no.

HOUSE: Not like in the movies, those skimpy little outfits, or anything.

MAMAKOS: No, but my cousin was funny. He always talked to me in Greek, for different things. He says, "If anybody asks for their coat, on Sunday especially, let me know." And it was hard, because there were three rows. And the first row and then the second row, the coats would be on top of the first row. Then the third, it was hard to get the coats out, without pulling two or three out together.

HOUSE: Yes.

MAMAKOS: And usually on Sunday, they'd want their coats because they'd want to go out and have a weed, or whatever they'd call it, cigar, or dope or whatever. They'd smoke.

HOUSE: Marijuana? They were smoking then?

MAMAKOS: Oh yes.

HOUSE: Oh, interesting.

MAMAKOS: Yes. So my cousin told me he would like to know who it is because they don't want that kind of people to come in. I mean, but anyway, a lot of good memories.

HOUSE: How long was that club there? Do you know?

MAMAKOS: I think it had to close in '52 or '53. I mean, the government closed it.

HOUSE: Because?

MAMAKOS: My cousin gambled a lot. A lot.

HOUSE: So he lost the money, or something? So we don't know when it opened, maybe after prohibition or something?

MAMAKOS: You know I should have asked. And there's no one left to ask, either. I really don't know. But I know, it was just a front. And it was a bar, and tables. You could get a sandwich and a beer, or whatever. But then they made it a nightclub in the back, and my cousin, his brother, if there were trouble and they're in back of the counter, where they are, there's a big icebox with beers and there's someone he would take his hand and get it on the bar and swing himself out and grab the person fighting. He was a big son of a gun [laughs]. That's the younger brother. But the younger ... only worked the bar up front. He never worked the nightclub, George.

HOUSE: They had these big names coming in. It must've been pretty large too, right?

MAMAKOS: Oh yes. But you know what was good, my cousin ... he was, sort of, clever. He would try to get a big band, say, in February, because this Greek club I belonged to that used to always have at the Statler Hotel, big bands with gowns and everything—and one of the things that would promote sales was a big name. So my cousin would hire them, and also have them, it was cheaper for the club, to get them being that they were working at my cousin's. But they were there for the bands. And the next day, they would leave. But a lot of memories.

HOUSE: Yes. Now did you have other jobs on the Hill. Did you work other places?

MAMAKOS: My only job that I had while I was in school, I worked at Murphy's at 13th and F.

HOUSE: Northwest?

MAMAKOS: Northwest. And I worked there mostly at the delicatessen. But if they were busy at Easter, they'd put me on the candy counter. And I was getting 40 cents an hour. Back then it was a lot of money. And when I got the money back from my taxes, my sister and I would go to Atlantic City with the money that I made from Murphy's at 40 cents an hour [laughs].

HOUSE: Good for you.

MAMAKOS: And I used to work every day after school because Greek school was all through with. So I used to catch a streetcar and go to 13th and F. And into Murphy's was huge. Murphy's was big. It went through to G Street. And then after Murphy's, I went to work at Riggs Bank. And I finished school, I think I had just finished school, I was still working at Murphy's. I don't know, but then I worked at Riggs, and I worked there at 43, I would've almost finished 48 years, I went out on disability. [ed: She worked at Riggs 43 years and was supposed to work 48 years for regular retirement.]

HOUSE: Oh.

MAMAKOS: They weren't very nice either.

HOUSE: Weren't they? And you worked several of the branches, not particularly—

MAMAKOS: No, I always worked at the main office.

HOUSE: Always the main branch.

MAMAKOS: In Trust Department.

HOUSE: Oh, okay.

MAMAKOS: And the only time I changed was when I went into the key punch thing, and that was up at 17th and I, at Lincoln, for a couple years, but main office—I've always worked there.

HOUSE: Okay, okay. Any other organizations or things you belonged to as an adult after you got out of school?

MAMAKOS: I think the only thing I belonged to is the Daughters of Penelope, which is a Greek organization. First, you, if you're young, you're in the Maids of Athens. And when you're 18 or 19, you have to go into the older group, Daughters. And I've been there, at least 50 years. I'm still there.

HOUSE: Yes?

MAMAKOS: So, all the little black hair, all dyed hair, I think my sister Virginia and I are the only ones that have the gray hair [both laugh]. So I worked at Murphy's [ed: she meant Riggs] all my life.

HOUSE: Do you have any other memories of the Hill, like after you got out of school? I know—for one thing, I know this house is always decorated for holidays.

MAMAKOS: That's mine.

HOUSE: Is that a tradition, is that something you've done, or your family's always done?

MAMAKOS: Well, I used to do it, until I can't do it anymore. My sister and her husband does it. And like my mother used to say, "No one knows we live with this house until you all come over." And they come over Saturday and my sister used to yell so much. But Easter, Halloween and Christmas. And if you go downstairs, I have a huge basement and it's all Halloween, Christmas or Easter things.

HOUSE: What do you put up on Easter, for example?

MAMAKOS: Easter, I have the wind socks, I've got big Easter bunnies, chocolate Easter bunnies that I have to put a chain. That's a shame I have to chain everything because I had things stolen. And the Easter eggs—

HOUSE: And lots of lights.

MAMAKOS: Easter eggs that light up, they're ... I've got eight of them. You put them in the ground, they light up; they're very pretty.

HOUSE: And what else?

MAMAKOS: Whatever.

HOUSE: That's Easter, then Halloween, you do—?

MAMAKOS: Oh Halloween is, you name it and it's out there.

HOUSE: Okay, and Christmas?

MAMAKOS: Christmas, the same. A lot of lights and things, which I can't do anymore.

HOUSE: Now do you decorate also for Flag Day and the Fourth of July?

MAMAKOS: I usually put a flag and I can't find the flag. I have a huge flag. And that's another thing about the flag. My cousin, whose mother was a Kavakos, was married, and her husband had passed away. He was in the Service. And of course, they put the flag on the coffin and then the wife gets it. And then, she got the flag and then after she passed away they said, "We can't go to Sloan's or anything to try to sell this." They said, "Does anybody want it?" I said, "I'll take it." And it's 48 stars on it and you can see where they actually sewn the stripes. It's not one of these painted deals. Everything, the stars are sewn on. And so when I got it, it was a little soiled. So I went to Woodward and Lothrop and they said, come Flag Day, any flag, we'll clean for nothing. And I took the flag in and when they saw how big it was they— [both laugh]. And I have it, I can't find it. My mother crocheted little hooks and I hook it up to the thing, it's like a screen that goes all the way down [the front porch], but I can't get up there anymore. I can't find the flag. And I don't know if you noticed the Greek flag; on March 25, I put the Greek flag out.

HOUSE: Oh, I haven't noticed that but I will in the future. I noticed you have a lot of things with the flags on in *this* room.

MAMAKOS: I love it. I love anything to do with the flag and my father fortunately wasn't alive when they had the protest—they were burning the flag. My father would've gone out and killed them. You know, you have to be born another place, and to come to this country, to understand what a flag is.

HOUSE: I see, so he was very patriotic.

MAMAKOS: Oh, my, yes.

HOUSE: So you got that from him a lot.

MAMAKOS: And a lot of people know because the little Mickey Mouse over there, he's holding the flag and I got Uncle Sam behind you, he's holding the flag. And of course, these two I love.

HOUSE: Those are?

MAMAKOS: Those are the Byers Choice [ed: name of figurines]. I got fifty of them.

HOUSE: I see. Okay.

MAMAKOS: I got a whole slew of them.

HOUSE: Okay.

MAMAKOS: Christmas, I used to take everything off of the, where the lamp is, and put them all down there and take a picture and do postcards with it.

HOUSE: You have a lot of interesting things here. Now, you were talking about some of the family who were fairly well known. Now the Louie Kavakos, who had that nightclub. And you mentioned another family member who was a boxer.

MAMAKOS: Yes. And he's still living.

HOUSE: What's his name?

MAMAKOS: Steve Mamakos.

HOUSE: And he was known as—

MAMAKOS: The Golden Gloves.

HOUSE: Or, the Golden Greek?

MAMAKOS: The Golden Greek, but he won the Golden Gloves in '38 or '39 before the war, or after the war, I don't know.

HOUSE: I see.

MAMAKOS: But my father, anything that was in the paper about him, he made, had a big scrapbook of him. And when I needed it, I asked his sister, [I gave it to her] because I didn't want it, and she said she threw it up in the attic someplace. She didn't know where it was. But he's still living. And they had [planned] a presentation at the RFK, but the football went on strike then, and they never had it. They had some kind of presentation in the Armory, but if you go out to RFK, you'll see his name up going around. And you see boxing gloves.

HOUSE: Oh, I see. Okay, so you knew him?

MAMAKOS: Oh yes, I go and see him. He doesn't know.

HOUSE: Oh, now ... he doesn't—

MAMAKOS: Yes, I go there and say, "Hi Steve, I'm your favorite cousin." He used to [say], "I gotta do what I gotta do. I gotta do what I gotta do."

HOUSE: So that was a difficult ...

MAMAKOS: Sad. His wife couldn't take care of him. So they had him in this house—

HOUSE: And you thought that was because of the boxing.

MAMAKOS: I think so. They used to call him the Punch Drunk because instead of having [him] boxing favorite, famous people, anyone that wanted to box, his Manager would have him [box them] and ... he did it. He has funny looking ears, fat—doesn't know who you are. Sad.

HOUSE: Yes, are there other memories? You want to look at your list there and see if there's anything else that—? [Pause while Mamakos reads list to herself. Phone rings in the background]. Okay, any other?

MAMAKOS: Did I tell you about the Eastern Market?

HOUSE: Oh no, tell us about what you know about the Eastern Market. What you remember about the Eastern Market?

MAMAKOS: The Eastern Market on Saturdays especially, all the chicken people and all bring their chickens outside and everything was all, the whole length, the whole sidewalk was all groceries and cabbages and different things. But, then, people started moving and the two brothers that kept it going, one brother had the seafood place and the other brother had the meats. And that's where my mother used to always get her meats, from there. And in those days, they would clean your chicken or cut your meat, free. It's not like that anymore.

HOUSE: Do you remember what the names of the brothers were?

MAMAKOS: I can't, they're still there too. Nope. Let's see. Wallach High, Eastern.

HOUSE: Well about Wallach do you remember anything about the inside of that school? I've seen pictures of the outside ... it was two stories at least, right?

MAMAKOS: Only one thing I remember about it was Ms. Hawley; she was the third or fourth grade [teacher]. Everybody comes off like this [laughs] and she used to have a box of Kleenex and she'd say, "Joe! Goldie!" [laughs] She always had—

HOUSE: Some people who would wipe their nose with their hand or arm.

MAMAKOS: Yes. And she always had a box of Kleenex, Ms Hawley. Little, this white haired lady ... Oh, and in the old days, if you went out to hang clothes, which people don't do anymore (they have dryers), you could hear the band at the Eighth Street, the Marine Band, which now it's hard to get a ticket. It's free, but, have you ever gone?

HOUSE: Oh yes, oh yes. I can hear them from my home.

MAMAKOS: Oh, we used to hear it all the time. It was so, but, who came to our house and they had never been? And I thought you could just go there, you know, and you had to get a ticket. And I remember we used to go there all the time, when we were young.

HOUSE: I think before September 11 you could go there too. You could just go over.

MAMAKOS: Oh really?

HOUSE: If there was room, but, it may be that, if you want to be escorted or something, you need a reservation. I don't know what it's like since September 11.

MAMAKOS: Yes, because I said that the old days, you'd hear the band and of course, Peoples Drug Store.

HOUSE: What about Peoples?

MAMAKOS: Okay, Peoples used to be a store at the very, very corner of Seventh Street.

HOUSE: Yes, that's what we call CVS now. Peoples was there for many, many years.

MAMAKOS: Yes, but they used to have a soda fountain there.

HOUSE: Oh, they did?

MAMAKOS: Yes, and my brother or I would go in and get a Coke and Georgie liked chocolate and they put chocolate and shake it and give it to him. And I liked cherry in mine and shake it and give it to me ... five cents [laughs]. I remember that ... Sherrill's Bakery my aunt had for years.

HOUSE: And what was her name?

MAMAKOS: Lola Revis.

HOUSE: Oh yes.

MAMAKOS: And my uncle was funny. He says, "You know, Goldie, I like this other place but you know, my wife would still be working and killing herself." She was always there, always there.

HOUSE: At Sherrill's Bakery.

MAMAKOS: Yes. And then I used to, behind the counter, and at the register with my cousins, I used to go see her and then if she had to go someplace I'd ring up some doughnuts or whatever. And I got to know people there. And my cousin, the younger one says, "You know, you're very fortunate." I said,

“Why, what do you mean?” “My mother doesn’t trust anyone and my mother trusts you to do the register.” [laughs] I never got paid or anything. I just go up there, it was interesting. See the neighbors that used to come in for coffee in the morning or whatever. And to look at the place, it doesn’t look that clean but you could eat off the floor. My cousin and my aunt would take this little scraper and anything that would stick to the floor, she—I mean really. But it was an old place. She got it in ’41 and my uncle would’ve sold it but ... [he] says, “My stupid wife would still be working,” but he, he worked until he couldn’t work anymore. And then his older daughter was teaching ... But anyway, she started working there too, and the other daughter. And I used to always go and visit. And I’d sit behind the bar stool and if somebody wanted a doughnut or whatever, I’d give it to them. So, I mean, pay of course. That’s it. But Kavakos had a lot of fine memories. And also Sherrill’s Bakery.

HOUSE: Okay.

MAMAKOS: A lot of nice people.

HOUSE: Those were some real Hill institutions. Are there any other businesses on the Hill that you remember particularly? You mentioned several so maybe not.

MAMAKOS: Well, on the end of Pennsylvania Avenue, Sixth and Penn, I think there’s a bar there now. I haven’t been up that way. In the old days, it was sort of, you could buy tobacco and different things in there, for years.

HOUSE: A tobacco shop or something?

MAMAKOS: Yes. But the only thing ... that I remember ... I don’t know when it was knocked down, was the Avenue Grand. And that’s another thing. We used to live at 650, in the back of Avenue Grand, he’d open the doors, this black guy would be cleaning. He’d open the door and we used run up to the very top of Avenue Grand and roll down [the aisle] because it was sort of on the incline.

HOUSE: Right.

MAMAKOS: Just having fun, up and down. This black guy didn’t care.

HOUSE: Well, I thank you very much for sharing your memories with us.

MAMAKOS: Oh, no problem. But there’s been a lot really. I’m very fortunate, really.

HOUSE: Well, we’re fortunate to have you today.

END OF INTERVIEW