



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

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**Interview with Karl Frederic Schwengel**

**Interview Date:** October 13, 2007  
**Interviewer:** Jackie Ludden  
**Transcriber:** Jackie Ludden

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

**LUDDEN:** My name is Jackie Ludden. This is the October 13, 2007, interview of Mr. Karl Frederic Schwengel at his home at 123 11th Street SE, on Capitol Hill in Washington DC for the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill Project. Thank you very much for allowing me to come.

**SCHWENGEL:** Pleasure. Pleasure's mine.

**LUDDEN:** When were you born?

**SCHWENGEL:** 8 November 1930. And in Windsor, Ontario. My parents are both from Ohio, but my father was with General Motors and as my mother used to say "Join General Motors and see the world." So...(chuckles)

**LUDDEN:** and where did you grow up?

**SCHWENGEL:** Well, the first seven years was in Canada, and then from 1937 until 1949 I was in Indiana, Indianapolis, Indiana. And, then I went away to college and I've been... been in the Army and back and forth from one place to the other and back to Indiana as my sort of my base until 1968 when I moved over here.

**LUDDEN:** and when in 1968 did you move to Capitol Hill?

**SCHWENGEL:** Then well '69, July 7, 1969 I moved in here.

**LUDDEN:** To this house?

**SCHWENGEL:** To this house, yeah. And been very happy here since.

**LUDDEN:** And what did you study? Where did you go to college?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, First of all I started at Kenyon, in Ohio, then the girl I was going with was going to Hanover College in southern Indiana. So after the first year I transferred to Hanover down southern Indiana and then there was a big push of the Korean War so I thought I don't want to get drafted and get stuck somewhere so I will enlist.

**LUDDEN:** That was around 1950?

**SCHWENGEL:** Uh, '52. And so, 1952 I enlisted in the Army and in those days if you specified what branch you wanted to go into you could probably get it. So I said that I wanted to go into counter-intelligence corps (CIC). And so lo and behold I was shipped off to Fort Holabird in Baltimore which was the CIC school, and then I volunteered to go to Germany because I thought after, with a name like

Schwengel (chuckles) what can I do, you know? Teacher? Teach German, of course! Well, I volunteered three times to go to Germany, didn't work out. I got sent here to the Pentagon. So, and I wound up as the—probably the only corporal in the United States Army with a private office and wall-to-wall carpeting.

**LUDDEN:** Where you married?

**SCHWENGEL:** No. We, well in fact it was just last week I talked to my fiancé. We had been engaged since I get out of the Army in 1949.

**LUDDEN:** (laughs) long engagement.

**SCHWENGEL:** Long Engagement. (laughs) I got out of the Army in '52, I'm sorry. Yeah, we've been engaged that long, she has not married either so.

**LUDDEN:** All you need now is a wedding planner.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah!

**LUDDEN:** What brought you to Capitol Hill?

**SCHWENGEL:** There was an opportunity doing, Hubert Humphrey was running for office, he... we thought that he was going to be elected, felt that he was. So I got a job here with the Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel. Which was a... a junk dealers lobby. Well it's actually—what it was, it wasn't junk dealers but it was metal sorters and so forth so I wrote a book about that, on metal sorting and, then he wasn't elected and here I was in Washington DC so hey, go back to school—teaching. And, so but I first went to, let's see Kenyon in Ohio, and then transferred to Hanover and then went into the Army and got out and went to Harvard for two years.

**LUDDEN:** For a graduate program?

**SCHWENGEL:** No, I was still undergrad and then finished at Hanover—just extra courses that I wanted to take at Harvard in Philosophy and French and that kind of stuff and, then I taught for two years (Ha!) of all things Biology and, at a prep school in Pennsylvania and then I went back to Indiana University and got my Master's and my PhD there. So.

**LUDDEN:** What is your PhD in?

**SCHWENGEL:** (chuckles) Structural Linguistics.

**LUDDEN:** Wooooow.

**SCHWENGEL:** So, you know I think it...it's strange I can do language problems—three or four page language problems, with paper and pencil (If you want you can put those things [the cats] out, throw them out the door there) and, and so, (he's...go go! You have better luck than I do with them [cats]).

**LUDDEN:** Sorry, continue.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, then I taught school for a while and a girlfriend said that they were looking for a business manager at Alexander Graham Bell Association where she worked as a librarian. So I thought 'Well, I'll make her happy' and I'll put in an application. Well, I spent 10 years there. It was the best job I ever had in my life.

**LUDDEN:** Really? And where is that?

**SCHWENGEL:** That's 35<sup>th</sup> and Volta Place NW. [pause] Do you know where Visitation [Academy] is? We're catty-corner from Visitation. It looks like a Greek Temple. A yellow brick Greek Temple. Which is what Alexander Graham Bell wanted it to, I forget the island, in the Greek Islands over there somewhere.

**LUDDEN:** There are so many. The only one I'm familiar with is Komi.

**SCHWENGEL:** I don't know. That's Boedecia [the cat]. She is named after the Warrior Queen England of the Anglo-Saxons. NO JUMPING!

**LUDDEN:** Your pets definitely have some um, historical names.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh yes.

**LUDDEN:** Leopold and ...

**SCHWENGEL:** Leopold [dog], King of the Belgians. Uh, Lydia for Lydia Pinkham, Arabella [also a dog] from Mozart's "Release from the Seraglio" [ed: "The Abduction from the Seraglio"] um, this one as I say is Boedecia, and uh, then Cadwalader was the male that you put out, he's Explorer King of Wales and the other gray one is (...ok honey. That's enough. THAT'S ENOUGH.) And, then Theodocia is named for a cousin and also for the daughter of Aaron Burr. She, I believe she turned against her father after she found that he was a traitor or an assassin, all kinds of bad things. But he thought he was doing his best for the country. Too bad...he was on the wrong side of the fence. Anyhoo.

**LUDDEN:** What were your duties at Alexander Graham Bell?

**SCHWENGEL:** I was general business manager, handled oh...supplies, insurance, the investment accounts, oh golly...all business matters, purchasing, I don't know how else to explain it just general

business and accounts receivable. I was accounts receivable. Of course being a small organization we wore many different hats and...

**LUDDEN:** And why do you say it was the best job you ever had? Sounds like you've done a lot.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, I have, I've been all over the place.

**LUDDEN:** What made it the best?

**SCHWENGEL:** I think largely, the Executive Director. Dr. Donna Dickman. She's died, unfortunately, but she was the best boss that I had—you could not imagine a better person. I mean, she was absolutely wonderful. Everybody... it's hard to say that, you know, every employee really worships the ground that your boss walks on and everybody did.

**LUDDEN:** She was, she would listen to your feedback and just take care of the employees? What was it...

**SCHWENGEL:** Yes! It was just her attitude. I mean she was a dynamo. And, but it was just her attitude and her interaction with the employees. She was just a wonderful wonderful person. Very very smart. She had gotten her doctorate in um... [points to left ear]

**LUDDEN:** Audiology?

**SCHWENGEL:** Audiology yeah. And, she worked with Dr. Bill Castle from Rochester Institute of Technology. They have quite a school for the deaf up there in Rochester, New York. But she... I'm not sure exactly where she was from, someplace in the south originally, and her husband was an attorney and her son is an attorney. And she didn't look a day over 35 and I know she was pressing 60. Unfortunately she died of cancer, so...

**LUDDEN:** Is her family still in the area?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. Neil, her husband and son, 26<sup>th</sup> and O, NW. That's the vicinity of their home, I can't tell you the exact address but, I'm sure it's in the telephone directory.

**LUDDEN:** What made you choose Capitol Hill over other neighborhoods in DC?

**SCHWENGEL:** I had looked at Georgetown and of course when I came here it was, I was in you know, the Carnaby Street style of clothing and so forth, and Georgetown was *the* place for the up and coming. And I got to studying on the property values, for what I would pay for the kind of house I wanted, and if I sold it I wasn't going to make much. So, I looked here, you know, Capitol Hill was up and coming and of

course it was just a whole lot different now, than it was 38 years ago. (HEY STOP! oh, no that's ok)  
That's a, one of those silly dream catcher things, that...

**LUDDEN:** Yeah. Um, what was it like in the 70s?

**SCHWENGEL:** Ooo, it was bad news neighborhood.

**LUDDEN:** This particular neighborhood here?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, I mean across the street here, Philadelphia Row there were places—were rooming houses and, pillows stuffed in the broken windows and, sitting here and saw a purse snatching right out here in the street and, I had several attempts at burglaries here and of course this is the latest batch of dogs. I did have a couple of other batches of dogs earlier just because I don't...

**LUDDEN:** They are your security system?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. They, are a very good security system and, I guess after they [burglars] tried to break in, in the back, the dogs let them know that they weren't supposed to be here. So (chuckles)...

Oh it was, the streets were dirty. Although, Bruce Sladen that lived on the corner of the alley over there, Milton Sladen's brother, younger brother. Both he and I tried to keep this end of the block, the gutters clean and so forth. So then with my work schedule, I couldn't, and the weather bad, and you can't do much in the rain and snow, and then during the summer I was pretty much gone.

**LUDDEN:** Did you travel for work?

**SCHWENGEL:** I did when I first came here with the Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel. And I finally had to give that up. That was, you know living on an airplane and it was just. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, it was just...an unpleasant existence. Running classes, trying to run classes and, teach truck drivers and heavy equipment operators how to teach their students, was what my job was. I ran into a lot of...it was civil rights work. You know what I mean. Uh, and a lot of the people that were selected for teachers were white and many of the students were not. Hispanic and African American. That was a (chuckles) well it just got to be more than I could handle. I'd get to the office, now the office at that time had moved to New York City and so I was, Sunday night or early Monday morning, I'm on the train or plane to New York to check in to the office, think that well, I'll be able to get something done writing on a manual which we were producing at the time, a basic education manual. And then the boss comes in, or my supervisor, well, he wasn't a supervisor—he was a nitwit! He'd come in and say oh, here are your tickets, you've got to go to San Francisco. So, hey, I haven't unpacked! So I grabbed my luggage and get a cab out to the airport and they've got my reservations set up at some hotel in San Francisco or to Rockford, Illinois, or

Clarksdale, Mississippi, you never knew where. So it was not... it wasn't fun. I mean, working with the people, the teachers, and seeing some of the students, of classes that were started was fine. But living on an airplane and the different, leave a call at the desk to be called at 5:30 or 6 o'clock in the morning and you ask them what city you're in. Uh, wasn't fun. And you have a diet that...you know buying a home and hey I'm here from Saturday afternoon until Sunday night. ...No thanks. That's not the kind of life I want.

**LUDDEN:** In terms of the work, so that was the late 60s that you were doing that?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. Middle to late 60s.

**LUDDEN:** Had you had a lot of, I mean was there any sort of training that you had to go through in order to you know, kind of bridge that gap? ...between the instructors and the students?

**SCHWENGEL:** Well having been a teacher and no, there wasn't really. I wrote the curriculum for the organization. And then I did most of the basic editing of the book that we put out. It was called System for Success published by Follett in Chicago. And, it was basic, just basic education because I had... I had been called on to take over a class of fourth graders when I was teaching high school. It was at a prep school. So I had to, I found out basically what level, because I taught everything from fourth grade through graduate school at one time or another from when I was at Indiana University I taught.

I had one class of Siamese or Thai lawyers—and they're under the Napoleonic code which was [learning] the definition between big and large. How do you explain you know, the difference? Where do you use it? How do you use it? So it became a very basic steps. Boy that was something, teaching those guys. (chuckles) When I, you know how do you get across to somebody that you can say oh that's a large house, that's a big house. You can say by-and-large but you can't say by-and-big. Things like that. How do you explain to them. It's... And of course being in linguistics, which was my love, we used to call it language games but, it was, there is so much—every person has a grammar book in here [points to left temple] it may not match with everybody else's grammar book but it is specific for the wants of that particular person.

And there are many rules that you have that you don't know why you have them. If I could find an example...I haven't talked about this in years, oh, you can take the word sake, S-A-K-E. You can use it in a sentence but if you use it in a sentence you have to use the preposition 'for', somewhere. You can't say sake without having for. For the sake of Kenyon Hall. For goodness sake. But it has to have a for—it's a bound, what we call a bound morph. It's like also what they call a cranberry morph. A morph is a form and but a cranberry morph you can't use the word cran without having berry anywhere in the English

language. You can say straw or strawberry. Berry, blue, blueberry. But you can't say cran without berry. That isn't incomprehensible. As I was saying earlier I can do language problems oh from Latin, from Twi, from Belacoola, an Eskimo language. But I can't figure out this damn computer.

**LUDDEN:** (laughs)

**SCHWENGEL:** That's beyond me. So, that's about where we are. But I was, I was fascinated after I moved in here and oh, Mrs. Kelleher—Miss Kelleher lived in the house on the other side of the alley, on the north side of that alley over there. She was born in that house and when I talked to her she was 97 and she died shortly thereafter, but she was telling me what this neighborhood was like, the only house she was ever in in her life. She was born there, she grew up there, she became a school teacher at old Eastern High School and 97 I don't know, that's pretty good for one house. You know? And she said that the streets before automobiles, now this, oh gosh that would have been a guess pretty close to 30 years ago that she told me this. That the mud streets and 'course they had horses and she said in the summer the heat of the summer, Washington summer, with all the horses, she said it was absolutely impossible. It was just, oh, awful with the horse urine and manure and all of that, and when you set the table because they didn't have screen wire, they had the windows open. But they had somebody in the dining room when you set the table, somebody that stood there and kept the flies off because everything would be covered, just covered with flies. I guess it was a pretty nasty situation because it was...

**LUDDEN:** Did this house have air conditioning since you've been in it?

**SCHWENGEL:** I had the air conditioning put in.

**LUDDEN:** Before you moved in?

**SCHWENGEL:** No, I had air conditioning put in three years ago.

**LUDDEN:** Oh! So you didn't have air conditioning.

**SCHWENGEL:** I didn't when I moved in here.

**LUDDEN:** How awful was it, I mean even then, when there wasn't horse poop?

**SCHWENGEL:** Whooh. It was, it was hot. It was hot. I had a spray bottle uh, one of those 409 or some type of spray bottle that I had water in I had beside the bed and I would just lie on the bed and spray myself and hope that I'd get to sleep before I got too hot. Well, it was, I had a couple of fans, window fans I think it was the only place on the street that wasn't air conditioned but no, Milton across the street wasn't air conditioned.

**LUDDEN:** Which way does the house face?

**SCHWENGEL:** That is east (points to the front window)

**LUDDEN:** So you get the morning sun.

**SCHWENGEL:** So I get the morning sun and uh, I get the morning sun in the front and the evening sun in the back or, all during the day across the top of the house and believe me, it gets *hot* up there. But thank God for air conditioning because I couldn't stand it now.

**LUDDEN:** I mean did you just not have it until...2004?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah.

**LUDDEN:** My gosh, you should get an award for that!

**SCHWENGEL:** That's about what it was. Yeah Milton was. I was trying to find those notes I had mentioned, and I can't find them. They're—'course my office upstairs is just stacks and stacks and stacks of books and papers and books and papers and ...up there the bookcases are I guess are a thousand or more books. I'm sure I'm going to read all of them before I die.

My uncle was a bibliophile and, so after he died my Aunt Catherine said "come take what you want" so, I loaded the car. And there are a bunch of first editions up there.

**LUDDEN:** What was your uncle's name?

**SCHWENGEL:** That was Edward, Edward Seese, S-E-E-S-E. He was, poor man, he was vice president for Metropolitan Life for corporate accounts.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**LUDDEN:** Your uncle Edward's farm?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, yeah. He had a farm. He had an apartment in Lakeshore Drive in Chicago. You know one of those with the private elevator up to each...and one in the front and one in the back, down to the swimming pool and the basement or the cellar or the lower level. Then they had property in California in Carmel, and they had cars at each place. Mostly Cadillacs. But he loved books. He got his, let's see, he got his doctorate in Chemistry and then he studied at the Sorbonne in France right after the First World War because he was an officer, cavalry or artillery, I'm not sure which. He was a [unintelligible] he

would've been cavalry. And, he's quite a guy. And he decided that he wanted a freezer. This was when freezers were first, right after the Second World War when freezers were just, so he had one built. They built it in the barn that was close to the house that was the one barn that they kept the cars and so forth. It wasn't the cattle barn. They wanted to get rid of the freezer and it was too big to get out the doors. So they put something like 40 loaves of bread and they spent one weekend preparing corn on the cob so they had corn on the cob for, for years. It was huge. Well, he overdid everything. Gosh, I don't know where I was going with that. Got off on Uncle Edward.

**LUDDEN:** That's all right. You were talking about your books. But I could ask you some more questions.

**SCHWENGEL:** There's some first editions up there that he had. I can't. I've got them separated I can't tell you what they are now.

**LUDDEN:** Sure.

**SCHWENGEL:** But they are signed and numbered and so forth.

**LUDDEN:** Now you were mentioning that you and um, Bruce were, you kind of tried to keep up with the gutters and keep up with the streets and stuff.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh yeah.

**LUDDEN:** How else were you involved in the neighborhood?

**SCHWENGEL:** Well at first I had joined what they called [dogs barking just outside the room, howling etc.] (ah, children!) Uh, the Frontier Club. That was the neighborhood club and they met I think once a month and that would've been back in 1969, 1970. But then I just couldn't make it after working so long during the day. I just couldn't make it to the meetings and I kind of dropped out.

**LUDDEN:** What year did you start working for Alexander Graham Bell?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh boy. I retired in ... '97. So it would have been 10 years before that.

**LUDDEN:** 1987?

**SCHWENGEL:** 1986. I gave an extra year.

**LUDDEN:** Um, what did you do for entertainment in this area?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, entertainment. I don't, I don't have any objection to going to movies it's just that I can't sit still for very long and I have to get up and walk around.

**LUDDEN:** Well you're doing a fine job right now, I'll say.

**SCHWENGEL:** Well, when I try to move out of this position...going to hurt. [laughs] Well, I used to do some painting, that kind of stuff [points to picture hanging on the wall across the room]

**LUDDEN:** Is that one of yours?

**SCHWENGEL:** No. That isn't. No, the stuff that I did, I wouldn't let anybody see, it was just more or less for my own amazement. My father, he was a marvelous man. He was an engineer, a body engineer for General Motors.

**LUDDEN:** What was his name?

**SCHWENGEL:** Frederic. Frederic C. Schwengel without the K on the end. And uh, well. My grandmother, Ida, was left a widow when my father was just a little sprout so she got a job in a bakery in Cincinnati and I think she got two or three dollars a week plus what wasn't sold during the day at the bakery and she could take it home and sell it. She, to save carfare, she would walk from the bakery back home. She went past this one place that was a large plate glass window with men sitting in chairs in rows looking at a blackboard up there. And she asked one guy if she could go in and sit down and rest for a few minutes and he said oh sure. So, she got to talking and found out it was the Cincinnati Stock Exchange and she wanted to know what all the stuff was up here on the blackboards. Well, it was before they had tickertape, before Edison came up with the tickertape. So she decided, well, could she invest something? She invested and she was shrewd, she discovered that or thought that the depression was going to come along so she bought a lot of uncut diamonds, put them in a little bag and put them in the bank. And then of course she kept playing the board, and upshot—and when she died in 1954, inheritance tax, my father had to pay \$60,000 on her estate so she did...right well.

**LUDDEN:** Yeah.

**SCHWENGEL:** She did very well. Then of course after the depression, she sold the diamonds and...uncut. She made another killing. She was also, insisted that my dad...mortgage the house back in Indiana. Mom and Dad had saved and built that house. It was an Indiana limestone, and in a very good neighborhood. So Grandmother insisted on a mortgage. So, she lived in the back bedroom (chuckles) as she held the mortgage on the house. Then at Christmas time she'd give Dad back the money that he'd paid her on the mortgage (chuckles) it was his money with a little interest. She was a real dynamo,

another one. She had the greatest sense of humor. The person she liked to laugh at most was herself. She would say things like... Oh that gets my goat tired. Meaning that that makes me tired and that gets my goat. (both laugh) That and there were a couple others. Then she'd laugh. She'd laugh hysterically at herself, at silly things that she had said that didn't make any sense... Never watch a boiling pot was another one. You know. A watched pot never boils...

**LUDDEN:** Right.

**SCHWENGEL:** She was quite, quite something. I didn't know my mother's mother very well. She stayed with my mother's sisters. But that was quite something. Growing up right after, during and after the Second World War. It was...

What do I do for entertainment, ok. Uh, course I did some painting as I say. My father, he played trombone, he played violin, he had done, played some piano, and being an automobile engineer he went to University of Cincinnati School of Engineering. He wanted to be a baseball player and he played semi-pro.

**LUDDEN:** Really?

**SCHWENGEL:** And Grandmother said no, you're going to be an engineer, and it was a good thing he did because he threw his arm out and he couldn't straighten his arm all the way out. It was crippled, but uh, ...during the First World War he enlisted. And to find out, well he's a college graduate. Do you want a commission? Well he didn't want a commission. So they enlisted him as a sergeant. He went right into the Army as a sergeant. Oh, an engineer? Send him to Detroit. He designed the ambulance bodies for Model T Fords

**LUDDEN:** Really?

**SCHWENGEL:** ...that were sent, the Army sent to France. So he got, when he got out of the service he had a job with the Babcock in Watertown, New York, that's where he met my mother. She was a schoolteacher, or she was a supervisor, art supervisor she had graduated from Pratt Institute and, so, eventually he went with General Motors in Windsor, Ontario where I was born and then he transferred to Oshawa, Ontario, which was the headquarters of General Motors in Canada. Then from there he transferred to Indianapolis, Indiana with Chevrolet and he retired as Chief Consulting Engineer for Chevrolet division. [to the cat] (are you having fun? You know those are needles that you have on the end of your little fingers.)

**LUDDEN:** Did you have an interest in baseball?

**SCHWENGEL:** No.

**LUDDEN:** So you didn't go to any Senators games while they were here?

**SCHWENGEL:** No. I thought baseball was a big snore, exactly. I was never, well I wasn't entirely unathletic as I did coach junior football at the first prep school where I taught at Perkiomen School in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania. Then I also started a fencing class and we won several matches. My students and I got one, one student got a fencing scholarship to Lehigh University which, ain't no small cheese. I don't know. I haven't heard from him. I do keep up with another student, in fact, he's on my email list upstairs. I've heard from about three students since I left there. I left there in 1959 and to still hear from them, that's pretty good, I think. 'Course after I taught there for two years then I went back to Indiana University and I was on the fencing team there and I won a couple...I couldn't begin to do it now. I mean, you'd have to hold a foil with one hand and a cane with the other. [conversation with and about the cat]

I tried to pick up trombone. I played in the high school band and I played in the college band and, then I liked the violin but I could never do anything with it. (Alright. Now That's Enough! [to the cat]) and, I don't know, just most...

**LUDDEN:** Just working and hanging around the house?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, and reading.

**LUDDEN:** Yeah.

**SCHWENGEL:** I uh, was an avid reader until 1977 I got cerebral meningitis and that kind of killed reading. I'm a terrible reader now. Very very slow. The doctor said though I probably would never get over all of it. So my balance is off...

**LUDDEN:** You don't hear many a—you don't get to talk to many survivors of (chuckles)

**SCHWENGEL:** No, you don't. Adults. Children can usually get over it but not as adults.

**LUDDEN:** Do you have any idea how that happened?

**SCHWENGEL:** I have no idea how I picked it up.

**LUDDEN:** You said it was in the 70s?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, '77.

**LUDDEN:** Airplane travel, maybe or something.

**SCHWENGEL:** Maybe. That could be.

**LUDDEN:** This is all speculation, I'm just...curious.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, I have no idea. I've tried to figure out where I could have picked it up, have no idea.

**LUDDEN:** Were you treated in Washington hospitals?

**SCHWENGEL:** I was treated...yeah, over here that was when, oh, it's a, it's a nursing home now. It was the old Capitol Hill Hospital and before that it was Rogers Memorial and then it was Casualty and then, it was also called the Chinese Butcher Shop. As you can guess why.

**LUDDEN:** That must have made you feel better, when you were going there!

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, right [sarcastically]

**LUDDEN:** How did your close proximity to Congress and all of the business of the Government affect your life here?

**SCHWENGEL:** Um, golly! I can't ...ok, there was a Congressman from Iowa, Fred Schwengel. And the spelling was the same. And it was strange, Fred Schwengel, my father was Fred Schwengel, my mother's name was Dorothy Schwengel and the Congressman's daughter was Dorothy Schwengel. I know that in southern Indiana and in northern Kentucky there are a whole bunch of Schwengels in that area, in Louisville, Kentucky. 'Course being from that part of the country it's [pronounced] Lulavul and it's Louisville to everybody else but that's Lulavul. So I had gotten several phone calls during the middle of the night asking for Fred Schwengel I said "No this is Karl Frederic Schwengel" and they said "Well Congressman..."

**LUDDEN:** [laugh] You said, "I didn't even know I ran!"

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah! Exactly! This would have been back in '69 when I was living over, when I first moved here and I lived over in Tiber Island for just a quick year.

**LUDDEN:** Before you bought this house?

**SCHWENGEL:** Before I bought this house, yeah. There was a knock on the door and this, I think it was a very attractive young woman said "Mr. Nixon wants you to have this"...uh-oh... I think you got the wrong Schwengel! Because he was a Republican, that is the Congressman was a Republican.  
[conversation with and about the cat] No, this isn't, this isn't for me, must be for somebody else. You're

not the Congressman? No I'm not a congressman. I'm just a scribbler for Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel. Well, I don't know where I was going with this...with wondering off...

**LUDDEN:** Close proximity to Capitol Hill.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, uh

**LUDDEN:** I would say that was an effect on your life!

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. I kept getting all of these engraved invitations for different...opening of the Freer Gallery, display on something, National Gallery, and black tie and...

**LUDDEN:** Were you ever tempted to just RSVP and go?

**SCHWENGEL:** I went to a couple of them...

**LUDDEN:** Really?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. And, I met Gwen Cafritz and, oh a bunch of people. That was, I can't remember their names now all of, the Washington 400. And of course I had a tuxedo and my little teensy weensy medals that I got in the service.

**LUDDEN:** But these invitations were for the Congressman, but you would go?

**LUDDEN:** But I didn't know it. I didn't know it at the time. So I thought oh they're being very nice to me.

**LUDDEN:** It was a nice welcome to Capitol Hill

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, I mean lots of Oysters Rockefeller and shrimp and all the rest of that. I signed in, signed the book, but I didn't know it was for this congressman, all of these invitations. I had a stack of invitations that thick [shows about two inches with his fingers]

**LUDDEN:** I wonder if he ever felt slighted that he wasn't being invited to things.

**SCHWENGEL:** I don't know.

**LUDDEN:** because you were having his invitation.

**SCHWENGEL:** I attended this...(laughs)

**LUDDEN:** That's great.

**SCHWENGEL:** I just honestly didn't know these things were for him. They were addressed to here. To the house. So well, ok. I'll go. If it's a free lunch.

**LUDDEN:** That's great. We just have about 10 more minutes and then you're free. I just want to get one thing. How did the installation of the Metro affect your life and your commute? Because your commute was pretty...to Alexander Graham Bell was pretty far.

**SCHWENGEL:** I uh, yes. My car, my little Volkswagen Rabbit was parked out in front of the house one night and...well, going back before that when they were digging the tunnels. And I had first moved in here, it was a nice quiet street. It was...as I say, quiet. Then all of the sudden these big dump trucks started coming up this way and out to East Capitol, I don't know where they were dumping, but it was a constant string of heavy traffic. Right up 11th Street and East Capitol. That. But then my little Volkswagen Rabbit was stolen right out in front of the house because it was a diesel.

**LUDDEN:** Oh...

**SCHWENGEL:** And that was very popular

**LUDDEN:** Was that during the gas rationing?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yes. So then I was taking the Metro to George Washington Hospital and then across the street I'd get the bus that went right past Alexander Graham Bell. So I used the Metro until, because I couldn't claim anything until they had been sure that I wasn't hiding the car somewhere and claiming it stolen. ...Oh, insurance companies are like that. Particularly with this neighborhood. Then, back then. No I wasn't hiding the car...

**LUDDEN:** How long would they wait, to see if it was stolen?

**SCHWENGEL:** All summer. It was all summer long.

**LUDDEN:** Really.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah.

**LUDDEN:** So, and that was when the Metro first opened.

**SCHWENGEL:** When it first opened.

**LUDDEN:** Do you remember how much a fare was, at that time?

**SCHWENGEL:** No. I don't. I don't.

**LUDDEN:** They are about to do a fare hike so I just wanted to get the historical perspective.

**SCHWENGEL:** I know. I can't remember. I can tell you what the bus fare was in Indianapolis but that isn't any help.

**LUDDEN:** (laugh) Another project, another project. But you did you use it?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh yes. I used the Metro all summer and even today if I were to go down, have to go down to the center of city I would drive over to the Eastern Market stop and I'd take the Metro to downtown, because this paying 12, 15 dollars to park in town and, the last time I drove in to, the city, I had to go to the doctor at 19<sup>th</sup> and K. I parked, or pulled in to one of those underground garages and then some people pulled in behind me and went off and locked their cars. And I couldn't get my car out. Of course the garage operators were furious...not at me, but at the people that had left their cars locked in the driveway so nobody could get in or out. It was costing them an arm and a leg. Fortunately I said I've got to get back to, cause I had a family to feed [points to the dogs outside the door] and put out in the back yard (chuckles) and I said I've got to get back to Capitol Hill, well, Bingo! They didn't charge me for parking cause I guess saying Capitol Hill. There I was dressed going to the doctor...

**LUDDEN:** And they thought you were a Congressman from Iowa. (both laugh)

**SCHWENGEL:** Right. Exactly. Yeah, unfortunately I heard he, after he left Congress, that Fred Schwengel became president of the... Washington Historical...

**LUDDEN:** Preservation society?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, something like that. I forget what it was. The exact name. The Senate Historical or the Capitol... Capitol Historical Society I think because, he finally discovered me and invited me up to have breakfast with him at the Capitol building. It was good. It was nice... it was, no big deal...

**LUDDEN:** Eggs?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, bacon and eggs and toast. Coffee, you know. That was about it.

**LUDDEN:** What did he want to discuss?

**SCHWENGEL:** Just because our names were the same?

**LUDDEN:** Is that right?

**SCHWENGEL:** So, uh...

**LUDDEN:** What year was that, do you remember?

**SCHWENGEL:** Whew, golly.

**LUDDEN:** I keep doing that to you, I'm so sorry. (both laugh)

**SCHWENGEL:** Well, you know. '76 it's getting kind of wooly up here (points to head)

**LUDDEN:** Give it a little workout today.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. I don't remember. Because he was in good health then. Unfortunately he's died since then...that would've been early 70s.

**LUDDEN:** Ok.

**SCHWENGEL:** Early 70s sometime. I know that was before I was sick. I mean with the meningitis.

**LUDDEN:** Which was '77, correct?

**SCHWENGEL:** '77 yeah.

**LUDDEN:** Um, what's been your least favorite part of living on the hill?

**SCHWENGEL:** ...I can't think of anything that...Parking!

**LUDDEN:** (chuckles)

**SCHWENGEL:** That's, I guess that's about it. That's the most unpleasant. When I moved here in '69 you could park in front of your house. There was no parking problem, I mean maybe, park maybe two or three houses down one side or the other but you always had a parking place. But now, uh, it's an impossibility. I know that people from 12th Street park over here on this side.

**LUDDEN:** But there are all zones now. Correct?

**SCHWENGEL:** Uh, well, yeah zone 6.

**LUDDEN:** So if you have a permit you could park for whatever, if you don't you can park for two hours.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. Exactly.

**LUDDEN:** But you're not guaranteed, obviously a spot in front of your own home.

**SCHWENGEL:** But you're not guaranteed because when I moved here, I had a Cadillac, it was 21 feet long.

**LUDDEN:** Oh my goodness!

**SCHWENGEL:** And this house, I mean it wasn't the big expensive model, it was just a two door Calais.....

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

**LUDDEN:** Sorry, the question was, what has been your favorite part or parts of living on Capitol Hill?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, the. It's a very historic part of the city. And it seems like it spread this direction because it was a bedroom community for the Capitol and for the government which, now, now the government is spread all over the city but then. The historical part, when I was talking with Milton Sladen across the street uh, oh this has been, this was years before he died. I found out about the man in the green hat and the skeletons that they found in the garden of I think it's 138, it's either 138 or 142.

**LUDDEN:** 11<sup>th</sup> Street?

**SCHWENGEL:** 11<sup>th</sup> Street. You're familiar with that then?

**LUDDEN:** No.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, um. Yeah, the man in the green hat was, nobody knew his name but he lived, I think it was 138 11<sup>th</sup> Street. He was the bootlegger for this part of the city. There was a restaurant over here on Massachusetts and Fifth [ed: Third Street NE], called Man in the Green Hat. But he was the bootlegger and...

**LUDDEN:** He had an actual green hat?

**SCHWENGEL:** He always wore the green hat—a dark green fedora. So that, you know, he was known as the man in the green hat so you wanted whatever kind of booze you wanted you looked for a guy with a green hat. It would be delivered. Milton was telling me this.

**LUDDEN:** What year do you think that was?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, prohibition ended in, what '33? It would have been during the 20s. Because Milton lived over across the street there I think from 1907 until, he died just a year before my mother did, so they were both born in 1899 and, golly, he had some other little stories to tell. But then I guess when they were renovating one of the houses down here they found a couple of skeletons in the back yard that were buried.

**LUDDEN:** In the house where the man in the green hat lived?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah.

**LUDDEN:** Really? (whisper)

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah.

**LUDDEN:** What year was that, do you know? Recently, or no?

**SCHWENGEL:** No that would have been, that was before I moved in here. He told me about it. So that would have been at least oh, 40, 45 years ago. Because that's when this started to, started to move up—become gentrified.

**LUDDEN:** In the 50s, early 60s?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. And, then Milton, 'course as a little boy had a bicycle and where these condos, these new condos and the building this side that used to be a High's Dairy Store uh, when the building, ok. Where the new condos are, that was a vacant field but they had put up a tenting around it, the vacant field and then there were benches and a screen and it was the first movie house here, not house, first movie.

**LUDDEN:** Outside.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. Kinescope, thing...

**LUDDEN:** Sort of a drive-in in the city? Kind of thing? So you sit instead of driving a car?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. It was 10 or 15 cents, he said and, they would show a movie here and then over on ...Maryland Avenue, NE, and I don't know what hundred, he would get on his bicycle and as they finished one reel of film here he would rush it over to this other theatre, or outdoor theatre and bring back another reel for another movie or something, because they were really short.

**LUDDEN:** Milton would?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, Milton. He had tubercular spine and he was hunchback. Anyhoo. He was their go-between. He told me several other things. I spent, oh I guess a couple of hours with him just talking about the hill and the suspicion that...what was his name...the guide for John Wilkes Booth...

**LUDDEN:** Oh yeah...the one that took him out to...

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, his, the guide. Yeah, whether they went down Eighth Street or whether they came down 11<sup>th</sup> Street and across 11<sup>th</sup> Street pontoon bridge after the assassination. And I don't know, there was speculation as to which route they took.

**LUDDEN:** Interesting.

**SCHWENGEL:** So, anyhow, let's see...

**LUDDEN:** Oh, we were talking about the skeletons at the house of the man with the green hat.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, yeah. I think it was 138.

**LUDDEN:** Nothing ever came of it? This was after the man in the green hat had passed away?

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh yeah, he was long gone. I don't think they were able to find out anything from the skeletons.

**LUDDEN:** That's so creepy!

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, they don't know who they were or anything else. Oh, yeah. They didn't have a regular medical examiner until Dr. James Tobin had this house and he was the first official Medical Examiner, Coroner.

**LUDDEN:** This house? 123 11th?

**SCHWENGEL:** He was the first official coroner for the District and I guess he did some of his, coronering here in this room. In the living room here, that's what Milton said.

**LUDDEN:** Wooooow!

**SCHWENGEL:** And then John Phillip Sousa had some of his musicians, this was a rooming house and some of his musicians lived here and he would, he was frequent, I guess a frequent visitor at this house.

**LUDDEN:** Do you know what year this house was built?

**SCHWENGEL:** It was shortly after the Civil War, I believe. Now this house and the one next door here are...

**LUDDEN:** That would be 125?

**SCHWENGEL:** 125 yeah. Uh, Miss Kelleher, the old lady I mentioned lived over there? [points across the street] She said when growing up these two houses were here and there was nothing from here, or

from the next house, to the corner. Except for that wooden frame house, the wooden frame house was there. But otherwise she said you could, she could look out her back window and see the Anacostia, or where the Anacostia River would be because there was nothing. Nothing built up, in between. It was just vacant fields. Because the Car Barn, the end of the line was right down there. But, guess that was about it. Milton also said that down here at the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> and Independence there were no houses, there was kind of a bank that went down to the mud road. In the winter they would, the little kids would use their sleds down there...

**LUDDEN:** Into the mud?

**SCHWENGEL:** Into the mud, yeah. Into the stinky streets. But, that was a different world, different world. Because I know that those houses, some of those houses down there are built up. The one that sits back behind the wall. Linda...man, I can't remember anything...

**LUDDEN:** You're doing a very good job. I think,

**SCHWENGEL:** Linda. It's not Linda Fischer because I used to go with her back in school. Linda...I don't remember. She was a big wheel with the postal service, I think. But I don't know whether she's still there or not, I haven't seen her in, or her car in years.

**LUDDEN:** And she lived down near Independence?

**SCHWENGEL:** She lived, where there's a wall and a gate. It's the second house on the south side of the alley. That goes through there.

**LUDDEN:** Have you been close to a lot of your neighbors here?

**SCHWENGEL:** Some of them I have but many of them have died off.

**LUDDEN:** Sure.

**SCHWENGEL:** Now Ruth Lyons who lived in 130, over there. She was the wife of Barrow Lyons who was the assistant undersecretary...of...Treasury...I don't know. I don't know what department. I was very friendly with her. She took me, She had an invitation to a hotel to meet one of the candidates who was running for President and I went with her. Because I had given her a ride in my car, she took me to dinner at the, Cosmo?

**LUDDEN:** Cosmos Club?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yes.

**LUDDEN:** On Massachusetts Avenue?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah.

**LUDDEN:** Near Dupont Circle?

**SCHWENGEL:** Right. And, that's why I met Jimmy Carter and I was working in Special Ed at the time, and he said, I had a private conversation like this [gestures between us] with him. He told me that Roslyn or Roselyn I guess it's pronounced, was interested in that, in special ed. I don't know, they had somebody in the family that was... They're not working with the retarded, it was with the emotionally disturbed. Because when I was teaching out there at Crownsville Hospital for a couple of years I had two students...

**LUDDEN:** Near Annapolis?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah.

**LUDDEN:** I used to live down the street from there.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, really?

**LUDDEN:** Yeah, on Crownsville Road.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh yeah! (chuckles) I taught there for two years, at least two years.

**LUDDEN:** And that is, that is a home for emotionally disturbed?

**SCHWENGEL:** Emotionally disturbed. Now I think there was a section of it for well the retarded, mentally insufficient but two of my students had...uh, one girl had an unmeasurable IQ and I couldn't keep enough work for her to do. She'd sail through everything. Another young fellow who was suicidal because he couldn't fit in, because everybody else was, just couldn't keep up with him and he just didn't fit in. He felt himself so different that he was suicidal and they were trying to get him to understand that he was the one that was brilliant.

**LUDDEN:** The exception.

**SCHWENGEL:** Exceptional and he was just a little too bright for the rest of the world. So it's such an awful waste. Somebody like that...I could give...what was her name, Doris? I could give her a book and ask for a synopsis at eight o'clock in the morning and she'd have it done, a good thick book, she have it done by noon. I mean just a, I'd of given anything if I could do something like that.

**LUDDEN:** I know!

**SCHWENGEL:** And a good reporting, good writing.

**LUDDEN:** Accurate and everything?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah! I started off with the Red Badge of Courage. Hell I knew the book because I had taught it in a class, I knew it. Bingo. I mean she was, she just sailed through it. And it was like she had almost re-written it through her report and it wasn't plagiarized.

**LUDDEN:** Do you think maybe that, with all of the research that's been done and different...uh, insufficiencies we'll say, do you think maybe she was, autistic?

**SCHWENGEL:** Autistic, no. No I did have one autistic student who bit me. [laughs] She bit my arm.

**LUDDEN:** Well that's communicating your feelings, that's good!

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, but she had bitten all of the other teachers, too, so. No she wasn't autistic she could carry on a perfect, I mean just a conversation like we would but she was [motions like a spaceship flying into outer space above the rest of us]. You know, she could understand many of the concepts of science. It's hard to get a kid, a high school kid a freshman in high school, the concept of atomic structure. She understood it, she understood molecular combinations, whiz-bang at algebra.

**LUDDEN:** Why do you think, or why was she in Crownsville?

**SCHWENGEL:** She was just unhappy with, it was the same with the fellow. She was depressed because she was so different from her peer group. I understand that's quite common.

**LUDDEN:** Sure.

**SCHWENGEL:** Because they don't realize...you know, hey what's wrong with me? Well, there's nothing wrong with you kid!

**LUDDEN:** Nothing, by far.

**SCHWENGEL:** (chuckle)

**LUDDEN:** So...so the history of this glorious neighborhood is probably your favorite part.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah, it's just, Bruce and Milton Sladen and Miss Kelleher, Jim and Ann Broderick who lived in that house (points out the window) he's a retired federal judge and they just recently moved to assisted living in Pennsylvania.

**LUDDEN:** They lived at 121?

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah. There are two women there I think, if I'm not mistaken they both work for the World Bank and I don't know them very well. And then Hal Ritter who was on the other side of them, he was a financial editor of *USA Today*. He lived there until there was a problem at the paper, I think he got terminated. But that was years ago. Then, oh, there were two elderly women that lived on the first floor and second floor of the house next to me here at 125 but they, they sold, that house was sold. Because it was owned by Mattingly's who had the funeral home there, the big white house, and when that was built I guess that was built by the Gessford and they had the first electric car on Capitol Hill, Milton was telling me. And the little boys liked to go back to the stable and watch the car being charged because it had some big tubes or something, on the wall and the sparks would go up and down and it was charging the batteries of the car. You know what old electric cars look like.

**LUDDEN:** Well that's great.

**SCHWENGEL:** So somebody I think finally calmed down and went to sleep (the cat).

**LUDDEN:** Looks like! Don't give her any attention or she'll wake up. (both laugh) Well thank you so much for your...

**SCHWENGEL:** I'm sorry, I'm not up to...

**LUDDEN:** No, this is fantastic and it's precious precious history.

**SCHWENGEL:** I wish I were more, because the people that knew the history are now gone. They're dead.

**LUDDEN:** But you're part of it. You've been here for 40 years nearly.

**SCHWENGEL:** Yeah.

**LUDDEN:** That's a pretty good chunk of change.

**SCHWENGEL:** I feel like I'm almost dead, too. (laughs)

**LUDDEN:** Naw.

**SCHWENGEL:** I remember coming in this house and I'd take two steps at a time up to... now it takes me five minutes to get up to the second floor.

**LUDDEN:** Well it's a beautiful home and...

**SCHWENGEL:** Well I wish it didn't, we didn't have that aroma problem.

**LUDDEN:** I'm stuffed up until probably January because of the ragweed around here so, it doesn't bother me.

**SCHWENGEL:** Oh, all right. I went to, my regular doctor sent me to Dr. Ein down there on Washington Circle and I had something like 96 pin pricks for allergies and all of that and I'm not allergic to anything except Bulgarian Grass. ...Baloney, I'm allergic to something...It's probably dogs and cats.

**LUDDEN:** (laughs) Well thank you so much.

**SCHWENGEL:** Well the pleasure was mine.

END OF INTERVIEW