



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

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**Interview with Margot Kelly**

**Interview Date:** August 16, 2007

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

**BARNES:** ... [Capitol] Hill History Project. We're meeting at Margot's home on A Street Southeast. This is August the 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Margot, would you start by just telling us when you came to the Hill.

**KELLY:** I don't recall the exact date, but I was living in Northwest, as a matter of fact, Wesley Heights. I mention this because the Hill wasn't that "in" then, and so it was quite a shift, from one neighborhood to another. I don't recall the dates now; perhaps we will hit on it a little later. And I moved here because I had done over a little house on Seventh Street with a friend of mine. And then we were a bit premature, I think, in our remodeling, like, we had painted it dark green, sort of a Georgetown green; couldn't rent the darn thing for any money, and I was separating and coming in [moving] someplace from Wesley Heights and I thought, well, I might as well move into the house that nobody wants. Which I did and stayed there till I found a permanent home again for myself. And I actually intended to go back to Northwest, but couldn't find what I wanted, which was two story living, access to a patio area from the first floor without steps, and not large formal rooms but informal, because I knew I was going to live with myself, by myself. So, make a long story short, I saw this rather sad looking number at 300 A Street SE, which had been for sale for over six months and was in very poor condition, but I thought it had what I was looking for, bought it. And that must have been ... 1966. So it was around 1966. I remodeled the house, it needed everything, and then moved in in '97 or early '98—the reason I do know, it was before '68—did I say '98? Yeah, it was '68, because we had the riots in '68.

**BARNES:** That's exactly right.

**KELLY:** And I was in this house, 300 A Street when the riots took place in '68. So I think I had moved in shortly before. So, I was living on 300 A Street, where I still am. And started to sell real estate here for Millicent Chatel, who had, I think, by then opened her office in the 200 block of Pennsylvania Avenue, had bought the building, and opened the real estate office there. Always had tremendous vision, and came over here before the office was established, because we had some property here that we were—she had a large [number of houses under] management—that we were managing, and she said, well, look at this fabulous East Capitol Street, and all of that. And we thought, Oh, really [laughs]. And she took us to this, not restaurant but club place on the corner of East ... oh, right next to the Supreme Court, sort of an organization that had a dining room there, a public dining room, and we all went in there and had lunch, which was quite interesting, and spiffy, by local standards at the time. So she encouraged us to work up here and to perhaps live up here. So, I already had made the move, and sold real estate. I had started to actually remodel houses in a very small way over in Northwest, already I had done one at 2400 Tunlaw and then in Burleith, larger projects, sort of grew from just moving, or painting, or moving a bathroom, to

larger and larger things. So I came up here, and this was actually the first building I bought on Eighth Street, 719 G Street SE, happened [was bought] before I moved here because we had this agent, I've never forgotten her name, was Odorenko, I don't know where she is now but she was living on the Hill.

**BARNES:** What was her name? Odorenko? O-D-O-R-E-N-K-O?

**KELLY:** I can't remember exactly how to spell it. It's Slavic, obviously. And she lived, at the time she lived in the 600 block of E Street, where later on Beau Bogan moved, too, and did a lot of remodeling in that block, the 600 block of E. Yes. G is the next one over; there is no F in there.

**BARNES:** That's correct.

**KELLY:** It was E. Six hundred block of E. That's where she lived. And she said, you know, we have this property for sale in the 700 block of Eighth Street that's five apartments and a liquor store, and, she said, you know, it's just a wonderful property, you should buy that. And I thought, God! And then I went over there, became aware of this whole neighborhood, because I wasn't living here yet. And I looked around and here were the Marine Barracks, neat and clean and proper, and this messy looking Eighth Street, and I walked down the 700 block and I looked at those facades, and I thought they are really lovely facades, everything is just dead, shuttered up, no stores, no nothing, just two bars, seems to be the only thing that was still in that block. But to make a long story short, I bought the building. It was very reasonable, I think 55,000 or some such thing, perhaps we shouldn't mention it.

**BARNES:** Oh, that's all right; [laughs] we all know ...

**KELLY:** Some of it you will delete anyhow, I'm sure you're not going to do the whole bit. You pick and choose, don't you?

**BARNES:** Well, no, we ...

**KELLY:** You just let them talk? Oh, jeepers.

**BARNES:** Because, you know, everybody now looks back at '68 prices or '66 prices and they think, oh my God, if I'd only bought then.

**KELLY:** Well. And there are pros and cons to that, because it took a long time to make it worth your while. But anyhow, I bought this building and through this building became aware of the 700 block of Eighth Street, which had some very lovely, beautiful old homes, and, so ... I had this small apartment building with the big burner in the basement that would go off every so often, [I was] obviously paying for all the utilities. Apartments were renting for 80 dollars a shot, and those were two bedroom

apartments. And the liquor store, run by Mr. Einbinder, yes, and then we had the riots. His store survived untouched because Sonny, who was really sort of his mainstay, stayed in there day and night, and nobody ...

**BARNES:** Was he a black man?

**KELLY:** He was black, yeah. Sonny was black and Mr. Einbinder was white. And so nothing happened. Two doors down was a store where they sold broken down TVs and whatnot. Well, some people were carrying out some of that stuff. Probably did him a favor because it wasn't much in there that was worthwhile. But I said to this Marine, he was a captain, I think, who was standing in front of the liquor store in gear, with all the machinery that a soldier would have, I said, "Officer, why don't you do something about this business, you know, down the street?" He said, "Ma'am, we have orders not to interfere." I said, "Well if you can't interfere I don't even think you should be here," you know. But he stayed. So, nothing happened. I think the only building that burned in all of Eighth Street, in the 700 block, was something that was owned by Mr. Goldberg, who owned a lot of property, and it was rebuilt and now is now owned by Denise D'Amour [ed: Executive Committee Barracks Row Main Street]; she bought it fairly recently and CHAMPS or Main Street is in the upstairs, you know that new-looking building, that's the one [ed: 733 ½ Eighth Street, SE]. That burned down and it was rebuilt. Because you could tell, it's very new.

**BARNES:** Yes, they rebuilt.

**KELLY:** Yeah, it was rebuilt. And so that was, actually, all the physical suffering, as I recall, that Eighth Street was involved in. But psychologically obviously it was a downer, you know, and nobody would touch anything. I think throughout the city, but particularly in these marginal areas like Capitol Hill. So here I had this building with the liquor store, and when the lease was up, Mr. Einbinder left and a black gentleman came in, and I think he took over the lease that existed; these liquor stores have long-term leases, apparently.

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** And when this lease expired, which I think was a couple of years later, I asked him to leave. Because I didn't want a liquor store and ... it didn't do anything for the neighborhood. [laughs] Because in those days, 700 block of Eighth Street looked like the Bowery, although it was harmless. We had these two bars there, and these bars were mostly frequented by people who had retired from the Navy Yard. They all had a small pension, and they sort of lived in those apartments in the area, and had nothing to do and really no life left, except go into the bar and drink too much and then the bar would throw them out

before they started a little trouble, so they'd be lying there, just like the Bowery in New York—but harmless.

**BARNES:** Uh-huh.

**KELLY:** And you know, when you're new at all these things, I remember, going downtown, when the liquor license had to be renewed, and also had the people from the restoration society in Georgetown—I knew somebody there—and they came with me. Well, we just looked ridiculous, you know. [laughs] Here were these lawyers from the liquor license [ed: Alcoholic Beverage Control Board] who knew what they were doing; we didn't know what we were doing; and they said, well, they're not aware of any ... and the police were not aware of any problems in those bars, whatsoever. And the reason they weren't is because they threw them out into the street before any problem starts. And so there were no records ... and obviously the license was renewed. So then I became more seriously interested in the area [because I was] living here [on the Hill]. And I thought, God, it's really architecturally a wonderful block. And I started to buy some property and I think ... well, one thing, a friend of mine who owned what's now the bike shop wanted out after the riots. He said, "I'm leaving town, I'm not going to stay in this city." That was Tom Drummond; he said will you buy the building for what I paid for it? I thought about it long and hard because what did it have? It had a boarded up store downstairs, that had been boarded up for a long time, which was a haven for these people to lie in because it had this old fashioned black-and-white entrance, sitting back—terrible smells—and upstairs it had two apartments, and only one was occupied, by a lady, which had the thermostat, and she was paying 85 dollars a month, 90 degree heat, and that was all there was. And I thought, well, I should really do this. And so I bought the building.

**BARNES:** And the number on that building again?

**KELLY:** 707, 709 Eighth Street, which is now the bicycle shop.

**BARNES:** Oh, okay.

**KELLY:** And then I thought, well, you can't rent it the way it is. And I had been told that Social Security was thinking of coming to the Hill. They were on H Street somewhere and didn't like it. So I remodeled this store, first class, with everything in it, central air, windows, you know the present windows that are in there. And everybody said, you're out of your mind! These windows aren't going to last. And I said, well, time will tell. You know. And so I got in touch with GSA, offered them this space, I think at five or five-fifty a foot—square foot—and these people were just awful. The H Street people desperately wanted to come in. And I guess these people didn't like me or didn't like women, or I don't know what, but I couldn't get to first base with them. They said they wanted it, but they wouldn't give me

a lease. And I was in ... I practically went under, carrying a building like this with nothing coming in. And I hadn't remodeled upstairs, yet, I think I still had the 85 dollar [a month] lady in there, so a friend of mine, Dan Minshew who worked for some senator, and I can't remember the senator's name, now, very influential at the time, he apparently had under his jurisdiction GSA. And I was in the yard here, on Sunday and Dan said, what's the matter with you? Oh, I said, I got so many problems, you don't want to hear. Well, he said [tell me]. So I told him. God, he said, why didn't you mention that a long time ago? I can't remember the man's name, who the senator was, he has oversight over GSA. I got a call from GSA two days later—they'd be ready to sign the lease.

**BARNES:** Wow.

**KELLY:** That's all it took. And when I went down there, they said, Mrs. Kelly, it really wasn't necessary for you to get in touch with the senator, to have this lease signed. I said, unfortunately, it's a disgrace, it was necessary. I tried to work with your people for six months; couldn't get to first base. Blah, blah, blah. It was signed. So GSA, I mean, the Social Security came in. Which was a tremendous impact, you know, to this broken down neighborhood. All these windows and about 30 people working in there. And that sort of gave, I think, a couple of other people hope, and, like, the Cymrots bought a building, and Barbara Thomas, I think, who actually was my tenant down the street for a while, she bought a building, which became Ademas, that wonderful tile shop?

**BARNES:** Oh, yes.

**KELLY:** That's what she had. And Steve and Nicky, I forget who they first had, I can't remember, doesn't matter, but they had something in there, too. So, then, with this in place, we still had Ship's Cafe next to 703, you know. And whether I did it before, I can't remember, but anyhow, I offered to buy the building from the owners. These were men whose parents had a business in there, which is the way all of Eighth Street was, and they actually lived upstairs, and of course, the parents had died, the children became doctors and lawyers, were in New York and Bethesda, and ... make a long story short, they finally sold me the building, with my proviso that the Ship's Cafe be out. And apparently that was doable; they must not have had a lease. So it [the Café] was out and I bought this broken down building which needed to be remodeled completely, which I did. And so that was that. And then later on, I think came 705, which is next door, the one with the broken down ... not refrigerators, but television sets, and whatnot.

**BARNES:** Oh, the television repair shop?

**KELLY:** Yeah, right. Then I bought it. I think that was the sequence.

**BARNES:** About what year would that have been?

**KELLY:** It was all after the riots.

**BARNES:** Oh, after the riots.

**KELLY:** Everything was after the riots. I remodeled 719 G Street, after ... all of that was after the riots. And I think the first one I did was 707, because you had to. It was looking so poorly, you know. And, there would have been no way of renting it to anyone. So, but all of these restorations happened after the riots. And I actually, the Department of Interior had started a program—I remember now—where you didn't have tax credits but you had tax advantages if you remodeled your properties with the guidelines of the Department of Interior. Which meant that you had to do things in a proper fashion, and also did the interior. And keep as much of the feeling and woods that were in the interior part of the building as possible. And I left ... in all of those buildings I left the staircases, because they were nice. The rest of the apartments really didn't have much except there were a couple of fireplaces at 707 which I did keep. Not wood burning but pretty.

**BARNES:** The decorative ones.

**KELLY:** Yes, decorative ones. So, and I remember I then remodeled 719 G Street which took over a year. Each of these buildings took over a year to do. And obviously I didn't do them simultaneously, I sort of did one, waited a couple of years till I caught my breath and my finances, and then I did another one. And 719 G, I went downtown to the archives to do a little research on it and it turned out that it was the first luxury apartment building that was done on Capitol Hill in 1900. And they had the whole bit on it, including graphics of the ironwork that was put in, the way the store looked, and all of that, and I actually have a picture of it upstairs, of the whole front that I took from the archives. And so I remodeled it, put in one apartment where the precious boiler was ... basement. [laughs]

**BARNES:** Steam heat!

**KELLY:** Yes, yes, exactly, that's what it was, steam heat. And when it came on you heard it, you know?

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** And, the people I had, some of the people I had living in there prior were quite interesting. On the second floor, I had a lady whose husband had worked for the Navy Yard obviously. She had played the piano in some of those old bars and her sister was living in the first floor apartment. The sister wasn't that nice but she took care of the front, which had a couple of rosebushes in there, and whatnot. And, you

know, I didn't have the guts to ask these women to leave until they were ready to leave, and that's when I started remodeling. And upstairs, yeah, upstairs in the top floor I had ...

**BARNES:** This is 719?

**KELLY:** Yes, the chap who writes the architectural stuff for the Post. What's his name again? He does architectural writing for the Post. He was my tenant then ...

**BARNES:** Oh, my goodness!

**KELLY:** Up there, and I ran into him at a meeting where he gave a speech about a year and a half ago, and after he gave his speech, I went over and I said, you don't remember me, and he said, Yes, yes, Margaret. No, I said, it's Margot Kelly. You remember that apartment you lived in for 80 dollars [a month]? Yes, oh, he said, I loved it, it was wonderful. He worked for the Star then, and he said you know I walked over to the Star. I said, do you know how much it's renting for now? Two thousand, actually, \$1995.

**BARNES:** That's close. [laughs]

**KELLY:** He said, Oh my God. But, he said, I just loved that apartment, it was just wonderful. I can't think of his name now. So anyhow, that's how the neighborhood started to improve.

**BARNES:** It improved one house at a time.

**KELLY:** One building.

**BARNES:** And you had a lot to do with that.

**KELLY:** Yeah, I was sort of the first one, the first kid on the block, you know. And then others came. Then later on I bought 729 Eighth Street, which is the one on the alley, and remodeled it. It's a handsome building. And it was interesting; it had one of those inverted entrances with the black-and-white tiles you know. And so, and I did take an architect, a wonderful man, Ivar Viehe-Nass, was the ... actually did the remodeling plans for me, friend of mine. And he put ... and we went to decide what facade, you know, downstairs. And we went to Alexandria ... actually, he had done a drawing all in glass on the facade. And I said, Ivar, I don't think we're ready, even though I did it down there, you know, which looked like Marriott, the thing there. I said, I don't think we can do it. [whispers] I said, let's go over to Alexandria and see what they have there. Perhaps we get an idea. It was hot. I think we had two or three ice creams walking on King Street ...

**BARNES:** That was your reward.

**KELLY:** And, got so sick of all those little square fronts, you know that look like, I guess the 1860s, and it all just looked like Williamsburg. And I said, Ivar, I think your idea is the right one. We'll go with the glass. I can't stand this stuff. And then shortly ... So we did. But even before it was done, I saw a photo that was done in the Navy Yard, when they were redoing the Navy Yard around 1860 or 1880 whenever it was, but there was this photo, and 729 was in it. And lo and behold, it had two columns in front, it had a sign on top, and the front was sitting back. I mean, it wasn't glass, you couldn't see what the front was, but it was ... but Ivar had those two columns in front.

**BARNES:** Already.

**KELLY:** He had it in his ... I mean, this man really had a vision for what this building was supposed to look like, and that's what we've got there now. Really quite wonderful. So, when you go by there, you will see it.

**BARNES:** Oh, I know the building.

**KELLY:** Yes. That's the one.

**BARNES:** It's a beautiful building.

**KELLY:** And I think the person who originally built it was a Didden, he was a builder, two or three generations back, from the Didden family. [Ed: irrelevant section removed.] I don't think they did anything else on Eighth Street. If they did I'm not aware of it. They might [have].

**BARNES:** So then after that building, what was the next one?

**KELLY:** That was it.

**BARNES:** That was it!

**KELLY:** That's the end! That's the end of the story. But then you see the Hill, I mean this area went through a lot of ups and downs, and that's the reason why I couldn't rent my apartments after I had redone them and they really looked splendid—gorgeous two-bedroom apartments—all with working fireplaces, beautiful kitchens, baths, tiles and whatnot ... Ademas was there and put tile floors in and you know, I mean, really pretty special. Couldn't rent, and the reason I couldn't rent was because, by then, Ellen Wilson had gone sour ...

**BARNES:** Oh ...

**KELLY:** Which was sort of a block behind, you know, over there on Seventh Street. And it went downhill, which used to be a wonderful place where, you know, people lived and were no problems, but the wrong people came in and we just had crime and we had—oh, my God—prostitution; we had Norma, Norma Jean, we had Norma Jean ... was the lady of the night, and she actually was a woman who had seen better days. She had a certain class even in her lowest days, and she really reached bottom, but there was something about her that, I thought, God, pitiful! Nobody could get to her. [I] asked Pastor Hall who has the church [People's Church], to get Hal Gordon [Community Action Group], who I worked with very closely. I said, Hal, can't you do something with her? He finally did. He finally got her to come into his program, and he asked me to come to her graduation. You know he had his graduations at the Cyprian Church [Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian Catholic Church]. And here she was in gown and hat, whatever these things are called, and she graduated. And apparently she has been clean ever since; she's put on a lot of weight. He said her mind is not as good as it should be because of all the drugs she took; but she's all right.

**BARNES:** Now what year did Hal intervene? He runs the community ... [Community Action Group]

**KELLY:** Community whatever, yeah ... Yeah, but this was before he ... Well, he was running it, but not out of the Pennsylvania Avenue address, you know, at the [Old Navy] hospital, yeah, that came a little bit later.

**BARNES:** He was at St. Cyprian's?

**KELLY:** I don't know where he was.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**KELLY:** ... to do one building.

**KELLY:** It takes a lot out of you.

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** Which I didn't realize, but I would have those yearly check-ups, you know. [The] doctor [said] you have these missed heartbeats, and one time he wanted to put me in the hospital, I'd say, "I can't go to the hospital now, and I'm fine anyhow." And when I wasn't doing a building I didn't have those missed heartbeats. Very interesting, even though, you know, some of them went rather smoothly, some of them

not so smoothly. I had a wonderful crew, the same people, who would be working for me so, I had a minimum of problems in remodeling, but still, it's apparently ...

**BARNES:** It's stressful.

**KELLY:** Yeah, it's stressful, it is. You don't even realize it. But it is. So, anyhow, that's all I did.

**BARNES:** So when did you finish the last one?

**KELLY:** 729 was the last one. I would have to look it up. At least 20 years ago.

**BARNES:** Twenty?

**KELLY:** Not yesterday.

**BARNES:** So that your heart could get back into regular rhythm.

**KELLY:** Now I think I'm out of it again ... but that's age. So, but then, as I started to say, Eighth Street went bad because of Ellen Wilson and the Norma Jeans, and ...

**BARNES:** Oh, Ellen Wilson, the public housing.

**KELLY:** And so, I remember ... Don Denton and I and somebody else, we went downtown; they had a new director for public housing who had come in; I can't remember his name now [ed: Alfonso Jackson]; that man was unbelievable. We thought, Oh, my God! This is like heaven. He said he was going to empty it out, and I forget whether he said he was going to rebuild or remodel. And I remember saying, those buildings are lovely! And if they were—you know—completely redone, with nice front yards, people would have wonderful apartments, I said. And I think people should own and not keep renting anymore. Well, he wasn't so sure about that. But we left and just couldn't believe that this man was so forward looking. Well, he did get it emptied out [ed: 1988].

**BARNES:** Really?

**KELLY:** And then he left after.

**BARNES:** You're talking about Ellen Wilson. He emptied the whole complex.

**KELLY:** Yeah, the whole complex.

**BARNES:** And it stood empty ...

**KELLY:** And he wasn't loved for it, but he did. And he's some big shot in something now, in government. Black gentleman from ... Chicago, I think he was from Chicago. So then he had emptied it out, but then there it sat, these empty buildings and all the winos and the small thief-types moved in and obviously congregated on Eighth Street, and everything went downhill. You know we had the wonderful restaurant, the Broker [that] was doing fabulously. And then it all just went silent. And that's when I became interested in trying to make improvements to the street, working with the police, and starting a Barracks Row Association. And Carolyn Doherty and I really started it. And when we did, Carolyn said, well, don't you want to run it? I said, Carolyn, I'm so busy with my stuff, why don't you? And obviously I'd be part of it. So Carolyn was actually the first president of Barracks Row. And then, she didn't last very long, because she decided to move to Santa Fe. So that's when I took over, and really created an organization that had a little substance. We would have meetings every four weeks, [and] had a little newsletter that Stephanie Cavanaugh and I would put together. [laughs] We would sit in her office, smoke seven or eight cigarettes, and get that newsletter out every four weeks. [laughs]. And meet at Shakespeare, next to the drugstore ... God! Not drugstore, the Lock and Hardware ...

**BARNES:** District Lock and Hardware!

**KELLY:** I couldn't come up with it either.

**KELLY:** Thank you. So, and you know next door Shakespeare had been renting space for all these years. And we'd have our meetings there and the police would come and we would have doughnuts. And they'd usually call a week or two ahead, when are you having your next meeting? Instead of being on the street, you know. We really had some police patrol that was truly interested in making this neighborhood better. But it was a humongous job. And some of them, I remember one day, I said to the sergeant, he was fabulous, he's retired now, I can't remember his name, I said, you guys don't work Saturdays and Sundays. You know, we need presence there on weekends, too. And he said you know we have a family life, too, and don't want to be out there on weekends. And I said, Jesus, if it's not you somebody's got to be there. So I thought this is really quite incredible. Well, the chap from *Roll Call* usually showed up but he wasn't there, so he called me afterwards and he said, well how did it go? What's new? I said, you won't believe this. These guys tell me that they don't like to work on weekends because they got families. I said, it's like a kindergarten. And he put that in *Roll Call*, which I didn't realize.

**BARNES:** Was he the editor of *Roll Call*?

**KELLY:** No, I don't think he was the editor; he was the ... he'd been with them for ever.

**BARNES:** Just like a journalist.

**KELLY:** What was his name? Well, I don't know whether he's still with them. But anyhow, he put it in *Roll Call*. We had just gotten a new captain, who I had introduced myself to, or already knew. And I had a meeting with him, I think a day or two before, on God-knows-what. And, so he called me at seven o'clock in the morning and he said, Margot, I just read *Roll Call*, and you just said to blah-blah-blah that we are like a kindergarten. He said, did you say that? I said, Read me the thing. And he read it and I said, it doesn't sound quite right. Well he said, Come on by and ... No, I said, I'll go over to Trover and get my copy and I'll call you right back. And I got the copy and he had it just right so I called him back. Yeah, [laughs] I said, that's just the way I said it and that's the way it is. I said, really. He said, you know I'm trying to help all of you here on the Hill and on Eighth Street and whatnot. But I'm also very ambitious and, he said, I can't afford that kind of publicity. He said, will you write a letter to the mayor and the police chief? The mayor was Barry. I said I'm not going to write a letter to Barry but if you want me to write one to the chief [I will], which I did. And he and I had a very close relationship, and he really tried to help us as much as he could on the Hill with the situation as it was till finally, those buildings were torn down [1988] which took quite a while. And Harold Brazil was our Council member at the time. And Harold was trying to be very helpful in getting this done, too.

**BARNES:** That was bringing down [ed: Ellen Wilson]

**KELLY:** To tear them down and then, in came the first Hope VI grant [ed: Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere, HUD plan to revitalize public housing]. And that was a long deal which meant, again, that it would be rental housing. And there was a whole group of us, Jim Simpson, Jim Didden, myself, the gal who is now in California, Gail Key—wonderful woman—we had this organization, lots of meetings, lots of time, trying to make it look better. And I was the one who kept saying, home ownership, home ownership. And this gal who was their contractor—I mean, if we were together at one meeting we must have had 50 meetings—and she finally said Margot, it's [a] broken record. I said, yes, it's a broken record, and so is your response, that you say that you are giving them home ownership. You're not. You're giving these people—you're asking for two months' rent, which is ridiculous, that's not home ownership. They get it back and you pay interest. That's not ... Well, actually, it wasn't up to her.

And we did go, Oh, yeah. I remember I was coming back from California and Cisneros [ed: Henry G. Cisneros, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development 1993 to 1997], who was then running the show, was on the plane. And I said, Mr. Cisneros, once we're up in the air, could I speak with you for a minute? Yes, he said, certainly. We were both in tourist. And I went up there and introduced myself and I said it's in regard to the Sixth Street project that you're probably familiar [with]. Yes, he said, I'm familiar with it. And I said, You know what we've had rental rental rental, for low income people and I think the time has

come for home ownership, and I think there's actually one precedent down where the golf course is. There is home ownership and I think that's the way it should go. And it gives people substance and interest, permanency, and all of that. And well, he gave me his card, and said call me and we'll talk about it. We had actually been to the Department of Interior [ed: HUD] I think it was, actually Jim Didden and the whole group of us had spoken to the Department of Interior [ed: HUD] people prior and obviously didn't get anywhere. And I didn't with Mr. Cisneros. I called. I never got him. That was the end of him. If ... he thought he couldn't help he should have had the courtesy [to say so]. No one explained that this was going to be the first Hope VI grant program, or whatever they call it. And apparently one of the rules or laws in it is that you can't have home ownership. Why not say [so]?

**BARNES:** Oh. It was pre-set.

**KELLY:** It was pre-set, apparently. I mean, even if they had wanted to ...

**BARNES:** It was part of the ... the proposal.

**KELLY:** Part of the package. [The renamed Townhomes on Capitol Hill opened in January 1999.] So, but what was good was the ... I mean, we had fights, I tell you. Unbelievable. [laughs] And so, they introduced this management firm from Boston, and they had done similar work in Boston. And I think these people are still running it. And I think they're doing a wonderful job. And then of course we had this wonderful architect [ed: Amy Weinstein], the one Kitty Kaupp had for all of her buildings, and she did a marvelous job in doing the fronts.

**BARNES:** But ... I thought there was ownership? How did they change it?

**KELLY:** There is no ownership. No, I mean, they call it ownership, but it really isn't. People don't have a deed, they haven't put a down payment down, and they put in two or three month's rent ... and whatnot. [ed: The Townhomes are managed by a private company as a limited-equity cooperative.]

**BARNES:** So they have the right to reside there.

**KELLY:** They have the right to reside, and I think, if they don't pay they throw them out, or if they want to leave, they can leave, you know, and then they get their deposit back, with interest. Now that's not home ownership.

**BARNES:** No.

**KELLY:** If it were homeownership, you wouldn't have that management firm.

**BARNES:** No, you would have deeds.

**KELLY:** You know. And they have an office there. And they are apparently doing an excellent job because it looks good.

**BARNES:** It surely does.

**KELLY:** It looks very good. It's wonderful. So, when that all came together and was being built, then Eighth Street started to look better and better again, because these influences disappeared from the streetscape and people—decent people—started to come and rent again, both residential and commercial. And then, I had a tenant at 719 who worked for historic preservation and they had this Main Street program, you know. And so I had her come to one of my meetings and speak. She was a wonderful speaker because that's what she was selling, was Main Street for them. And so they all got excited about Main Street. And so I went down there, and said that, would they be interested? And, oh yes, they'd be delighted to do that, but there was ... money effort involved; it would cost about 15 or 20 thousand dollars. And I thought, we don't need that, I mean, they don't do what we are trying to do ourselves, trying to get better tenants, get the facades, you know, straightened out, painted, or new facades, whatnot, you know. And we don't need to pay ...

**BARNES:** And this was part of your Barracks Row ...

**KELLY:** This was part of the Barracks Row. We don't need that kind of stuff. And we didn't have the money either. But even if I'd had the money, I had a few thousand dollars, but even if I'd had it I wouldn't have done it because I didn't think their program was any more than what we were trying to do anyhow.

**BARNES:** And you were doing it without paying 20 thousand dollars.

**KELLY:** Yeah, I mean I was doing it on zero.

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** You know. I would talk to the tenants, I would talk to store owners, they would come to my meetings—some would, some wouldn't—you know. And some owners were in Florida, long-term absentee owners. Would you consider selling or doing something? You know, trying to—especially the 400 block. Getting rid of all the pay phones in the 400 block? I tell you, what an ordeal that was! It took months and months.

**BARNES:** Oh. I can't even imagine.

**KELLY:** I mean it was just two steps [forward two steps back] ... I mean there were so many issues that had to be addressed. The person who was wonderful with the pay phone issues that marvelous man who is the ANC permanent employee, who is still there, what's his name? He was marvelous. The two of us got rid of those pay phones. Some of those phones ... you see, the tenants or owners on whose properties these phones were located received a monetary reward, so they weren't interested in getting rid of those things, you know. It was a struggle. But I mean, there were so many struggles, this was just one of them. And he was wonderful in that respect. In all respects, I might say. So gradually, you know, we started to get better and better, and better people came in, and the idea of Main Street was very much on our minds but there wasn't any money available at that time yet. The city and the feds weren't ready for a Main Street program. And so then I turned 75 and I was ... [on] the board of CHAMPS was running the zoning issues there, and so I thought, if I'm ever going to have a little peace and quiet—or, I thought I would—it's now. And I just quit everything. I quit the Barracks Row, CHAMPS, whatever else I was doing, and turned over Barracks Row—couldn't find anybody who wanted to do it—to Denise, she finally did that, and took Main Street over to, what's her name, who is still running it, lives on East Capitol, very well-known ...

**BARNES:** We'll work it out.

**KELLY:** Lives on East Capitol. [ed: Linda Parke Gallagher, died July 17, 2008]

**BARNES:** It won't come to me either. And I've heard it so many times ...

**KELLY:** I certainly have. She was on my board. And then she ... I asked her to take over and she was happy to do it. And, so that's pretty much the end of the story. And ... Well, it really isn't the end, because when she took over, then, because the Navy Yard was bringing in all these people ... Well, that's another thing, too. Mr. [John Imparato] would always come to my meetings. And then the Navy Yard—when it first started—the Navy Yard, he was doing the same thing I was doing on Eighth Street in the Navy Yard. Remodeling buildings and trying to get more and more people in over from Virginia, and, as a matter of fact, he did a wonderful job and very much supported me.

And I used to have people like Mr. [Imparato]. I had people from the gas company, from the electric company, sometimes from some other government organization, I can't remember. But they would come, because they know eventually we would have a Main Street program. And I was particularly keen on Potomac Electric because I figured once—and I discussed it with him—once we get this program going, we would have lights in those tree boxes, just like they have in Alexandria. That, I thought, was wonderful in Alexandria. And he said when the time comes, we'll talk and perhaps you all can put some money in and we put some money in and get lights into those tree boxes. Well, it was never done,

unfortunately. But these were ideas that were actually on the agenda. But, the Main Street people thought it was too much trouble. So it didn't happen. Which was very sad, I think.

**BARNES:** We do have some lights ...

**KELLY:** Oh, we have street lights. Yeah. Too many, I think. But we don't have individual lights in the tree boxes, which would mean we could light things up year-round, you know.

**BARNES:** Year-round ...

**KELLY:** And wouldn't need that many street lights. And it would give a different aroma to the neighborhood. But unfortunately that didn't happen. Yes, Mr. [Imparato], as a matter of fact, I remember I went to some meeting that Sharon [Ambrose] had over there, she had meetings over there, by the ... in the old days, we would just be sitting in a little old room in the Navy Yard. And they had this gorgeous auditorium with pictures going every which way, and afterwards, Mr. [Imparato], he said I want you to see a couple of buildings that I did, which I think you would really enjoy. And so we took a tour of the whole place and I said, you did a fabulous job, and he did. He did a marvelous job. And he's been at this longer I think than I had been on the Hill because he was there when I started. And I also used to have a very good relationship with the Marines. Like, in the old days, when the street looked like hell, you know, even when it started to look a little better, the city didn't do any cleaning to speak of, and I would have the Marines—in Spring and Autumn, a whole slew of young men—come over, clean the street, clean the tree boxes, clean the alley, all of that stuff. And they were very, very helpful in those days. We did it in spring and we did it in autumn.

**BARNES:** The Main Street—they took over the project—that would have been, what year?

**KELLY:** Well, I turned 75, let's see, that gives us a clue. I was born in '24. Twenty-four and 75 is what? [laughs]

**BARNES:** Oh, we're both very good, aren't we? [laughs] Ninety-nine.

**KELLY:** Ninety-nine. 1999.

**BARNES:** Ninety-nine—very good. And it took them, how many years?

**KELLY:** Another couple of years, right.

**BARNES:** Because, it seemed like a long period of time, but then it sort of came together and certainly your buildings are now so valuable, and all the properties that you bought, way back then when you paid 55 thousand for one, are so valuable and you rent what was an 85 dollar a month, apartment, for what?

**KELLY:** Two thousand a month. Right. But don't forget a lot of money was spent on those buildings.

**BARNES:** Of course!

**KELLY:** Not any—not up to today's value, but I mean a hundred thousand dollars was a lot of money in those days and that was easily spent, and more, you know, on one building and more on each building. So those were commitments that took a bit of money and conviction or guts or whatever you want to call it.

**BARNES:** Yeah.

**KELLY:** So, because, at the time, the street was trying, trying. And as I'm sure you realize, the 700 block was the best looking block, [the] 400 block, [is] the lousiest, still, and the 500 block has been catching up some you know. But the 700 block ... And architecturally speaking, I think the 700 block is the most interesting.

**BARNES:** More interesting ...

**KELLY:** Yeah. Except for the Shakespeare building, the mansard building, that is spectacular, yeah.

**BARNES:** Oh, yes.

**KELLY:** And that also was interesting. I mean, Michael Kahn ... obviously, I was working not with the present director [ed: of the Shakespeare Theatre Company] but the one prior to the present one; he would come to my meetings. They were very closely watching what Eighth Street was doing, and already had their base renting that front next to the District Lock & Hardware. But that building across the street was sitting there, and they were thinking of buying it, but obviously they weren't going to buy something that was never going to be any good, you know. So they were very closely watched what was happening to Eighth Street, and finally decided, well, they were going to take the plunge, which was wonderful ... And he spent a lot of money on it, and I think it makes a marvelous place.

**BARNES:** Beautiful.

**KELLY:** Yeah. And that's actually a cutie-pie story, too. In that particular [laughs] ... on the first floor there used to be one of those grocery stores of sorts, you know ...

**BARNES:** Convenience ...

**KELLY:** Yeah, beer and wine and a lot of junk to the locals. And we actually took him to court. This was owned by a man who was highly educated, I think he was Iranian or Syrian, lived in McLean with his family and daughters, and I think his wife was a professor at American U, if I remember correctly. And

when we asked him to, please, improve the merchandising that he was doing he said that he was catering to the neighborhood, and this was what the neighborhood needed. And we took him to court on the license and spent a hell of a lot of money and time on all these issues, you know. So he finally got out [of] there. But then he owned the building across the street right next to ... what is it now? It's where the little grocery store was. Is that where the pizza joint is now? I think it may be.

**BARNES:** Or is that the Subway? No, that's too far up.

**KELLY:** That's too far up. I think it's the pizza place now where he then had his store because he owned the building.

**BARNES:** Uh-huh.

**KELLY:** And we kept at it, you know, saying, please, please, please, you must improve your merchandising and cater to—no matter who—but, start, stop selling this horrible stuff, one beer at a time, you know, one bottle at a time, no fresh fruit, or no fresh anything, just lousy stuff. I think he finally got fed up, or somebody offered him a lot of money. He sold, thank God.

**BARNES:** Oh! [laughs] That's one way!

**KELLY:** That's one way of doing it! But it took, oh, God, how often we went to the Liquor Board, and we even had an attorney over on the other side, and I ... all the stories, I tell you, there are so many of them! But when Michael Kahn bought his mansard building it was empty.

**BARNES:** Oh, it was?

**KELLY:** Yeah, he didn't have to deal with this man; he was already out. Yeah.

**BARNES:** How have the Main Street changes affected your buildings?

**KELLY:** Well, they obviously have been favorably affected by it, although I always made certain that I had tenants who would be an asset to the neighborhood. Like, just to give you one example, this was many, many years ago, too. A friend of mine from Louisiana had a friend who came to town to open up the first Popeye—Popeye's. He had the franchise. And he rented 705, which was an office at the time on the first floor from me. And next door, I think the people at 707, the administration, what are they called again? They had moved out after many years. The Social Security people ... and it [was] empty. It was empty for quite a while. And he said, Margot, let me rent the store, and I will open my first Popeye's there. And I said, I can't rent you that store. The kind of atmosphere it would create and the paper ... He

said there won't be any paper; I will have it clean all the time, you know you will get your rent on time, blah, blah. I said, I am sorry [and] he thought I was nuts. I said, No, I can't rent to you.

**BARNES:** So they went up the street?

**KELLY:** Later on. A little bit later. And he apparently has quite a few others. He for a while lived on the Hill with his family, but then moved.

**BARNES:** Um-hum.

**KELLY:** And, but so I was always careful ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

START OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

**BARNES:** I was wondering about your real estate career during this whole time, because I know that Millicent Chatel encouraged her salespeople to buy as well as sell. But how did that work out for you, in terms of the selling side, when you became ...

**KELLY:** ... A landlord ... Right. [laughs] Well, obviously my selling career diminished and finally came to a stop, and I really stopped selling because I had to manage those buildings. I always managed them myself, because I thought that way you have control over who your tenants are, and I'm still doing this.

**BARNES:** You're still managing your own buildings.

**KELLY:** Still managing my own buildings. It's getting a little old, but I'm still doing it. And, so that really fizzled out. I didn't sell much on the Hill, and then, nothing.

**BARNES:** When would you say that occurred?

**KELLY:** Let's see. Probably it started already in the early '70s, yeah, that I sort of concentrated on my own buildings.

**BARNES:** On the management side.

**KELLY:** On the management, the remodeling, and all of this business, yeah.

**BARNES:** But during that time you had so much to do with the political process.

**KELLY:** Yeah, quite a bit of it at the time. Well, when I finally decided at 75 to retire, I would be gone, you know, for a couple of hours, and I'd come back and I'd have 10 or 12 calls waiting for me. I mean,

this Eighth Street business, this Barracks Row business, became a life of its own. And I guess when you become a little successful in something, the whole world calls you and wants to talk to you or interview you, or whatever it is. And it just takes on a life of its own. And I thought, I don't know how I managed my own little buildings, you know?

**BARNES:** At the time ...

**KELLY:** At the time I was doing with all this ...

**BARNES:** Involved with the political process..

**KELLY:** That's right. And I didn't manage them that well, I think, at the time. I sort of became more serious about it after I did quit all of that and then made sure the places were in good condition, and tenant-wise .... And tenants fortunately didn't move that much, because I guess my rents were never that high, so tenants stayed for many years, which was helpful. But, still, I was able to concentrate on it. Talking about being a land ... no, what were we talking about?

**BARNES:** Being a landlord.

**KELLY:** Yeah, being a landlord. There's a cute story. I went to Russia in '75, Moscow, and this was the first Smithsonian trip. And they had us divvied up in points of interest. So obviously I was interested in real estate. And so this young Russian architect took us around showing us what they were doing in the form of building houses for people, apartments, and whatnot. And they were putting in cement pipes for water; water pipes were made out of cement! So I said to this gal, I said, why don't you use copper, and if you don't have copper or iron or something for pipes, you know. Oh, she said, we just can't afford it. It goes someplace else, you know. And so, she said, Are you an architect? And I said, No, I remodel old buildings. Oh, she said, you remodel old buildings, and then when they're done you sell them. I said, No, I rent them. Oh, she said, you are a capitalist! I said, you're right! [laughs] It was so funny! I couldn't get rid of her.

**BARNES:** Oh! Because she wanted to learn everything you knew, so she could become a capitalist, too!

**KELLY:** She ... well, exactly. Let me tell you. She eventually came to Washington, DC. She called me, Svetlana was her name. And that heavy Russian accent, you can't miss it. And I said, Svetlana, what are you doing here? Oh, she said, I married Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith used to run ... or was somebody with the Smithsonian. You know, later on they had weekly tours going to Moscow, I guess, and so she got in with Mr. Smith and married him, and was living over here. She had a daughter and a mother, and the daughter apparently was with her, and I was having a dinner the next week and I said ... [I'm having] quite a few

people. And I said, well, why don't you and Mr. Smith come over. And so they did. And as the evening petered out, a couple of people and I, we sat with them, and Shirley Blanchard, who unfortunately isn't alive anymore ... wonderful gal ... she said to her, well, what do you think of Washington? Well, she said, you know everybody needs a car here. We have this wonderful subway in Moscow, you know, we don't need cars. And then Shirley said, Well, what about shopping, if you go to Neiman-Marcus and places like this? [laughs] Oh, she said, you know, we do it differently. We have our bathrooms ... and in the bathrooms where we work, we sort of hang out what we want to sell and what we want to buy. And we said well, really, you know, Svetlana, forget it. It doesn't quite compare. So ...

**BARNES:** That was their Macy's, their bathroom, where they bought and sold ...?

**KELLY:** Yeah, where they ... So anyhow, then the next ... Oh, and she was already working for the museum, Merriweather Post museum, was coloring the Easter eggs there, you know. And so the next call I get from her is about a year later, and she said, Oh, Margot, Mr. Smith and I bought a house out in Bethesda and I'm working for an architectural firm now. And I said, oh, you bought a house. Well, Svetlana, you've become a capitalist, have you? [laughs] And that's the last I ever heard from her. I tell you, she was something.

**BARNES:** Yeah.

**KELLY:** She was something.

**BARNES:** How would you compare what you were able to do on Eighth Street that the city, up until now, has not been able to do on H Street?

**KELLY:** I don't think the city has done that much on H Street. It was ...

**BARNES:** And there hasn't been the interest from someone like you.

**KELLY:** I don't think ... it probably would not have happened. I remember Mayor Williams did come over at one time to Eighth Street, I forget what it was, and it was very poorly organized, and at the last minute. Somebody was supposed to have organized it and ... which didn't happen. And then I asked Pastor Hall whether he could at least have his wonderful men with the voices, you know, sing which they did. So that was one little highlight, we had, you know. As a matter of fact ... this is a cutie pie one ... talking about singing ... they have microphones in this overhang where the church in the 500 block used to be ... a cinema at one time. And so, while we were having these people lying around Ellen Wilson, etcetera, you know, I said, Pastor Hall, would you mind? Not church music necessarily, but have some music coming out of those microphones [speakers] that is sort of a little formal or a little old fashioned or

something. And I said I have a hunch these guys probably won't like that and won't be lying down there anymore. It worked. For years. [laughs]

**BARNES:** He changed the music! [laughs]

**KELLY:** He changed the music, and they were gone. They were gone.

**BARNES:** These were people that just hung out there?

**KELLY:** They just hung out there, they just lie there, they'd sit there, you know, whatever. Gone. It worked.

**BARNES:** But I think it is so interesting ...

**KELLY:** But I don't know what the city ... I think the city ... I don't know anything about H Street because I don't follow those things. But you read something in the paper, the city does seem to take some interest in H Street, I think.

**BARNES:** But you, I mean the realtors ... after '68 ...

**KELLY:** We really started it on our own.

**BARNES:** ... were really interested in H Street.

**KELLY:** We had enough to do with Eighth, I didn't really know where H, well, I did know where H Street was, but, my God, you know H Street was a big number.

**BARNES:** Because it [H Street] really was burned out in the riots.

**KELLY:** Well, no, it [Eighth Street] wasn't burned out. As I said, one building ...

**BARNES:** H Street?

**KELLY:** Oh, over there, H street suffered. Sounds like Eighth. Many people get it mixed up, yeah. No, it really suffered, just like Seventh Street and 14<sup>th</sup> Street Northwest, you know, all of those commercial areas suffered severely. And I think those rebuildings took a long time.

**BARNES:** Yeah. I wanted to ask what, looking back, you enjoyed most about your work in purchasing and renovating and revitalizing and being a part of Eighth Street?

**KELLY:** Well, I think the most satisfying thing is to take an old building that had seen better days, and then see it come back to look right again. And live again. And prosper and thereby the street prospering

and the street coming back. But I think it's very satisfying. It's like, just painting a wall, you know, except it takes a little more than a wall to do a building, but to see something looking again the way it was supposed to look when it was being built and was a proud, handsome looking building and to get that look back again, I think, is, to me, it's very satisfying, not just on the outside but also on the inside.

**BARNES:** Well, you have been honored for the impact that you have had on the revival, if you will, of Eighth Street, and that has been through the Capitol Hill ... Foundation?

**KELLY:** Community Foundation, yeah.

**BARNES:** Tell me about that and how that came about? You were nominated?

**KELLY:** Nicky and Steve Cymrot, who are the founders and the presidents of the organization well, I guess they rang my doorbell one day and came over and they said, we want to talk to you about something. And I thought they needed money. That's usually what it is. [laughs] And they said we want to give you an award, you know, at the yearly dinner that they have at [the] Folger. I said, Oh God, I said, don't do that, I said either I'll have to make a speech and all that, Oh, I said, forget it. They said, No, we insist that you agree. We really want to do that, we want you to be part of that, and we're having Sharon Ambrose, and you, and a gentleman, very nice gentleman who did volunteer work for the Young Marines. [ed: Jim Parker]

**BARNES:** Oh ...

**KELLY:** And apparently did remodeling at one time, too. He said we had met that he'd bid a job for me which didn't materialize or something. Very nice gentleman and they wanted me to be the number three.

**BARNES:** So that was the ... Capitol Hill Community Foundation?

**KELLY:** Yeah, that's what it is.

**BARNES:** I don't recall the year that you were given that award.

**KELLY:** I could look it up, yeah ... [1999]

**BARNES:** But, we can look that up, because that really is an outstanding award on Capitol Hill.

**KELLY:** It is, yeah. But, and, I must say I'm pleased and thankful that they did asked me to join and be part of it.

**BARNES:** And to be recognized.

**KELLY:** But at the moment I thought, Oh, God, no, you know because I'm not one who is really into this type of thing. But I'm very pleased that they did ask me.

**BARNES:** Now how do you see your legacy on Eighth Street?

**KELLY:** Oh, I don't see a legacy at all.

**BARNES:** You don't?

**KELLY:** No, I don't, no, I mean we come and go, and ...

**BARNES:** But probably if there had not been someone like Margot Kelley ...

**KELLY:** Well, somebody would have come along, I think. It may have taken a little longer, may have gone a little differently, but eventually I think something would have happened.

**BARNES:** Yeah?

**KELLY:** Perhaps I started a little sooner than the street was really ready, but [laughs] talking about legacy ... you know, there's the alley next to 729 Eighth Street?

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** I had actually painted a mural, oh yeah, that's another ... I had actually painted a mural there, on that wall, big mural, it's a 60 foot-high building, and the newspaper ... City ...?

**BARNES:** City Paper?

**KELLY:** Yeah. No, not the City Paper ... the good one that we've had for years ... Not the Voice, the other ... the Hill Rag, was in the building next door at the time, and they had this lady who had done their cover, which I liked, so I walked in there and I said would you be interested in doing a mural for me on this wall? That was when Ellen Wilson was still sort of starting to go down a little bit, and I had all this graffiti stuff on the wall and all that ...

**BARNES:** Oh, yeah.

**KELLY:** Well, the two of us got together and, I said I would like something sort of ethereal-looking, nothing exact, but Cezanne-ish, but not quite, you know, combination of that, and, so she came up with some suggestion. I said, that's good. So she worked, she got herself one of those things you strap yourself into that she hung from the roof, to paint the upper parts of it. I think it took her about two and a half, or three months to do this. They wrote us up in the Washington Post, they had a long article on it. And there,

too, people thought, My God, why would you spend money, they [are] just going to ... they didn't, they had no graffiti whatsoever. Can you believe that?

**BARNES:** Oh! Well, what happened to it?

**KELLY:** People respected it. And she was very good with the kids in the neighborhood. They would come over and they would say, Lady, what'cha doing? You know.

**BARNES:** And she would tell them.

**KELLY:** And she would tell them and she would give them a paintbrush and let them paint.

**BARNES:** Ah ...

**KELLY:** We had no graffiti.

**BARNES:** They had a part in that.

**KELLY:** That's right. That's right. And it worked.

**BARNES:** It was their painting.

**KELLY:** Yes. It was. And they loved it. And it's not there anymore because she used water-based paint and it just sort of ... It went. It was beautiful. It was stunning. So I had it ... you know when it ... then it starts to look poorly, and so I had it completely repainted, you don't see anything anymore. But it was a wonderful success ...

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** Because, I mean, this wall was just full of stuff, you know, that you don't want. And the moment we had this thing finished, it was no more graffiti. It worked. How did we get on that?

**BARNES:** Well, we were talking about the impact that you have had on ...

**KELLY:** Oh, yeah. No, actually, what I was going to ... I was going to say something else. In the process of that ... The legacy, right. I don't know who it was, but somebody had a little sign made, which may still be hanging there, Margot's Alley, Kelly's Alley, I think, it may still be up there, about this big, I don't know who actually did it and called it Kelly's Alley. It was during the period when she was doing that [painting the picture on the wall]. I have to look and see whether it's still there.

**BARNES:** Talking about legacies. [laughs] Oh, I think that's marvelous.

**KELLY:** Well, it's not Kelly's Alley, you know, it's not on the books.

**BARNES:** It should be on the books. [laughs] You've done so much. What, would you say you're proudest of, in terms of the work that you did on Eighth Street?

**KELLY:** You mean the physical ... the facade work?

**BARNES:** Well, it could be that, or, it could be your involvement to move things forward, or buildings or ... all of the above?

**KELLY:** Well, I guess, I would say the thing that really makes me feel good is to see the street thriving and see that it works and see that people enjoy coming to shop, to eat, and to relax and are not afraid of crime, and, all these things that we had to deal with in the prior years. I think that's really the thing that makes me feel real good, when I walk down there and see that.

**BARNES:** And you're still at it.

**KELLY:** And I still am at it, that's right.

**BARNES:** Are there any regrets?

**KELLY:** Actually, no. I must say. No, I don't have any regrets. Just minor little stuff like the lights, you know, I would have done Main Street a little different. And I probably would have insisted on a slightly different design, things like that, but that's minor. I would have had a slightly different vision of it.

**BARNES:** Than ... what eventually came about?

**KELLY:** What came about? They tore down all the trees, which is kind of sad, you know. It wasn't necessary.

**BARNES:** No, they could have left those in and done the lighting ...

**KELLY:** Many of them ...

**BARNES:** I have to agree with you on that. I love trees ...

**KELLY:** There were a few, I'm sure, that had to be removed. But during the time I did Barracks Row, I planted three trees. I remember I planted one in front of what's Starbuck's now, and I used to carry the water out there so it would survive like I'm doing with the little one up here now, [at] my house ... I planted one in front of 703, and planted one at ... down the street at 729. They were all good sized trees, healthy trees by the time they tore everything out, which I thought was sad.

**BARNES:** Well, that would be regret.

**KELLY:** Yeah, I mean ...

**BARNES:** Something that you would rather they had kept. Certainly, because ...

**KELLY:** They could have been kept, you know.

**BARNES:** Yes, they were healthy. There's no reason ...

**KELLY:** Many trees were healthy. I'm sure there were a few dead ones.

**BARNES:** Oh, yes, there's always that. I mean, we're replacing trees on the Hill all the time, on every street. Do you remember which trees ... because all the streets on the Hill have trees assigned to them, the type of tree, whether it's a maple or an oak, or what? Do you remember what the ones are supposed to be on Eighth Street?

**KELLY:** They were, I think, oaks.

**BARNES:** Oaks.

**KELLY:** We had oaks, yeah.

**BARNES:** Every street has to have its own particular set of trees.

We're kind of doing this in reverse, but ... because I know that you moved to the US from another country. We'd like a little of your history.

**KELLY:** Of my background?

**BARNES:** Of your background, and when you came, and where you're from, and ...

**KELLY:** Well, I was born in Germany, in Dusseldorf which is on the Rhine. And my family moved to Berlin when I was ten, so my, I was raised there, my schooling was there. And then after the war, in '48, I moved to Frankfurt because I took a job here with the Herald-Tribune.

**BARNES:** With what?

**KELLY:** The Herald Tribune.

**BARNES:** Right, the Herald Tribune.

**KELLY:** What was his name there, the correspondent, I tell you, my memory. Ed Hartridge was his name, right, yeah. Doesn't matter. And then I heard through a friend of mine that we were opening up embassies in Washington, Paris and London and she was working for the German government then. And I put in my application. And to make a long story short, I was selected to come to Washington. And I came here on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1950. We were not an embassy at the time, we were a diplomatic mission— diplomatic economic mission. And then in '51 some peace treaty was signed and we became a full-fledged embassy. And Dr. Krekeler became our first ambassador. So, and I remember when I came here, April 1<sup>st</sup>, out of this old broken-down dirty Frankfurt, and the gentleman who was running the mission at the time lived at the Dresden [apartment building] and our offices were right there at Dupont Circle, New Hampshire Avenue in the 1700 block. And I arrived Saturday and he was giving a cocktail party, obviously not for me, but for somebody, and we were supposed to show up. So I was supposed to show up, too. And I remember walking up Connecticut Avenue, this beautiful, clean, gorgeous street, with these buildings, they all looked like marble, that was [chokes up] ...

**BARNES:** Oh ... It's very emotional ...

**KELLY:** It was just fabulous. [choked up]

**BARNES:** Just so wonderful, and because of the comparison with Frankfurt, and with the life that you had there and the life that you have here.

**KELLY:** Which was starting then.

**BARNES:** Which was just beginning?

**KELLY:** Just beginning, yeah. It was very special.

**BARNES:** Oh, yes. And did Washington remind you of other European cities?

**KELLY:** Not really, no, no, I think it had, even though, you know, L'Enfant was instrumental in getting the city started. Not really, no. I don't think it looks like Paris or London or Rome, you know. I think it has its own character. And obviously has done fabulously well. I mean, when I came here it was a sleepy little bureaucratic city, you had no theater, you really had very limited shopping, you had museums. It was clean and safe and sweet.

**BARNES:** And so you lived up on Dupont Circle at that time, or near there.

**KELLY:** Well. Well, we all started there when we arrived. It was sort of a rooming house.

**BARNES:** Because they had housing?

**KELLY:** No, no, no, we weren't that fancy, no. Things were very simple in those days. We all ... the office was 1716 New Hampshire, and there was a rooming house across the street, so when we arrived, there weren't that many of us, we would stay there and then rent an apartment. And I actually knew an old friend of mine, from Berlin, who was here, working for Pan Am, she was already here, she had an apartment at 2929 Connecticut Avenue. Her girlfriend had moved to New York, so I moved in with her. And that, too, was just spectacular, to move into an apartment building where you had [a] slot going through the whole building, you could put your mail down into it. [laughs] Oh my God! You know I really am in heaven. And they had a deck up on the roof, where you could burn yourself to death, you know ...

**BARNES:** And you all did?

**KELLY:** A little bit, you know. Not for long. But a little bit. I mean, just the availability was remarkable. No, I mean, coming out of Germany five years after the war, this city was just like a fairy tale. And the weather was so gorgeous, too. I mean, it got a little too hot, at first, which you weren't prepared for, but you had all these sunny days. Europe especially Germany's not that sunny.

**BARNES:** Very dark, yes ...

**KELLY:** A lot of dark days, lots of crowds and things like this. So having all this sunshine and blue sky, and these white buildings ... They all looked white, not quite white, but they did, then, look that way.

**BARNES:** Yeah.

**KELLY:** It was pretty spectacular.

**BARNES:** And so this was in the '50s, then when you left the embassy, where did you ...

**KELLY:** Well, I got married, and ...

**BARNES:** Was this someone you met in the embassy, or was this an American?

**KELLY:** Neither. [laughs] It wasn't the embassy, it was a Swiss gentleman who I met. And then we got married, and then the marriage did not last, unfortunately, and in '55 or '56 we separated, and then got unmarried three and a half, four years later.

**BARNES:** Uh-huh.

**KELLY:** And then [I] had to look for a job and make a living. And Lufthansa was coming into town. So von Pappenheim, Count von Pappenheim was my boss, I was the first employee he had, and, so we were running Lufthansa, which did not operate obviously into Washington, DC ...

END of TAPE 2 SIDE 1

BEGINNING of TAPE 2 SIDE 2

**BARNES:** Today you would be a travel agent.

**KELLY:** Yeah. Sort of.

**BARNES:** Sort of?

**KELLY:** Yeah, of sorts. We didn't write that many tickets, obviously. We did PR work, and all kinds of stuff, you know, to get Lufthansa ...

**BARNES:** Promotion and advertising. So that would have been throughout the United States?

**KELLY:** No, mostly in the Washington area. They had a large office in New York, obviously, and probably did have some on the West Coast, too. Oh, sorry ...

**BARNES:** Well, how long did you work for Lufthansa?

**KELLY:** Oh, probably a year and a half, or two or so years, and then my mother became very ill, and, I went to Germany, and took care of her ... it was cancer ...and, so.

**BARNES:** Was she in Frankfurt at the time?

**KELLY:** She was in Frankfurt by then. My parents actually moved to Frankfurt in '49, just shortly before I came over here. And, so ...

**BARNES:** Your father was not living at the time?

**KELLY:** No, my father was still alive. Both of them alive. And my mother died first, and thank goodness Dad stayed healthy for a good long while thereafter. And actually came over here to visit me quite a bit. Both had been over here, too ... but after Mother died, he obviously came more frequently.

**BARNES:** Are you the only child?

**KELLY:** Yeah.

**BARNES:** I see.

**KELLY:** And he knew America ... and, I remember, he had been here twice, I think, in the '20s. And when Americans used to ask me, while I was in Germany, I used to say, Yes, my dad has been here, he's been to Hoboken, they all would laugh, you know [laughs]. He'd been to Chicago, and apparently ... He was an engineer, and he was selling something or trying to sell something to America that they over there thought we didn't have and, you know Germany was in a terrible recession, depression at the time. But he did these two trips over here and apparently was very taken with America, liked it a lot. And I remember he brought back what we call pamplemousse, which are grapefruits, from the boat. And I was just a little girl and seeing these yellow round things, I always loved round things, still do—in my buildings I made arches, things like that—I liked things round. Oh I just loved those grapefruits, I thought they were the greatest thing, which obviously ... we didn't have grapefruits in Germany. We hadn't gotten to that point yet. They have them now, but ...

**BARNES:** Because you import them.

**KELLY:** That's right, but in those days you didn't have them. And so, anyhow.

**BARNES:** After her death ...

**KELLY:** After her death I came back, and decided that I wanted to have a little house. And Burleith in those days was very inexpensive; you could buy houses there for 16, 18 thousand dollars. It was not the place to live—to be.

**BARNES:** What year would that have been?

**KELLY:** It would have been in the late '50s, yeah, the late '50s I would say. And apparently Burleith was built by Shannon and Luchs in the '20s, and those houses, I was told, then sold for six thousand dollars—new—five or six thousand, something like this. They're all little row houses. And, make a long story short, I saw this little house, and bought it through Millicent Chatel, that's how it started. I think I paid sixteen five, or something for it. It looked pretty ... not my taste, had a lady [who lived] there who did sewing, lots of flowers, wallpaper ...

**BARNES:** Artificial?

**KELLY:** Yeah. And so Millicent Chatel, who I met, said to me, what are you going to do after you have fixed the house up? I said, well, I have to work. And in those days I put down, I think, three or four thousand dollars max, or less, and got a mortgage of five percent from Citizens Federal, which was located in Georgetown on the corner of Wisconsin and N Street, I think. Wonderful little organization, and so anyhow, she said, I'll call you. She did, we had lunch, and she explained to me [about real estate

sales], and I said I don't know that I can work for commission. I have to have an income. She said, try it. Well, I did. And ...

**BARNES:** Did you have to get a license?

**KELLY:** You didn't in those days. You could work for six months, I think, before ...

**BARNES:** Under someone ...

**KELLY:** Yeah, under someone ...

**BARNES:** Like a broker in which case that was Millicent Chatel ...

**KELLY:** Right. But you had, then, to pass an exam. But I think they gave you six months. And so I started working with people who I knew, from my days when I was married before—we lived over on 31<sup>st</sup> Street, in a very beautiful part of DC, of Cleveland Avenue ...

**BARNES:** Cleveland Park?

**KELLY:** No, it was better than Cleveland Park [Woodley Park]. You know where you go behind the Shoreham there, that area, Morningstar Drive, or whatever it's called. Very, very pretty, very sort of exclusive. That's where we lived. So that was pretty neat. And then moving into Burleith, my friends said, you can't live there. I said, oh, yes, I can. Because that's the best I can do, and barely can do. So anyhow, I started working, and I sold, I think nine houses that first year, which was a short year, from May to the end of the year. I just worked. I didn't do any social life. I was fairly depressed, and not thinking very positively and I just worked. All my friends were ... everybody was divorcing in those days, and all saw psychiatrists. Well, I didn't see a psychiatrist, I just worked.

**BARNES:** You worked! [laughs] You worked yours out.

**KELLY:** I worked [laughs]. That's right, that's how I did it. And so then I proved to myself and the store—Millicent—they all thought I was a genius. I said, I'm not a genius, I just work while you all party or do whatever you do, you know. And, so I realized I could do it. And then the idea of buying something occurred. That's when I ... the first house I bought was 2400 Tunlaw Road, which was a beautiful old farm house for 20 thousand dollars, again with two thousand down, I think and rented it. And this is correct—I think sort of relevant—I kept it rented; three or four years later a colleague of mine, even though I didn't have it on the market, but it was empty, she came to me and said, I have a contract here for thirty thousand. I said, well, I wasn't going to sell, but she said, Margot, I think that's pretty good. So I sold it—for thirty thousand. With it was a lot next to it that now has a house on it. And so, and they sold

the lot, I think fairly soon thereafter for five thousand. And so my colleague said, or friends or whoever it was, gee, you shouldn't have sold that house. See how they're making money and now it's worth more and blah blah blah. And I said, No, I think it's all right. It just proves to you that if you have something good you don't sell it. You know. You hold on to it if you can afford to hold on to it, I really also could use the money at the time. So, I said, no, I don't feel badly at all. But it's a good lesson: when you have something that's worthwhile, you think it's worthwhile, don't sell it. Hold onto it if you can afford to.

**BARNES:** And you were still in Burleith?

**KELLY:** I was still living there. I was still living in my little old house, yeah. And I had painted that house [Tunlaw], you know all the woodwork was dark brown. [I] painted it with a wonderful gentleman who used to paint for friends of mine. And he, Charlie, [a] wonderful person said, you can't keep painting eighteen door frames in one day. He said, if you do that you'll ruin your arm. You can't do that. Well, I didn't ruin my arm. Other things did, but not the painting. And so made it look a little more up to date, you know; and I think I rented it for 200 a month, which, sort of, paid my mortgage, and my taxes.

**BARNES:** This was Tunlaw that you're talking about?

**KELLY:** Right, Tunlaw.

**BARNES:** And then after that, what was the next house you bought?

**KELLY:** Well, then I bought, actually the one across the street from Tunlaw which also was for sale. [It] was not as nice a house and I didn't keep it very long.

**BARNES:** You turned that one over?

**KELLY:** Yeah, I didn't do it over ... none of these houses I did over. I just sort of fixed them up a little bit. But then I did see a real possibility on 37<sup>th</sup> Street thereafter, and I did that one over completely; it turned out to be a beautiful house, really lovely, should have never sold that one. [laughs]

**BARNES:** [laughs]

**KELLY:** I should have kept it. I could have lived in it myself. It was just charming. And then, I think, by then the time had come where I was ready to get married, and move over to Wesley Heights.

**BARNES:** So this was ...

**KELLY:** So this is the Kelly marriage.

**BARNES:** Oh, the Kelly marriage, okay.

**KELLY:** Right.

**BARNES:** So you, by then, sold your Burleith house?

**KELLY:** No, I was still in my Burleith house when Fred and I got married. He had two daughters, two lovely daughters, and one of them was still in high school, and the older one was finishing high school. So, we bought this house over there in Wesley Heights, and moved in there on 44<sup>th</sup> Street. But the marriage didn't last; the relationship with the girls lasted. But with Fred it didn't, and so when I moved out that's when I moved to Seventh Street.

**BARNES:** I see, you moved to Seventh.

**KELLY:** Seventh Street Southeast, 504 Seventh; the house that I had remodeled with a friend of mine, Cornelia Noland, who was a friend of mine through Chatel, also divorced. Her husband was Kenneth Noland, the painter, you know, who does these modern paintings?

**BARNES:** So it was Cornelia Noland, N-O-L-A-N-D?

**KELLY:** N-O-L-A-N-D, right.

**BARNES:** And he was the painter, Noland.

**KELLY:** Right. This shouldn't be relevant, really. But she and I, we had owned that property and done it over together, so that's the one ... now we're catching up with where we started, where I then moved in, after I left Wesley Heights, I moved into that house.

**BARNES:** And then after that house ...

**KELLY:** I bought this one.

**BARNES:** And so when did you buy this?

**KELLY:** This one here? I think it was '67, no '66, '66.

**BARNES:** I think you said ...

**KELLY:** I think I sixty- ...

**BARNES:** Because it was before the riots ...

**KELLY:** Right, yeah, and I remodeled and I was in here ... at the riots.

**BARNES:** At the riots. And the church was across the street, all of that was here ...

**KELLY:** Oh, the church was, I think, 1860 or something ...

**BARNES:** Yeah. When you moved in.

**KELLY:** There were no physical changes here ...

**BARNES:** But the buildings, the government buildings, were all ...

**KELLY:** They were all here.

**BARNES:** They were all here. So, the street itself hasn't physically changed, in terms of the facades and so on ...

**KELLY:** No. The facades haven't changed but they have been sort of updated, and the owners have changed, yeah ...

**BARNES:** Many times.

**KELLY:** Yes, right.

**BARNES:** [Laughs]

**KELLY:** That's right.

**BARNES:** Is there anything that we should know about Margot Kelly that we don't know?

**KELLY:** I think you know more than you care to.

**BARNES:** Oh! [laughs] I think you're a very fascinating woman.

**KELLY:** Thank you.

**BARNES:** And you've done such exceptional things with your life and you've made such a huge contribution to our life on the Hill, even though you don't see it that way. I think you're very humble and don't take a lot credit for the things that you have done, but certainly those of us who have lived here have profited from the work that you have done in reclaiming Eighth Street and making it a place that all of us truly enjoy going to.

**KELLY:** Yeah, fortunately it worked. How long have you lived here?

**BARNES:** I've been here for ... about 23 years, so I'm a newcomer.

**KELLY:** Since the '80s.

**BARNES:** I always ask this of people, if there was anything that you could do over, or change in your work on Capitol Hill, what would it be?

**KELLY:** The only ... I think I touched on it before ... The only thing I would have done different is the Main Street improvements on Eighth Street.

**BARNES:** Yeah.

**KELLY:** Yeah.

**BARNES:** But otherwise ...

**KELLY:** Otherwise ... and I would have liked, I mean I would have liked if there could have been more emphasis, perhaps it wasn't possible, perhaps it's still not possible, to sort of improve the 4 and 500 block, especially the 400 block, you know, to get a better element of tenant or owner in there, but otherwise ...

**BARNES:** And to improve the opportunities for people to own homes, with your work with Ellen Wilson, and that was not possible.

**KELLY:** Yeah, I was very disappointed in that.

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** And there were many meetings and I must say I was obviously quite popular with the low income people, because they also thought it would be a good idea if they could own, you know.

**BARNES:** Yes.

**KELLY:** But apparently the Hope VI grant ...

**BARNES:** Was not allowed ...

**KELLY:** Didn't work that way. I don't know why. You know, I think it's very, very short sighted. I think the government should give people a chance to take responsibilities and better their lives.

**KELLY:** Yes.

**BARNES:** And you certainly have. You came here from another country and you made a life, and a very good life, and you have contributed greatly in your life and I think you have continued to contribute.

**KELLY:** Not a heck of a lot, no.

**BARNES:** Well, you do, by virtue of the properties that you own and the service that you do for the people who live in those apartments, and not just the apartments but the store fronts as well. I think you contribute by your presence on the Hill and your love for the Hill, which is so obvious to all of us. I appreciate having this opportunity to interview you—truly appreciate this—and so many other people would like to have done this interview and I feel honored to have gotten it!

**KELLY:** Thank you.

**BARNES:** Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW