



Interview with Catherine M. Peterson

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

OVERBECK: Today is January the 23rd, 1996. I'm in the office of the Director of the Capitol Hill Day School, the Principal, Cemmy Peterson and hers will be the only other voice you hear on this tape. Cemmy, how did you get the name Cemmy and what is your real name?

PETERSON: My real name is Catherine Motz Peterson. When I was born, I was living in a house with my grandmother and great aunt whose names were Catherine and Emily. My initials are C.E.M. and it was easier to have something to call me other than Catherine or Emily so my family decided to call me Cemmy and though I've moved many places in my life, I've never been one place where I was independent of everyone I had known before and I've never quite gotten rid of the name. It stayed with me [*laughs*].

OVERBECK: Where were you born?

PETERSON: Baltimore, Maryland.

OVERBECK: Where all have your travels and your education taken you?

PETERSON: I went to college in Massachusetts to Smith College and after that returned to Baltimore for a graduate degree in education at Goucher. I moved then to Philadelphia, where I taught at Germantown Friends School and from there moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts where I worked for Jerome Bruner at a place called the Education Development Center. It was, well we can go into that more later if you'd like to. From there was married and moved back to Washington, D.C. where we've been ever since.

OVERBECK: What made you go into education?

PETERSON: Well, these aren't very glamorous answers so I'm not sure how to respond [*laughs*].

OVERBECK: Some people choose and some people get directed, some people fall into it [*laughs*].

PETERSON: How did I do that [*quiet statement*]? I majored in music in college and that was not a direction that was all-consuming for me. It was terribly important intellectually and I can talk about that a little bit too, but beyond that there wasn't a direct path that I wanted to take. I think that working with children was something I had always enjoyed doing and I decided that that was a path I would like to travel at least for a little while. Once I became involved with it and in particularly the teaching at Germantown Friends, I was committed to it for many, many reasons. I've been fortunate in my life, do you want me to just talk a little bit about that?

OVERBECK: Yes . . . [unintelligible words]

PETERSON: You had asked me to consider what I considered to be my greatest accomplishment and that was something that's hard for me to think about. But I could think about something I had accomplished that had utmost importance to me in my life, so I prefer to think about it that way. And that happened when I was in college my senior year and was studying with Louise Rood, who was a marvelous cellist. I didn't play a stringed instrument, but I had become terribly interested in music and music composition and under her for my senior thesis I studied several of the Beethoven string quartets which are, of course, beautiful pieces of music.

In the process of studying them, I came more and more to understand how they were created and how the harmony, the melodic line, the rhythms were used and varied and changed to create a whole piece of music which was a creation which you could listen to and enjoy and you could also analyze and enjoy from yet another perspective. I just remember that happy year when my eyes were opened and opened and opened as I began to understand these relationships and it was something that then became important to me in almost everything else I have done.

When I taught at Germantown Friends, I had the good fortune to use the math materials of a man, his name is Robert Wirtz, later on again just by pure good fortune I had the opportunity to work directly for him. I think I had thought before about teaching young children as more a matter of teaching them something and perhaps teaching them subjects that they were to memorize and arithmetic was one of them. But when I was using Bob's materials, which I struggled with night after night to understand, I began to understand that just as with the Beethoven string quartets, there was a pattern and an order underlying mathematics and that one learned to use the language of mathematics to describe this pattern of order.

This again opened up a world to me and helped me understand what I thought education for young children be like. That it shouldn't be simply the memory of the arithmetic facts, but an understanding of the principles underlying mathematics, or indeed the principles underlying whatever it might be that they were studying.

So to continue that path of good fortune, I had the opportunity to hear Jerome Bruner speak at a conference that I attended of Friends schools in the Philadelphia area and he was, at that point, on sabbatical from Harvard developing a social scientist course for elementary school children, fifth grade, sixth grade, somewhere in that range. With the purpose of helping them understand underlying themes, underlying . . . how we might study another group of people, another culture, how we might understand human beings by studying another culture and looking for the underlying themes that tie us together as a

human race. Well that seemed to fit right into everything else I had been thinking about. I mentioned this to my headmaster who happened to mention it to, in a thank-you note, to Jerome Bruner. The next thing I knew I was teaching third grade and the principal came in and said “Jerome Bruner...”

He invited me to come up and work with the team at Harvard. Because they were in need of having a classroom teacher translate what it was that they were thinking about as professors that should be taught to children, but they were finding it difficult themselves to communicate with the children. So, they thought it would be wonderful to have a teacher who was fascinated by what they were doing and also to see how that could be translated into work with children. So, the school kindly, or maybe they had other reasons but I think it was kindly [*laughs*], let me leave in the middle of the year and go up to work with that team of people. I fully expected to return the next to Germantown Friends, but as it turned out I stayed five years working at Education Development Center on what then became a course of study entitled “Man: A Course of Study”.

Lots of other things happened, I came to this city and I worked for a Ford Foundation supported organization, the Advisory and Learning Exchange. Through it I came to know people all over this city. I came to know people in the public schools, in the private schools, parents, teachers because the intent of that organization was to bring together those people who were interested in the field of education and that was in the late sixties. It was at a time when there was turmoil was going on all around. So the intent was, on the one hand, to involve people in subjects that their interests through education. And on the other hand, to bring together people from schools all over the place—the county, the city, the public, the private so that we would get to know each other.

Actually, that was the first time I got to know Capitol Hill Day School. I remember Ida Prosky, I remember Sandy Burns, Bobbie Morra. People who are still at Capitol Hill Day School or associated with us because it was just at that time that Capitol Hill Day School was getting started. I remember, even at that time, thinking about what an exciting institution this could be. An institution that was committed to using the resources of the Washington area as part of its course of study and was also committed to the community in which it lived.

I did other things: I worked for Bob Wirtz for a short period of time on the development of the math materials. It was when I was working in Fairfax County—developing math materials there—that I received a phone call from Sandy Burns, whom I had known and reconnected with from time to time, asking me if by any chance I might be interested in applying for the head position at Capitol Hill Day School. I’d never done anything like this before, but it intrigued me and from what I had known about the school I decided I would like to try it.

Do you want me to keep going? *[laughs]*

OVERBECK: [unintelligible words]...you're doing wonderfully.

PETERSON: Well, I was remembering the first interview that I had. It was quite funny because it was held over in the Senate office building and I remember Mark Gitenstein was the person who was heading the search committee. I went up and there was a long table with lots and lots of people and [I] went in and just began talking. In the course of conversation, it turned out that I was supposed to receive a packet of information that I *had not* [interviewee's emphasis] received describing the school.

So Mark, one of his last questions to me was "Well, we realize that this isn't quite fair because you haven't received this information about the school, but something that is of concern to us is to make sure that the next head can articulate what is important about Capitol Hill Day School."

Well, I started to talk *[laughs]*. It was as easy for me then as it is today to talk about what I thought Capitol Hill Day School was and then what I then learned is truly what I believe the school is. My interests and commitments so nicely coincided with the interests and commitments of the school.

OVERBECK: How do you feel that you had picked up on what Capitol Hill Day School was enough for your perception of it to be their perception of it? You didn't have that much contact with it just sporadic piecemeal?

PETERSON: It was sporadic, it was piecemeal, it was memory of its beginning days. I learned in the conversation that the school was using the course that I had been involved with developing in Cambridge. I learned that Jerome Bruner's philosophy was the touchstone for the curriculum here at the school. So, I think that probably was the key and Sandy Burns and other teachers and I were on separate paths exposed to the same kinds of materials that were being developed in the sixties and influenced by the same kinds of thinkings. They were even using Bob Wirtz's math materials. So to come here was like coming home and added onto that the educational component of it: the commitment to community was something that was very, very important to me and seemed to work... What was important to me seemed also to be important to the school. So that's what happened.

OVERBECK: The twenty-fifth anniversary of the school began last June, end of last June?

PETERSON: '69...two years ago.

OVERBECK: There you go. Did it culminate, I think with...

PETERSON: Yeah.

OVERBECK: At any rate, when did you come on board?

PETERSON: I've been at the school for eleven years. [long silence, some voices in the background and interviewee whispers "it's alright" to an inaudible question].

OVERBECK: In terms of the mix of children that you have here, what do you think that says to the community at large or the world at large in terms of the way that they associate with each other or that they are blocked together under one roof to act as an educational community?

PETERSON: Could you restate the first part of that?

OVERBECK: Okay. The children that you have here—they represent a lot of different aspects of life in Washington. I guess what I am really asking is how do they find and what do they find as a home-place [words uncertain] here at the school? I think kids don't know theory.

PETERSON: Right.

OVERBECK: They're brought here.

PETERSON: hmm hmm.

OVERBECK: Some of them have a choice, more or less, but not much.

PETERSON: hmm hmm.

OVERBECK: And what is that makes for them this home [interviewee begins speaking over interviewer]...

PETERSON: To be part of the community once they're here?

OVERBECK: hmm hmm.

PETERSON: Of course we use the word community so much that maybe that's why I'm having a little bit of problem with this. [long silence]. Well, there's no question I think that it's the kind of caring that the teachers give to a group of children when they come into the school to make those children feel that are part of a group that's going to be working together, that does work together, that is supportive of each other, that is appreciative of the different values that are brought into the classroom. Each one of us, our histories that we bring with us, become part of the curriculum of the school as that goes on through the school.

At the beginnings it may appear more in terms of the rituals that the children have at home and then their parents come in and share those rituals and those family traditions along with the children and you can always feel such a sense of pride as the children share those. And as they grow older and the children become articulate about their own backgrounds and their own interests, it's very important to us that the

children feel comfortable talking with each other about those backgrounds and then begin to understand in a larger context what some of the issues may be that grow out of the differences from which we come.

So, I think that the children who are here, the longer they are here, the more they become understanding of each other, supportive of each other, and yet comfortable talking with each other about the issues that arise. That's something that they carry with them to other schools. I do think that they carry with them ways of thinking that come about because of the way they are treated and the way they are taught within the school. They assume when then they go to another place that they are going to be able to talk about what is important to them and issues as they see them and they assume that they are going to be able to talk with other children as well as the young people that they are with as well as the teachers.

I think that they approach academics in a manner that they are involved themselves with their learning. That becomes critical to us that the children are taught to look for the kinds of patterns in relationships that I might have seen in the Beethoven string quartets or in the work of Bob Wirtz or in the work that I did with Bruner. That searching for patterns in relationships, not memorizing something for the sake of memorizing. Knowledge is becoming...there is so much knowledge now in the world that to memorize everything would be impossible for all of us. It's knowing how to find it and how to sift through it and how to look for, how to search for something that's significant, that's important. And I think that that's what we do, from the tiniest ages on through and I think that that affects the way the children think once they leave this school.

What's really fun for us is to have someone like Tati Kaupp who went through the school, come back, and so naturally assume the perspective of the education of Capitol Hill Day School that she has the whole art department just completely intertwined with the curriculum of the school in just the way that she learned when she was at Capitol Hill Day School those many years ago.

Or another student who graduated from Capitol Hill Day School, she's now at Haverford, Whitney Barnett... She called her Mom earlier this year and said "Mom, I am reading the most wonderful person in my history of education course. His name is Jerome Bruner and I am so excited about his ideas." [laughs]. Well, Betsy of course just laughed and said "Well, no wonder [laughs] because his is the philosophy that was undergirding the curriculum that you were part of for those many years."

Then, in terms of community, and I'm getting back a little bit to your question which isn't still not quite answering your question I think, so don't hesitate to push me further. It is important to the teachers here that the children feel themselves first a part of the community of the classroom, then as they grow older a part of the community of the school, and then as they grow even older a part of the community of Capitol Hill. Which doesn't mean that you don't talk about all aspects of that much earlier on, but as children

become cognizant of their role in making these places work: the classroom work, the school work, and then the community work, I think that happens cognitively as they grow older.

By the time the children are in sixth, seventh, eighth grade, we make an effort to help them think about their role in the community. And as I say, this has been happening earlier unconsciously. They see their parents caring about this community. They know that they are collecting lunches for some kids who aren't able to have lunches on Saturdays or Sundays and so they are helping some people out in that way. In seventh grade, we have a program with Hine Junior High School. Do you want me to talk about this?

OVERBECK: Sure.

PETERSON: The children work within a class at Hine Jr. High School just getting to know each other through the year. And then this year we will be able to do what we were able to do a couple years ago and that is to take all the kids off together at the end of it and to have a chance to go on an overnight camping trip. Our goals aren't terribly ambitious in this, it's just to have kids get to know each other from different walks of life. Kids who normally walk past each other's school, but who wouldn't have a chance to talk perhaps. There's no question it pays off in little ways. A child from Hine will bump into another child from Capitol Hill Day School at a drugstore and instead of just passing each other by, they'll say hello and talk to each other because they've met each other here and are interested in each other.

And this year that program is more well-developed than it's been before. We have hopes that kids will be working together on an artistic endeavor where they will be designing and painting a mural on a Capitol Hill facade someplace and all of the work that will go into that will, of course, begin with the teachers, but then will become part of the children's effort as well.

The eighth graders have a program with Stuart Hobson, where they go through a series of drama workshops during the year together. Each of them produces a play, a Shakespeare play, and then we are able to go to the Shakespeare Theater at the Folger Library and each group performs its play for each other and for the parents. Another way of just getting kids to know each other and a way that they can do it at the same time that they are learning the wonderful language of Shakespeare and something that will stay with them throughout their lives.

There's a service component, at seventh grade the children perform service within the school. At eighth grade, the children go out and work at Friendship House, helping with the young children's programs there and they also serve lunch on a weekly basis at the Church of the Brethren Soup Kitchen. I'm always impressed that some of the kids realize that when we're on holidays there isn't somebody there at the time that we're usually there so they and sometimes their families make an extra effort to go on those days when we the school itself won't be there.

I think all of this kind of helps the children understand that they are part of a life that is broader than the school, that is part of the community. And of course they're getting that here too from the field trip program which is *so* [interviewee's emphasis] important to the school. By using the resources of the Washington community, the children meet people in all walks of life who contribute so much to their own lives. They assume that learning doesn't happen just within the walls of the classroom. Learning happens all over the place and you go all over the place to learn about whatever it is that you may be studying. We're truly fortunate in people that we have as, we call them our extended faculty, people whom we go back to year after year who help us with whatever it is that we are studying and learning.

OVERBECK: Do you have any favorite locations or spots on Capitol Hill that you use to learn?

PETERSON: On Capitol Hill...

OVERBECK: Many things that can be the series of note papers the kids did for a project on the fencing, I believe, the iron fences and so on. Is there a way in which the assets of the community and the physical assets of the community are used?

PETERSON: Absolutely. The architecture of Capitol Hill is part of the study of the history of Washington D.C. which happens at the fourth grade level. It used to happen at third grade, but that's what those pads of paper and the note paper are drawn from are the children's sketches that they make of the facades of Capitol Hill. There are also some wonderful clay facades of the structures that they've created as a result of that. Eastern Market, the young children go up to Eastern Market.

We last year found that our kindergarten class followed the hole across the street from Eastern Market which has now become the new building near Tunnicliff's as a way of understanding how buildings grow, how they're put together. So some architects who are parents in the school also helped that class follow the construction of the building during the course of the year.

Oh every place...pet shops... Lisa, of course, is the person who could answer this much more easily than I could. Having access to the government buildings as part of our study of United States history in seventh and eighth grade is so important to us. Exhibits at the Library of Congress, which we find people who are kindly willing to talk to us about...perhaps they aren't supposed to because taking young children to some of these exhibits may not be exactly be on strict lead [unintelligible word] with the rules, but they're kind to us.

The bagel bakery...there are just so many places that the children go and it's always as part of some aspect of their course of study from the youngest to the oldest.

OVERBECK: What about the relationship of the school to Garfield Park?

PETERSON: Of course we use Garfield Park all of the time for our play, for our physical education activities. It used to be that the children in the school would go over and help clean up Garfield Park. That was part of what we did. We don't do that anymore. Parents do it and we feel lucky that we are able to participate in the Garfield Park Association, I think it's now called. It's a group of people who live here and who care about the upkeep of that park and they meet several times a year sometimes more frequently, sometimes less.

[They] usually meet here at the school and they care about every aspect of the park: the beautiful old trees, the play equipment, the overflowing trash baskets and what can we do [*laughs*] knowing that the city is in the straits that it's in what can we do to help out. Of course the children themselves use the park for study and they look at the little ecosystems that exist under the tree or measure the circumference of a tree and try to figure out how old it is.

The park is just a natural part of our lives and we hope to care for it with the care that you give to places and people that you love [loud sound in background] and our parents are particularly helpful in that now we're more careful about what the kids should be picking up within the park itself. Is there something else that you're thinking about there?

OVERBECK: No, that's the kind of thing that we need. Talk to me some more your intellectual drive: it made you move to ...[unintelligible word] that weave into what makes...[unintelligible words] work. What kind of intellectual motivation do you...[unintelligible words] for yourself?

PETERSON: That I had?

OVERBECK: You have. Where does that drive come from? How do you recognize it? Where you'd get it?

PETERSON: Well maybe that's why I can look at that as a time that was so very important to me. Who knows where it comes from or when it arrives, I don't know. [long silence] I think I was in that generation of women who assumed that they were well taken care of when we were little girls and grew up in wonderful families who loved and cared for them and gave them everything they could possible want. It never occurred to me that I would have a career as an adult. Which may be why I found that teaching question hard to answer before. I think I assumed that I would graduate from college, before long get married, have children, and bake cookies [*laughs*].

So that's why I feel so very lucky that somehow or another in college something sparked and hit me hard that there was something very exciting intellectually to learn about this world. You can find it in absolutely anything that you come involved with and I have the key to me was Beethoven string quartets.

If anything now I find that the administrative aspects of what I do, I have to be careful not to let them become too tedious and I have to be able to be in the classroom and to talk with teachers and to find out what's going on and to find out what the big questions are that we're trying to get at or to answer.

We're never here without committees who are looking at what are the major themes that are tying together our social studies program. Or questions of some major issue for us. I have to have that or I dry out and I certainly would dry out quickly if it were just more administrative day-to-day aspects of the school that I was part of...[door knocks, opens, and there's a very brief conversation]. TAPE STOPS.

OVERBECK: What do you go to for intellectual fulfillment for yourself now that it's outside the walls of the day school?

PETERSON: Well, to be very honest the Day School is pretty consuming for me [*both laugh*]. And it's a place where, I think many of us who work here, find that we give a lot beyond the day-to-day operations. So, that I happen to love gardening and I love to do it here, I love to do it at home. Whenever I have an opportunity I attend plays and concerts and read. My husband's influence on me is important to...

OVERBECK: I was going to [unintelligible words], but do you want to start that now? That's what the other side of the paper is for [*interviewee laughing*]. Okay...[difficult to follow conversation because they are both laughing and talking at same time]...totally intellectual, there is a whole body sitting over there. [*interviewee laughing*]. Okay, husband's name?

PETERSON: George Peterson.

OVERBECK: And you met?

PETERSON: Oh my. We met the year after I finished graduate school and he finished college at a mutual friend's wedding. George then hopped off to Oxford for two years, while I hopped off to Philadelphia and then to Cambridge. We saw each other one summer while I was teaching at Germantown Friends I took a group of youngsters over to live with some families in France and then we did work study in England. George and I went mountain climbing in the lake district which was simply glorious-we had a wonderful time. But we lost touch with each other basically after that for many years until one day when I was walking along the street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I saw this little car that I remembered seeing in England and an arm comes stretching out while somebody was yawning and it was George. Soon thereafter we met again and we've been married for a long time.

It's been very interesting because he has not played a direct role in my life at Capitol Hill Day School. Let's see, how to say this: I'm somebody who likes happy endings. I'm always searching for ways to make life easier and whether it be here or any place else, I search for happy endings. George is somebody

who looks at life as it is and he's been wonderful for me in that way. He forces me to look more carefully at whatever it may be that I'm doing. Whether it be with other people, when I'm studying, or whatever else it may be.

So his support is not the usual kind of support that one might expect from...[unintelligible words] somebody to parties or helping out with whatever, something or another. But it is very strongly there, very deeply there and providing a kind of challenge to me. And he certainly nudged me beyond the point of thinking that I was going to stay home and take care of children and be a housewife. Not that he forced me to it, but by the manner by which our lives evolved and our conversations evolved, he would encourage me in what I was doing.

OVERBECK: What is his profession?

PETERSON: He's an economist with the Urban Institute. He travels a lot. He is right now traveling the Czech Republic as we speak.

OVERBECK: Do you and he have children?

PETERSON: We have two wonderful children: Gregory is at Wesleyan University, he graduated last year from high school. He's a child I particularly enjoy talking with, we have common interests I think in biology and evolution and Darwin and at the same tying that to a philosophical understanding. He's just a kind and wonderful person and it's a conversation that I miss not having him around all the time. And Kate is this wonderful, spirited person who went to the College of Worcester for two years and now is at the University of Colorado. She's involved with women studies, spends a great deal of time working for women who are in abusive situations and hopes to continue her studies so that she can...that is the field that she wishes to study and go into.

OVERBECK: Did they ever attend Capitol Hill Day?

PETERSON: They both did. Gregory came when I did, in third grade he came. He says he remembers, I don't remember this, he said he remembers crying the first day he was here. He had been in a Montessori school up until that point and there he had the freedom to move around and to choose those activities that he was interested in working on at a particular time. And his tears were simply one of absolute fear of what it meant to have a desk and what it meant to be centered in one place and to have someone who was going to be directing you and guiding you for a period of time.

Well, I think that I knew that were many similarities between what he had learned in the Montessori school and what he would be learning here. But he didn't yet and even if I had told him he wouldn't have understood it. It didn't take him long before he was comfortable about that. He came in.

Kate didn't come, and we didn't think that she would, until her eighth-grade year and she came when Capitol Hill Day School's was probably the smallest it ever has been. I think maybe we had six children in the class that year, five of whom were boys and Kate. She, needless to say, had the time of her life.

[both laugh]

OVERBECK: And now she's in women's studies.

PETERSON: It could have well led her there. Believe me, she was as much of an advocate for women's rights then as she was now *[both laughing]*. And those poor boys didn't know what they were getting. I... *[laughing, unintelligible words]* that Kate joined their class, but it was a wonderful place for her because it opened up to her the fact that knowledge was something other than strict memory.

She found herself excited about the mathematics that she was learning, excited about the history that she was learning in ways that she had never even be...she didn't realize that people could approach subjects in such a different way and she enjoyed it. She still remembers and talks about that year as being a very important one to her. She went on to Deal Junior High School and Wilson Senior High School. And Gregory actually went from here to Sidwell Friends.

OVERBECK: Your favorite piece of music?

PETERSON: It would have to be the late Beethoven string quartets *[laughs]*.

OVERBECK: Even after pulling them apart?

PETERSON: Even after pulling them apart and putting them back together. Although I must say that the St. Matthew Passion is something also which I *[interviewer begins talking]*...

OVERBECK: Your favorite thing to eat?

PETERSON: Oh my. Probably lobsters fresh out of the ocean.

OVERBECK: Did you attend private school as a child?

PETERSON: I did. For the first four years, I went to public schools in Baltimore County and then I went to Friends School in Baltimore for the rest of my high school, junior high school education.

OVERBECK: Is your family of the Friends persuasion?

PETERSON: Hmm, hmm. That actually happened as a result of our going to my brother and myself attending Friends. It was not something that we knew anything about before that in my family.

OVERBECK: Is that part of the quietness of Cemmy *[uncertain words]*?

PETERSON: I don't know, I'm not always quiet [*laughs*].

OVERBECK: You have a quiet simpler demeanor and all these things seem to come with this organization.

PETERSON: I don't know, it certainly was important to me. One of my great delights last year was serving on an accreditation team at Baltimore Friends School and I think it's probably unusual that they would ask a graduate to go back to help accredit a school that they once attended. We talked at length before I agreed to do it. This was the

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PETERSON: One of my great delights last year was serving on an accreditation team at Baltimore Friends School and I think it's probably unusual that they would ask a graduate to go back to help accredit a school that they once attended. We talked at length before I agreed to do it. This was the Lower School that the visiting committee was accrediting. To walk up and down the same marble steps that you walked up and down when you were ten years old and probably haven't walked up and down since you were twelve brings back memories...[recording stops, restarts]

OVERBECK: Start again, basically like...

PETERSON: Oh. Looking at an old photograph only this was real and it brought back all the wonderful sense of...all the things that I loved the most which happened to be music when I was in the lower school at Baltimore Friends and the music teacher, who was also the librarian, a woman I think was tremendously important to me. It also brought back all those fears that one had when one was a little girl. It was a very exciting occasion to be able to go back and to see what the school was about and to have those memories that kind of rooted me in it from long ago.

Shifting the subject a little bit, that is, you know as head of an independent school in the city there are a couple opportunities that I've had that help me understand Capitol Hill Day School better. One of them is that I serve on the accreditation committee for the Association of Independent Maryland Schools, and that is the organization that accredited us as well as Middle States. And it does the majority I would guess of the accrediting of independent schools in the Maryland area and increasingly in the Washington area. It's a good instrument. But sitting on that committee and reading as I've just been reading the self-studies and the visiting team reports of other schools, is just a tremendously rich opportunity to be able to understand how schools work, what they have in common [a lot of noise, a man comes in and talks briefly] and how they're different.

And the other way that I accomplish that as well is serving on the Board of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington, where I also have the opportunity to talk with and be with other heads of schools. No two independent schools are alike and each is governed by its board of trustees and has its own statement of mission. Every once in a while someone will ask me, a parent or sometimes even other schools, and ask if I'm tempted to look at another school and I'm really not. I didn't come to Capitol Hill Day School because I was interested in being head of an independent school. I came to Capitol Hill Day School because of the school that it is. I remain with the belief that the philosophy of this particular school happens to coincide with my own beliefs about what education is all about.

So, I'm very, very happy here, but I also feel extremely fortunate to have around me educators in both public and private schools from which we can learn and share resources and share ideas. This is a school that is more rooted in its community than most independent schools are. I don't think there's any question about that. In part, it's because we are the only—that's not true, I better be careful about that, there's St. Peter's—but in terms of independent schools on the Hill, there's St. Peter's, there is us, and 75 percent of our population comes from Capitol Hill. A much higher percentage comes from the city itself, and then some from the outlying suburbs.

That has its advantages and its disadvantages. We always have to be careful of being inclusive of families who are not part of the Capitol Hill Community because they bring something special to us as well. But, we also have to admit, I think, that a large part of the character of the school is its part in this community and what the community does for Capitol Hill Day School in the community. We just feel a responsibility for being here and we feel grateful to our neighbors and the community of Capitol Hill for being such a resource upon which we can draw and their kindness to us and the way that they act toward us. And I don't think you'd find that to be true quite so much with other independent schools in the city.

OVERBECK: If you had a wish for Capitol Hill Day School fifty years from now what would it be?

PETERSON: [long silence] Well, I guess I'd hope it's still here. [long silence] I hope the community will still be one that is caring about the city and about being part of the life of the city, and the very special fact that we are not only part of the life of a city, but we are the capital of the United States [laughs] and I hope that the community continues to attract people from diverse backgrounds and interests. I hope it becomes even more so, and I hope that that's part of what will continue to make this school a rich place to be.

I'd like to see the school continue with the kind of educational program that it has, the commitment to having children become involved in their learnings so that they carry that curiosity and involvement onto whatever it else is that they are studying. And I'd like to think that it would continue to happen through

the same ways that we are now teaching. Of course organizations change and ours is one that's quite sensitive to change just by the very governing structure of the board itself where we have a board of trustees that's basically elected by the parents of the school and by the faculty of the school, the members of the corporation. So it's always going to be reflective of what the issues and the concerns are of the people who are here.

OVERBECK: Are most of the parents of the students at Capitol Hill Day gone to private schools themselves?

PETERSON: No, most of them have not I would guess. We've never done a study of this, but it's definitely our impression that parents come not knowing much about independent schools and partially attracted by the school because of the fact that we are in a beautiful, old DC public school building that has a kind of charm that is true of the Hill as a whole. They don't see us as a place where you have to be dressed up or fancy to be able to come. They don't always understand what it takes to make a private school tick and I can certainly understand that. That you have to pay a tuition and on top of that we have other fund-raising efforts to round out what it really costs to educate a child at Capitol Hill Day School.

It's hard to educate somebody about that, it was hard for me to understand it, but that's something that I think one has to come to terms with and if your commitment is to send your child to an independent school, then you have to realize that that's something you have to pay for. There is, of course, within the school a desire to have a diverse student body in many respects, including an economically diverse student-body. So there's this strong financial assistance commitment. There has been from the founding of this school. This school was founded with commitments to serve an economically diverse student-body, a racially diverse student-body, and those commitments have remained. I think it's become more common, it is now part of every independent school's mission, I think, to serve a diverse student-body in many ways. But it has certainly been part of us from our beginning. [long silence]. I could ramble on about anything you ask me.

OVERBECK: I think we've covered everything. If you have any other thoughts, or if there's something else you'd like to add, whatever.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW