



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Janice MacKinnon

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

DEUTSCH: I'm with Jan MacKinnon on March 13, 2002, in the library at Peabody School. Jan, why don't you start by telling me how you came to Capitol Hill.

MACKINNON: I came to Capitol Hill because, I [am] originally from California, and when I was in college, John Kennedy had just been elected President and he said, "ask not [ed: what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country] and come to Washington, do it", and I decided that that is what I wanted to do. At the same time my Dad was working out here on a congressional committee, and so those two factors just came together and I ended up here working for a congressman.

DEUTSCH: Which congressman?

MACKINNON: Congressman Don Edwards, who was actually from San Jose.

DEUTSCH: Is that where you were from?

MACKINNON: No, I was from California, Los Angeles. Los Angeles. But the job was available with him, and I was fortunate enough to get it.

DEUTSCH: So you grew up in L.A., in the city?

MACKINNON: Oh, yes, I hate to admit it, but it's called Hollywood.

DEUTSCH: You grew up in Hollywood

MACKINNON: Yes, Hollywood, Hollywood High School.

DEUTSCH: Hollywood High School (laughter).

MACKINNON: Yes, my friend Cathy Pfeiffer would always say, "Did you know Jan went to Hollywood High School", and I would be tremendously embarrassed. (laughter)

DEUTSCH: Well, what was it like going to Hollywood High School?

MACKINNON: Well, it was really unusual because, it's like working on Capitol Hill. You hear all about the congressmen and the senators and the president and yet your life is just an ordinary life and you're here living your life and going to the grocery store and doing everything you normally do in a day. It was the same way at Hollywood High School, and yet you hear these things said about the environment (laughter).

DEUTSCH: A cool environment but an ordinary life....

MACKINNON: But it was just me. (Laughter) I never saw any stars, I never see any senators.

DEUTSCH: And so where did you go to college?

MACKINNON: I went to college at the University of California at Riverside, a small branch of the University of California.

DEUTSCH: So right after college you came here?

MACKINNON: Right after college I took a one year master's degree program in New Jersey at the Rutgers University. It was a program called the Eagleton Institute of Politics, and was designed specifically for young people who wanted to go into politics as staff representatives. And that is what I wanted to do, so I went there and it was a good experience although it was my first time on the East Coast ...all by myself.

DEUTSCH: Was it culture shock?

MACKINNON: Tremendous culture shock.

DEUTSCH: And then when you came to Washington, was it even more culture shock?

MACKINNON: No, it was much easier because Washington is more of a city. New Brunswick, New Jersey, is small town, not a very exciting place to be.

DEUTSCH: Did you move to Capitol Hill right away, as a young staffer?

MACKINNON: No actually, Adams Morgan first. I moved here when I got married; but I was living in Adams Morgan first and then I got married here. Shortly after—we were living on 4th Street and then moved to 7th Street because some enterprising very smart young realtor, when we were looking at a house because my husband is an architect—we were just walking down the street looking at houses, he picked—he started asking us what kind of house we would want and pretty soon had us looking at a house and pretty soon had us buying a house. And it was very fortunate.

DEUTSCH: So you're still in the same house?

MACKINNON: Same house.

DEUTSCH: So you've been there what, 30 ?

MACKINNON: Since '69. Bought it right after the riots.

DEUTSCH: I guess that was a good time to buy a house.

MACKINNON: Extremely good time to buy the house.

DEUTSCH: Now, did that make you nervous? Did you have concerns about moving....

MACKINNON: No we did not, but many of our relatives did. You see, Capitol Hill, even back in those days, it was such a livable place that that's why it didn't bother us. But I think when people heard—from out of town—oh you're living in Washington, D.C., that's where those riots were, they would get concerned.

DEUTSCH: And you have children?

MACKINNON: I have three children, who are now 29, 27, and 23.

DEUTSCH: And where are they?

MACKINNON: Rebecca's my oldest; she's living in a town called Chestnut Ridge NY. She's working as a, I want to get the words right, assistant talent agent for one of the talent agencies in New York called Gage Group. And she's married and her husband is a chemical engineer. And she has three dogs.

DEUTSCH: Three dogs. (laughter)

MACKINNON: (laughter)

DEUTSCH: O.K. And the next one?

MACKINNON: Timothy is 27, just turned 27, and he lives here in D.C. He is engaged to be married on June 22.

DEUTSCH: Ooo, that's exciting.

MACKINNON: Yes, and he's working for the American Association of Trial Lawyers in the media department.

DEUTSCH: Is he a lawyer?

MACKINNON: No, no.

DEUTSCH: And your baby?

MACKINNON: Baby is working at the Library of Congress in the Prints and Photography Division. That's Emily. She's 23 and she's also engaged to be married this spring.

DEUTSCH: Oh, my gosh.

MACKINNON: Same day as Paul Cymrot, on the 11th.

DEUTSCH: May 11?

MACKINNON: Yes.

DEUTSCH: And is she going to stay around here when she's married?

MACKINNON: Probably not. Although she loves working in the Library, her fiancé is in environmental studies and loves to get his hands on the real earth, so I think he came to Washington expecting policy to be as exciting as the real thing and is finding he really prefers the real thing, so I think that they are probably going to an area where he can do more environmental work.

DEUTSCH: Tell me about how you got started in the schools or maybe something exciting came before that.

MACKINNON: No, actually not. After I worked for the Congress for a while, I then went downtown to work for the budget office of the District of Columbia when Walter Washington was Mayor. And that was very exciting and fun and I enjoyed it, but David and I wanted to have a family. We actually had a plan to go into the Peace Corps and decided no we wanted to stay home and get started with a family. Rebecca came along in '72 and of course then you begin to meet other mothers on the Hill and you start to talk about schools, play groups, nursery school groups and everything, and at that time there were very few small children. I remember sitting out on the stoop with Rebecca and just letting her play on the sidewalk and kids would walk by but there were very very few. I finally linked up with Lori Garrison—Lori and Dave Garrison who lived down on 4th Street—and the kids started playing together. And, we were aware that Sue Wodatch and Claire Davis were sending their kids to the local public school. I just assumed that's what you did, you know, I grew up in California where you really only went to private school if you were a movie star, so....

DEUTSCH: And you weren't. (laughter)

MACKINNON: No, (laughter) so you know, when the time came I enrolled Rebecca in the pre-K program, Lois Kaufman was the teacher at that point.

DEUTSCH: Peabody, right here?

MACKINNON: Yes, right here. And they all started here and of course [by] then I had quit—I was fortunate enough to be a stay at home mom—and so [I] began to get very involved in schools just because it was fun, I found it a lot of fun. Veola Jackson was the principal at the time, she was very welcoming to parents to come in and work, and of course Lois was encouraging to get parents to come in to work a lot

and [I] just got involved with that. What probably got me really more involved than the average parent, though, was when Rebecca was in Kindergarten and Veola asked me to set up what she was calling an exploratory arts program at the upper grade levels, and I said “Oh, but Rebecca’s just a kindergartner,” and she said, “Well , she’s going to be older.” And so I thought about it, and I said yes indeed she will be older one day and so I sort of have to think about what kind of school she is going to have in fifth, sixth, seventh grade. I started working with her in terms of really reaching out to some of the community groups at that time because there were no arts programs then. I mean, you had [a] school, you had a teacher, you had a child. You had none of the arts program, none of the science programs or anything that they have now in the schools. [I began to] set up some programs with Capitol Hill Arts Workshop and other groups. And that’s how I really got very involved in working in the schools.

DEUTSCH: Then, did you go back to school yourself?

MACKINNON: I did but not until [later]. I stayed home basically until Emily was in kindergarten, and during the year she was enrolling in kindergarten, Bob Boyd was running for the school board, and he asked me to be his co-campaign manager. His to-be wife Charmaine Yochim was his campaign manager and I was going to...

DEUTSCH: Who was his campaign manager?

MACKINNON: Charmaine Yochim, Y-o-c-h-i-m I think is the way she spelled it. So he won and when he won he asked me to come downtown as a staff assistant. I thought, well, that sounds like a good thing to do, it’s what I did before, it still involved the schools...

DEUTSCH: I can do that again...

MACKINNON: And Emily’s in school, so that was a good idea. Well, I found myself working more and more in the schools than with him, and he was always very good because he said, you want time, go on a field trip, go, you know, do this, do that, go. And I kept kind of inching more and more toward the schools and spending less and less time downtown and decided at some point that was what I wanted to do professionally since I was spending so much time in the schools anyway—setting up programs, and just all kinds of programs, computer program here, ecology program at Watkins, you know, different programs. My kids were getting older at that point, and I decided I needed to go back to school before they hit college because once they’re in college for the next ten years, I could not think of anything [like that], so I did go back to school to get my librarian degree.

DEUTSCH: Where’d you go, Catholic?

MACKINNON: No, to the University of Maryland. They have a wonderful program that is specifically for school librarians, a two year master's program.

DEUTSCH: Is that where Cathy went?

MACKINNON: Cathy did her work at Catholic, I believe.

DEUTSCH: Yes, maybe that's where I... And so then you came here?

MACKINNON: Then I came to Stuart [Hobson], to the Middle School.

DEUTSCH: And that would have been about...?

MACKINNON: Twelve years ago.

DEUTSCH: '90?

MACKINNON: That's exactly right, as a matter fact....'89, '90. That is exactly right. Emily was in seventh grade at that time, and Veola was sick. I did not know she had a library program position open, and I was learning so much in [library] school about the new technologies [that] were coming into the library system and at that point, of course, it was CD ROMs and not even the Internet, but I felt that the way that you teach a child to look for information and think through their information needs was so easy to teach on a computer. I was talking to her about that and she looked at me and she said, would you like to come and work for me? I said, but Ms. Jackson you already have two librarians. And she said, "Oh... She was always so sneaky, she had another position. And she had hidden it, and she just unhid it and hired me. Unfortunately, I never had the pleasure to work for her because she got sick the next year; she never came back at that point. And that year was the year we started to work together—have the Veola Jackson Center, developed it at Stuart Hobson and named it in her honor.

DEUTSCH: And what was that exactly? Is Veola v-e-o-l-a?

MACKINNON: Yes. The Veola Jackson Center was a concept that we put together several people including myself, Sharon Raimo, Elizabeth Teferra, Jake Collins who was a technology person at that time. The concept was to combine the research and writing capabilities that the computers were giving us with the traditional library in one room. And at that point, of course, it was a very new concept. Now it's not so new, now it's ordinary. [We planned to] put a whole bank of computers in there with—and build up the library—[and also] put your [management] system... on computers, so you had your management capability.

DEUTSCH: Your card catalog?

MACKINNON: Yes. And so that's what we did. We had some fund raisers in honor of Veola and brought some good friends together. And I think that was the first time that the Cluster really put a commitment into libraries, and I think it's probably why these three schools certainly have the finest library system in the city. I go to other [school] libraries all the time on assessment teams for the Superintendent, and I just want to cry. They are dark, dank, the books are old, it's no wonder the children don't want to learn. It's just the saddest thing but the Cluster has brought a huge amount of money into libraries in all three schools. We've had lots of grants, lots of outside support.

DEUTSCH: How do you feel about the computers in school? Obviously you are enthusiastic.

MACKINNON: I think it's tremendously exciting, and that's the one thing I miss about [not] being at Stuart Hobson, I think at this point, because although I think it has to be extremely carefully managed, I think what computers [can] do is put a child in charge of their own learning and reduce the teacher['s role] to becoming really more of an advocate and to provide the structure and provide goals. The kids really just take off on the subject they are interested in and they use the computer, but again it has to be managed *so* carefully. And there's a lot of abuse by the computers in schools—people just fail to manage them...that's all I can...

DEUTSCH: A lot of abuse by the children, you mean?

MACKINNON: If they aren't taught how to use it effectively and properly. Not just the care and feeding of a computer but also the evaluation of the material that you get, how you search, how you determine whether what's coming across that computer is good. But there are lots and lots of programs and the one that Cathy and I did over at Watkins and here is probably one of the best, providing a global way for looking at a problem or an issue. The one that we worked on so closely was the butterfly project, I don't know if you are familiar with that?

DEUTSCH: I know a little bit about it. But...

MACKINNON: It's called Journey North, and what it does—it's an Internet site that traces the migration of animals, birds, butterflies, during the fall and the spring. And so what it does—you set yourself up to do your curriculum, and your kids are watching for butterflies, they're aware of the habitat, they're aware of the weather patterns. And at the same time, in their own area, they learn from the Internet what's happening in Georgia, or Mexico, or wherever they [the butterflies] are and how they're coming north and when they're coming north. We're going to actually start a habitat watching this week with Louise Chapman's class but it's a fascinating Internet site—very, very well done. And they do the same thing with whales, loons, bald eagles, robins, so almost any animal you choose to select—you can see how you

can broaden your studies with that. The weather, the seasons, but again you have to have a good concept for what your goals are to be able to use that kind of program effectively.

DEUTSCH: Do you think just the fact that it's on the computer makes the kids more interested in it?

MACKINNON: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Yes. I mean, that's why it's such a tremendous learning tool because the kids do anything to get in. Early on when I was at Hobson, about 6 or 7 years ago, I had a small room, it was called the Educational Management Room, it was the most fantastic management, technological system you can imagine. It was distance learning and you had an interactive TV, you had a fax system with an 800 number, a telephone with an 800 number—and they only gave us one computer. I managed by, a variety of means, to get a system with ten computers in the room so the kids could come in, they all had a computer that they shared with another person. This system was set up so that you could come in the room, download stuff—material from this group which was all curriculum—they could interact with that and then they can go out on their own. Well the kids would come in—I was doing archeology at that point, because I was working with Ruth Ann Overbeck—and they'd come in, and they'd get everything they needed to know about archeology. They would design Power Point [projects]—they did it all. They just constructed their own piece of the world. And we took them up to Sidwell Friends because they let us do some of their archeology [work], took them up to the Lab School because they had some archeology projects, and it was a wonderful learning experience. They totally enjoyed it because they knew it was all computer based. They also knew that they wanted to be in that room and so there was never even a thought that there would be a behavior problem because they so badly wanted to be in that room.

DEUTSCH: That's nice.

MACKINNON: I'm not a classroom management person, and I didn't even have to look twice because they just would give anything to be in there.

DEUTSCH: Do you see any disadvantages with them?

MACKINNON: With the computers? Oh, yes, because what happens is the kids just want to work on the computer and they just get [focussed on that]. And of course then [there's the] whole safety issue, the whole privacy issue, which is tremendous. One of the things they stress very, very heavily in our own training from DCPS is you never set up a room which has a computer facing a wall. All your computers need to be facing out, so that you can see what's on the screen, because they *will* get into all kinds of things that they should not be into. Plus this whole issue of plagiarism and that's where your teachers have to be trained to realize that plagiarism is a whole lot easier coming off a computer. All you have to do is download it and if they're not sensitive to that...

DEUTSCH: I guess at this grade level that's not much of an issue but I know in high schools...

MACKINNON: Middle school and yes in high school, I'm sure too. My true experience with computers is with middle school. Here I just basically use them for teacher training, and I use them for me to structure what I'm doing. It's not something I can do with our kids. Whatever the kids do in Peabody in computers happens in the classroom.

DEUTSCH: How do you see the neighborhood changing? I mean obviously there've been changes since you've been on 7th Street.

MACKINNON: Yes, there've been some huge changes, and a lot of it is socioeconomic. Do the changes first. A lot of it has stayed the same. I think the nature of Capitol Hill—the kind of commitment and the kind of value system—has really stayed the same, and that's the good part. You know, it was a very young community when we moved here. People had moved out, The riots had occurred. People were moving out and, and young people were able to buy houses. And many, many of our children all grew up together because of the fact that people our age had bought these houses. Two, three, four, five years down the road they had children, the children all went to school together, and it was a very cohesive neighborhood. Really, really small [community] that you knew and took responsibility for all the kids that were around you. I think it's not just—I don't think it's the fact that it's different, that people want it to be different—I think this world that we have right now is just so intense with both parents working, financial pressures, there aren't as many kids in the neighborhoods, and those that are you don't see because they might be in day care from 7 am 'til 6 o'clock at night.

DEUTSCH: Yes, there's not as much street action.

MACKINNON: Yes, you don't see the kids walking to school even though they only live three blocks away because the parents drop them on the way [to work], and that's really unfortunate. I hate to see that. But I don't think that's going to change. [Although] I see a lot of people coming back to the concept of being at home with their kids.

DEUTSCH: Do you?

MACKINNON: Yes. I see more and more young people wanting to do that, and I think that helps. Many of the parents in our Reggio program are stay at home moms, many of them.

DEUTSCH: I certainly see them a lot, in Lincoln Park, and much more than ten years ago.

MACKINNON: Yes, they are. Unfortunately, there is a real serious contrast with parents who can't stay at home, so if they can't stay at home they don't have as much opportunity to be with their kids at school,

and they try very hard, We still get good parent support throughout the Cluster, but it's hard and they have to plan ahead, and they have to have things on the calendar. And what our parents do primarily is working more in the classroom; like they're not out there organizing the house tour and leading the race but they're there in the classroom and working. It's just a lot harder and that's unfortunate. I would like everybody to have that chance, because I know how much it meant to me to be with my kids.

DEUTSCH: Did your kids work in any neighborhood businesses? Did they have jobs on the Hill?

MACKINNON: They were dog walkers. (Laughter)

DEUTSCH: (Laughter) That's a job.

MACKINNON: (Laughter) And that was their main job in life, I think for many years. And they didn't want much more. They were happy getting—they were not much—they'd earn a dollar walking the dog down the corner grocery store, buy a soda, walk home with the dog, and they were perfectly happy. (Laughter)

DEUTSCH: They'd done their job.

MACKINNON: But, Becca worked at Grubb's for a while. They weren't big babysitters but they certainly did that. I'm trying to think what Timothy—Tim didn't work in the neighborhood so much, he...

DEUTSCH: Did they all go through public school or did they...?

MACKINNON: No, no what they did, they went from pre-K through 8th grade, they graduated from Hobson or Stuart Hobson in the younger kid's case. All three of them managed to go to Field School. And have three—they were three very different children with three very different experiences at Field but they all were at the same place.

DEUTSCH: Well, that makes life easier.

MACKINNON: Yes, it was, it was. And I think they had good experiences there, very different from public school. But their mind was molded by their public school experience more than their private school experience.

DEUTSCH: And I guess their experience was very different from yours. Is there a big difference between the kind of community you grew up in and the...

MACKINNON: Oh, yes, yes. I mean, very different, I mean... Southern California, you know, everything that you come to mind when you think about southern California in terms of being WASP and

conservative is not only southern California but also my family, Republican (laughter). They'd probably be horrified—except for my Dad, my Dad and his one brother, they were union leaders so they were sort of the black sheep of the family. But everyone, it's very different, yes.

DEUTSCH: Anything else you want to talk about?

MACKINNON: Well, I think, those are a lot of the facts of what I've done. As I said, I've been very fortunate because I've had tremendous support. And one thing that's helped me a lot through my life is just changing a lot, changing jobs, changing things, giving me a fresh perspective all the time. I love working with the kids. I used to coach softball, and when I met John Parker at the reception, I told him I said one day maybe I'll come back and coach again. I coached when Don [Denton] first started that league, I coached for three or four years at the Watkins' Field and then I started [at Stuart Hobson].

DEUTSCH: Did you coach girls?

MACKINNON: No, at Watkins it was girls and boys, mainly boys. But at Stuart Hobson I coached the girls' softball team.

DEUTSCH: Now had you played softball as a kid or was this something...?

MACKINNON: Yes, off and on, I just always loved baseball, baseball and softball, it's just been one of my things. Between that and the Scouts. And I think one of the important things that really is different—going back to your question about the differences between what [I had in my childhood and what] my kid's [had] growing up here and early on on Capitol Hill—so much of it you had to create. And school certainly being the number one thing, but it wasn't just there. And you can either sit back and accept the fact that it wasn't there or you could move or you could do something about it. [For example], Girl Scouts, I think if I'm not mistaken, Rebecca's Girl Scout leader was Barbara Eck, I could be mistaken about that. But [when] it came time for Tim with Boy Scouts, there was—St. Peter's Scouts had been long gone—we had to reactivate that—every program, Capitol Hill Arts Workshop, Sally Crowell...

I think '72 must have been a threshold year because everything [so much] started in '72. Veola came to the Cluster—to Peabody, Sally came to Capitol Hill Arts Workshop, everything sort of started in '72. And you had to build to make this a community that had all those kinds of services, there was Softball on the Hill had to start, you didn't have the baseball at the time. I mean, now this is a wonderful area for children, and I hope that our parents don't just take it for granted. You know, it's not something you can just come in and say, I want this for my child and if it's not there then I'm going to go somewhere else.

DEUTSCH: Right.

MACKINNON: You just can't do that. You can, but it doesn't create a community.

DEUTSCH: Right.

MACKINNON: And those kinds of bonds that you get when you are doing that and creating a community are just life-long. I'm trying to think of some of the other services...

DEUTSCH: Are you still, are you still coaching?

MACKINNON: No, [not] since I left Stuart Hobson, and I tried (laughter) one year to teach my [five year old] Girl Scouts how to play softball and it was a total disaster. (Laughter) They were so funny, they were out here on the playground and they were running all over the place. To tell them to run from home base to first to second to third to home was—oh no, five year olds, they ran to the pitchers mound, they ran to third base, they went back to first (laughter). No I gave it up.

DEUTSCH: It doesn't seem that complicated if you grew up with it, but...

MACKINNON: It was awful. It was awful. (Laughter)

DEUTSCH: I think that's a good point that a community that doesn't have everything forces you to: a) think about what you want, and b) try and make it happen if it's not there.

MACKINNON: Try and make it happen. And I think, I certainly may have been a different person, very easily could have been a very different person. But we're here, I liked my house, I wasn't going anywhere, and I was, you know, this was my school. In fact it's funny, because I remember one time Judith Hunter, who lives up on 6th Street, and I were over at Hobson before it became the Cluster, and we were talking to Andrea Irby, who was Veola's assistant at that time, and she was trying to understand where we were coming from. And finally she just looked at us—she said it in her eyes, I don't know if she really said it in words—but clearly her message was you are not going away are you? And we said, No. No. (laughter) We are going to figure this out and how to make it work, because it was just, I always told Jennifer [Smith, principal of the Capitol Hill Cluster School] she was fortunate I wasn't a parent for her.

DEUTSCH: (Laughter.) You'd have bugged her...

MACKINNON: I'd have bugged her crazy, crazy. I mean it was just always [important] being on things to make sure it was going to work. And one of the things—and I thought a lot too about this five minutes I have to talk about, Steve said I have to talk [at the Awards Dinner]. I think to me the most important thing is you have to make it work, and you have to make it work not just for your three children—and see, that's the key for me. Otherwise you know it will work for your three children but where do you go after

that. And that's probably why I'm still at Peabody (laughter) besides the hugs I get everyday. That's pretty nice.

DEUTSCH: That is pretty nice. What does your husband do?

MACKINNON: He's a planner, government manager, he works at the Department of Defense, in the Office of Economic Adjustment. And it's funny, he's worked there since Rebecca was born, almost 30 years. He deals with areas of the country that have bases that are either closing or winding down in communities to—and it's been good for him, it's been a very creative job. He's managed to stay there all his professional life.

DEUTSCH: Does he travel a lot?

MACKINNON: Oh, yes, travels a lot. I mean not every [month]—but a lot. More than I.

DEUTSCH: You see yourself staying here?

MACKINNON: Oh, yes.

DEUTSCH: I mean, you're not close to retiring yet, but at some point...

MACKINNON: Actually, I've been, that's the downside of having several different opportunities and jobs is—I always joke about it but it's true—my husband is my retirement. I have no retirement, I can't retire, I have to just quit one day. You know, I have no retirement, I've been just not anywhere long enough to have built up investment like that, but, he's my retirement.

DEUTSCH: Well, you invested in him. (Laughter.) And he invested in you.

MACKINNON: Yes.

DEUTSCH: So you're here for the...

MACKINNON: Yes, I think so. I—this is I think my fourth full year at Peabody. The first three years as they say, [I was] just involved getting stuff and trying to figure out what to do with four and five year olds when you're a librarian, and they can't read, and they certainly don't know the Dewey Decimal system, so anything you went to [library] school for—you know, [you] put it on a shelf. So, I feel like I'm beginning to get to where I have a sense of where they are. It'll take me a couple more years to kind of solidify that.

DEUTSCH: Do you read a lot of children's books?

MACKINNON: I like to read the children's books. I always have, I always have. Even in the middle school. In fact sometimes I'll still take a middle school book and read it, instead of an adult book and I just find them really good.

DEUTSCH: What are your favorites?

MACKINNON: I actually like the pictures book the best and—if you're talking about my favorite authors—Jerry Pinckney, who is African American author, he has done...

DEUTSCH: P-i-n-c-k-n-e-y?

MACKINNON: [spells it]. He's done both nonfiction and fiction. One of my favorites from him is John Henry—he did a book on John Henry. And Jan Bradt [distortion masks words] marvelous. There's [another favorite] a woman named Lynn Cherry who does environmental writing, she did some really good picture books. I also liked to—when I was at Hobson I really liked taking the picture books—that had really solid, really solid [content] picture books, and use them with the middle school kids because it, first of all, was motivating because they're beautiful and, second of all, the concepts were right there. They didn't have to read a whole chapter to get one or two main points, and then you can build from there. But it was often that I would use a picture book as a take-off point, especially some of the really good environmental stuff.

DEUTSCH: So two weddings this spring, that's kind of nice.

MACKINNON: Yes it is

DEUTSCH: Both around here?

MACKINNON: No, both—Emily is getting married in Mt. Savage, Maryland which is near Cumberland, half way between his parents and our home. And Tim and Sarah are getting married in York, Maine, so that's the longer trip.

DEUTSCH: It will be an exciting spring for you.

MACKINNON: Yes, it is; it's going to be a nice spring.

DEUTSCH: Are your kids going to be at the dinner?

MACKINNON: My son might come. Emily will be on her honeymoon. And I mentioned to Tim, to Tim and to my surprise he said yes. I don't think he knows yet he has to wear a tuxedo or get real dressed up. But he is really willing to come. I'd love to have them both come. I'm very happy about the people they're marrying. I just think they're really very fortunate. I'm not sure that Tim's wife knows what she's

getting into (laughter) but it's good. And I hope at least one of them stays around the Washington area.
But that's...

[Question started on Side 1 is repeated on Side 2.]

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

DEUTSCH: Jan, when did you come to Washington for the first time?

MACKINNON: I came to Washington for the first time when I was a sophomore in college. My brother and sister and I drove out to the East Coast for our first time,—my father was working for a Congressional committee which was drafting the legislation for the Office on Aging. His job was to set up the hearings and legislative sessions on the area, so, of course, he had already psyched out Washington, knew where the parties were, knew the best bars, knew Congressmen, had stories. and I was coming from California and I just thought it was thrilling. I mean I was completely overwhelmed because I thought "This is the best place in the world." And since he had been living here about six months, he knew some places around and he would take us over to the Eastern Shore and he took us up to a ballgame, and I think we spent about three weeks before we drove back. But I had it in my mind after that I wanted to come back to Washington.

DEUTSCH: *The place.*

MACKINNON: The place, the place. I remember the Monocle from that trip, I remember the Market Inn from that trip, a couple of other places that are still here and that's quite a long time ago.

DEUTSCH: Did he live on the Hill, or...?

MACKINNON: He—no, he did not, he was living out in Virginia with a family that we knew. The gentleman was a lobbyist for the optometric association at the time, and he just had an extra room and let my pops stay there, so it was a convenient place for him to be.

DEUTSCH: Tell me about the Capitol Hill Classic.

MACKINNON: The Capitol Hill Classic when it first started was proposed by Skipper Nelson, or Carl Nelson—and Carl and some other people were on the fundraising committee at the time, in my house. And I remember Carl suggesting that we run a marathon. And he said that people pay money to run three, five, ten miles. And everybody said, "They pay money to do that?" And he said yes, it's the new thing. We were all quite dubious, but he prevailed and we started it that year with Shelton's Market Basket was the first [sponsor, with a] yellow shirt....

DEUTSCH: What year would that have been, do you remember?

MACKINNON: No. It would have been the 100th anniversary, though, of the school.

DEUTSCH: 100th anniversary of Peabody?

MACKINNON: No, it had to have been more than that because now we're 120.

DEUTSCH: Well, it could have been 20 years ago, the first race—'82. I think so.

MACKINNON: Yes, that might have been, because we were doing the 100 year celebration of Peabody, and we had a big yard sale and this was to go to the playground equipment, that first old wooden equipment. There was no playground equipment; it was an asphalt playground, and there were these two monkey bars that were like an upside down U, except it was crooked. That was the only thing that was on the playground. So now I look out there like after school and you can't hardly make your way between all the kids and the parents and the networking that's going on out there. It's quite changed, but at the time we invested money in that playground for the 100th year; we had a yard sale, we had the first race. And it was all in celebration. The Marine Corps Band came and played for us and it was a big to-do. Joan Schwartz, Mary Mattioli Donovan, and Sue Sprenke, and most of those older folks were kind of on the planning committee.

DEUTSCH: Did you run?

MACKINNON: No, never. Once, I think, I walked the 3 K. No, David—my husband—was very involved for several years with the Finish [Line] Committee, you know where you say you've finished and now you can go collapse, he did that for several years. But I never thought it was something that I wanted to do, to head up the race. I always admired people like Bruce Brennan and these other people who'd done it because it's a tremendous lot of work but it's not something I've done. The race has been an important part of our lives for a long time. I enjoy it now because now what I do is I just come and watch; I always come and I always see everybody and enjoy it but it's kind of nice not to have to worry about. You feel like you've done your part. But building up the playground was really a huge difference because it made a place for people to sit down now and for kids to come. Because when my kids were little I would bring them up to Peabody or to over to Watkins to play, and it was not good, I mean that's the only way you can say it, it was not good.

DEUTSCH: Yes, there was no place really to play.

MACKINNON: No place to play. Very, very bad conditions for the grounds, safety, neighborhood. I guess there were neighborhood people who were not terribly friendly and so, you know, having that

playground built and then bringing people to the playground and parents and people who come on the weekends and of course now hopefully we, the school yard habitat going strong next year.

DEUTSCH: You mean over at Watkins?

MACKINNON: Well, Watkins is about two years ahead of us so they're in pretty good condition...

DEUTSCH: But you're doing the same thing here?

MACKINNON: We're doing the same thing here. You can tell the area out here, but we [have] had a difficult time establishing it, because we had this two year period of time [with a lot of] construction taking place, with Mr. Scallon's building [next door] and with a lot of renovation work going on here at Peabody. So we had cars, trucks, construction equipment at the same time you're trying to put in the garden. Basically it's finished now except for continuing weeding and maintenance. Mr. Scallon still has a fence to replace here and some edging to do which I understand he's going to do within the month and once that's done we'll do another work day, and then hopefully it'll become more like what the Watkins garden looks like. Because it's really come into fruition now. Watkins Garden is now—looks tremendous and it has really become an institutional part of their instruction. I mean the teachers are using it more and more every year, their science is becoming stronger every year over there, and the garden is really an important part of it. And, again, look at the fact that you have a volunteer over there who is running their science program. You have [a] volunteer who is working with the regular science teacher. This woman is working with the garden two, three days a week. What a wonderful asset! But it's making a difference. They are further along. It will take until probably next year [for Peabody to] to get that much integrated between using the garden and our instruction.

DEUTSCH: There's always been talk from time to time about closing Peabody.

MACKINNON: Well, actually that's how Mrs. Jackson came to Peabody and Edmonds School at the time, it was on the closure list, both of these schools were on the closure list.

DEUTSCH: That's right; now which is Edwards?

MACKINNON: Edmonds. Is over at 9th and D. It is closed now and it's closed because it was closed as part of the deal with the school system to create the middle school. Close that school, begin the middle school program. So it's a history that we've had to fight—about every four to five years, it seems that Peabody is on the closure list. I think we've now passed that I hope. The last time—most recent one—was about 4 years ago. And if I'm not mistaken it was General Becton who said he was going to close it and sell the school for a considerable amount of money. And many of our parents went down to the School Board and just spoke very fervently and probably the most fervent was Cathy Pfeiffer who

when she wanted to speak fervently could really speak fervently. She could really say it in ways that you could not ignore, and I think Gen. Becton had to listen finally. And I don't think we'll have that problem again; they've invested a great deal of money, the building is significantly better than when I came. It's been painted, they have new restrooms, it has a new roof, it has new windows. It really at this point is in good shape. And it's a solid school, it's not falling apart, it's a beautiful building.

DEUTSCH: Well, talking about fervent, I drove by the other—when was it, a month or so ago—when you had your out of bounds registration and at five o'clock in the afternoon the day before there were like four people here.

MACKINNON: You know, Oyster School is the school that has the claim for having the longest lines the earliest in time, and they always get the newspaper coverage. We have had that to some extent. We have been lining up probably at 6 o'clock in the morning. I don't know if we had people spending the night, if you were the night before we may very well have had that.

DEUTSCH: That's what I saw.

MACKINNON: I don't know what you can do about the out-of-bound rule. Every year the school system changes its mind as to how you can do this, but there is no fairer way than first come, first served. I mean, what else are you going to do? I think one of the things that I know there is a lot of concern about the number of spaces available for the many, many small children I see on the streets. I think there's spaces available, they just have to apply for them, especially if they are in-boundary. If they are in-boundary, we have to take them. We have high out-of-boundary enrollment right now, and probably always will have, but you know you have eleven pre-schools here, you have 220 four and five year olds. Watkins has the Montessori program. In the Cluster schools we are serving—taking in every year—probably 150 to 200 children at the age of 3. That's a lot of spaces. And many of those are coming from out-of-boundary, but in-boundary people have first choice. But we have three [pre-school programs]—we have Montessori, we have the Reggio program and we have three pre-Kindergarten classes on the first two floors under Jennifer. That's a lot of spaces.

DEUTSCH: So there's room for everyone in-boundary who wants to come and, yes, plenty of room, and then you take the out-of-boundary.

MACKINNON: And there's a lot of choice, too, you know people really need to look at the different programs, because Montessori is very different from Reggio, which is very different from the first two floors. So you really want to kind of look at it.

DEUTSCH: What is the difference between Reggio and Montessori?

MACKINNON: Montessori is actually very structured as a program. And they have very specific learning materials that they use all—and of course they are based on Maria Montessori's philosophy. [The] Reggio program is based on a program in Italy, and all the teachers upstairs have been trained in it. They are much—they are not as structured—they are probably the least structured of the three programs. They plan their program much more on the children's [interests. The] projects that they do—like for instance the butterfly project or a certain country they might—they are more focused in terms of planning their instruction on what the kids are doing. And they place a high value, as all programs do at this age, on language development. But I think they exhibit that value probably more than some of the other programs. The program under Jennifer is a D.C. public school program and as such we have to follow the curriculum and the standards of the D.C. public schools and as such, therefore, we get much more emphasis on pre-writing skills, pre-reading skills, learning the phonics, learning the sounds of the letters. They're very strong when they go to Watkins, in terms of that and what you would think of them, you would think of a more basic education, phonics based, literacy based, so each one is quite different. Each one is very solid, but different.

END OF INTERVIEW