



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

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**Interview with Mary Lou Dempf Stott**

**Interview Date:** April 27, 2002  
**Interviewer:** Jack Womeldorf  
**Transcriber:** [none; not a taped interview]

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[This is not a taped interview; these are notes made by Jack Womeldorf during an interview with Mary Lou Dempf Stott in Honolulu, HI. Ms. Stott grew up at 13 Fourth Street NE, the home now owned by Jack and his wife Ann. These notes were reviewed for accuracy by Ms. Stott.]

Grandfather Joseph Anton Dempf was a lawyer, who also worked at the Naval Observatory, as Collector for the Washington Brewery (1891-1917), and at GPO. Her father, Martin Anthony Dempf, was four when the family moved into the house in 1896 (which was built in 1892). The Dempfs paid \$10,000 for the house. The grandparents had lived at Fourth and F Streets prior to moving to 13 Fourth Street.

Her great grandfather, Anthony Dempf, worked as a decorative painter in the U.S. Capitol under Constantino Brumidi. She thought he painted particularly the faces of the cherubs. (Her family records had him as Anton Edward Dempf; he was born in 1831.) The family had lived at 329 Maryland Avenue NE when Joseph Dempf was a boy.

Grandfather, a sometime inventor, knew Thomas Edison and John Phillip Sousa, who visited the house. Her father taught FDR to drive, when the latter was Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

An idea of the original owners was to use the front half of the living rooms as an ice cream parlor, with the counter under the arch between the living room and library. This was not done.

Grubbs Drugstore was at its present location, as were the groceries on East Capitol at the corners of Fourth and Fifth Streets. Congress Market was owned by Mr. Lenkin. Every day Grandmother Dempf called to order food, never going to the store! Jimmy T's location was used as a pharmacy/soda fountain. (Jimmy T's was established in 1969.)

At the southwest corner of Fourth and A Streets NE, there was a Chinese laundry, and in its rear extension lived a Russian princess. Across the street was a Greek candy store and deli. There was a shoemaker at Second and East Capitol. Mr. Caputo had a barbershop on the north side of East Capitol, between Fourth and Fifth. He cut all policemen's hair. He had 12 children.

Mary Louise Dempf (born March 2, 1932) went to Peabody School, then St. Cecilia's, Stuart, and Eastern High School, and Wilson Teachers College (now part of U.D.C.) She was a flight attendant for American Airlines for a while. Perhaps it was after that that she attended the University of Maryland and George Washington University, where she earned a teacher's certificate. She also attended the American Airlines stewardess school.

In the 1950's, when the neighborhood had gone down hill, her friends questioned why her family lived where they did.

At some point, the family bought the house just to the north, now owned by Hans Moenig (then a single-family dwelling) and four houses on F Street NE to rent out.

Her father sold cars at Arcade Pontiac (14th and Irving), and later, particularly during World War II, worked for the Du Bois Soap & Chemical Co., selling cleaning supplies to war plants and hotels in the DC, Virginia, and Maryland area, making a lot of money.

Her father was Protestant, her mother a Roman Catholic. The family attended St. Joseph's for some years, then switched to St. Peter's.

Mary Lou met George when he was at the Naval Academy. He'd gone to Western High School. Both graduated from college in 1955. They were engaged after six months, and married six months later. He commanded two nuclear attack submarines, retiring as Commander after twenty years in the Navy.

In 1953 her father lost his pension when his company went bankrupt. The back bedroom was then made into an apartment. A Library of Congress employee, Miss Green, and her 92-year-old mother lived in the back bedroom, with the 'little room' as their kitchen, and the bathroom in between making up their apartment.

The basement had been fixed up with pine paneling and a kitchen in the late 30s or early 40s so her mother could cook separately from her grandmother. They didn't get along for years although no harsh word was ever exchanged. She recalls great parties in the basement when she was in high school and college.

Mary Lou slept in the front bedroom alcove; her parents had the rest of the room. Her grandmother and older sister slept in the second bedroom, her brother in the tiny bedroom, and her grandfather had the back bedroom. (He died there.) Her Grandmother had dementia, and was at St. Elizabeth's for the last few years of her life. The family always had a maid; the one who worked the longest was named Viola.

Ice and milk were delivered each day.

Her grandfather had a 1910 Cadillac, which he kept in the garage.

Her father, who was Chief of Maintenance for the DC Air National Guard, had some hangers at Andrews Air Force Base named for him after he saved a plane by figuring out a way to get its stuck wheels down. He had been in the Guard for more than 25 years as of 1972. Her brother helped to arrange the naming.

### **The house itself**

The outside of the house was not painted, at least in front. (But the Foulds took off the paint; who painted it?)

Mary Lou remembers maroon walls and carpets downstairs and black paint on the floor upstairs. The fireplace in the “back parlor” was more ornate than the one there now and the dining room fireplace may have been marble. There was never a fireplace in the “front parlor.” The bookshelves in the “back parlor,” were added about 1988 (?) by the Foulds.

The upstairs of the garage (the loft) was used for storage until the 50s, when it, too, was pine-paneled, all installed by her father.

There was a building-wide back porch with a roof. It was wooden, and the dog slept underneath. Two steps led to the patio. Her father used the back porch for visiting with his friends. He paved the back yard, but not the present brick

There was a second set of stairs, from the kitchen to the back hall in the early days. These were removed when her father added a first floor bathroom, which was on the south side of the kitchen, taking in the window. The Foulds moved the bathroom to its present central location. Since the Dempf bathroom was on the south side, there was no second door to the kitchen from the dining room. Mary Lou doesn't recall a brick fireplace in the kitchen and said there was a pantry where the brick fireplace is now.

The ceiling of the basement was never enclosed, nor was there a front entrance to the basement. She doesn't know why there is a second gate in the front fence.

When her parents could no longer go up and down the steps, they moved entirely to the first floor and used the “back parlor” as a bedroom. Heavy drapes were hung in the arch to separate the bedroom from the living room. While her mother still lived on the first floor, there were two apartments upstairs, one in the basement, and one in the carriage house for a total of five apartments.

### **More memories of Mary Lou Dempf Stott**

Every year the Dempfs had a huge Christmas Eve party—100 people or more. The tree was put up early; only lights were used, which were added Christmas Eve. Mary Lou was awakened at midnight to come down and open presents; all those people brought gifts! She was one of the only youngsters among her parents' friends. (Her brother was 16 years older, her sister 12 years older.) The next day (meaning Christmas?) they had a huge Christmas dinner for 12-20. Her grandfather would always say: “This is the best Christmas tree”.

When her father was a young boy he was very spoiled by his family, especially her Grandmother's brother. They bought him a pony and kept it in the back yard! He was dressed up so much that he was "beat up" by boys in his elementary school. Tony [his father, Mary Lou's grandfather] and the uncles taught him how to fight to defend himself. She doesn't remember where he went to high school—McKinley Tech? They drove him to Wake Forest College, but he hated it and arrived back home before the family! He did go to Georgetown University. Mary Lou remembers all sorts of textbooks in the basement: Greek and math, for example. He said he was accepted into George Washington Medical School, but decided not to go, and went in the automobile business. Cars were the wave of the future, and he loved the business. He won national sales awards year after year. He could relate to all kinds of people. He also knew how to repair and build cars. "He was great looking; very distinguished—always smoking a cigar—and knew the latest joke. My mother was very pretty; she looked like Hedy Lamarr. She let him run the show." Mary Lou's grandmother raised her brother and sister after the divorce. (He was said to be a lady's man.) Then her mother married her father, and was like an aunt to the children of the first marriage. They all loved each other, and the children took great care of her in her old age.

Dinner was served every night at six in the dining room, with a linen tablecloth, napkins, and napkin rings. The conversation was always pleasant and everyone was dressed. Thursday the maid was off and the family, Mother, and Grandmother did the dishes.

Two doors to the left (to the north?) lived a black family. The Johnsons were lovely people, with two little girls that Mary Lou played with: Eleouse and Enabee. The Johnsons rented part of the house to another family. They had a darling three-year-old boy, W.J., who Mary Lou thought was a delight, and tried to bring him into the Dempf yard, a "no-no" for both families. Next to the Johnsons lived Bee, a black lady who "took numbers". Next to her was another lovely black family named Day. He was a barber at the Capitol.

Across the street were three-story rooming houses. The owner lived on the first floor and rented rooms to families. All the families shared one bathroom per floor. Mary Lou's mother would point at those people and say "if you don't learn something you will end up like these". Fear is a great motivator.