



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

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**Interview with John H. (Harry) Ford**

**Interview Date:** March 20, 2003

**Interviewer:** Elizabeth Stein

**Transcriber:** Marty Youmans, Mary Ann Wyrsh

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

**STEIN:** Mr. Ford, could I have your name?

**FORD:** My name is John Harrison Ford. Born in 1924.

**STEIN:** And could you tell me, where were you born?

**FORD:** Born in Southeast Washington, DC. Better known as Capitol Hill. And born in the 300 block of Ninth Street SE. Home still standing, and barely in need of repairs right now.

**STEIN:** What about your parents?

**FORD:** My parents lived there before me, as far as I know. My parents are originally from southern Maryland, originally.

**STEIN:** When did they move to the Hill? After they were married?

**FORD:** Oh, they moved to the Hill way before the turn of the century. Because parish church was built in 1890 something, and I understand that they were the first to be married at the church when it was built.

**STEIN:** That's wonderful. Now, what did your parents do for work?

**FORD:** My father worked at the Government Printing Office, delivering big rolls of paper that we printed everything on in the Government Printing Office. Documents, and everything. I don't know if they still do that or not. But that was back in the days of the old Mack truck, when they had these big rolls of paper, came all boxed up, and he used to deliver those. Pick those up and deliver them, and what not. Pick them up at the railroad station, wherever they dropped them off at the railroad from wherever they came into town, and I think that particular area is where the Federal Express is located today. Where they used to bring a lot of things in by rail, and it was picked up there. That would be in the area of Florida Avenue and New York Avenue.

**STEIN:** Sure.

**FORD:** Right across from the Judd and Detwiler old printing building.

**STEIN:** Now, how many children were there in your family?

**FORD:** Fourteen.

**STEIN:** Fourteen brothers and sisters?

**FORD:** Brothers and sisters.

**STEIN:** That's fantastic.

**FORD:** Originally. A few died as infants and what not, you know. But there was 14 of us. Two left today.

**STEIN:** Oh, really.

**FORD:** Myself and my younger sister are the only two living. So, let me see.

**STEIN:** Well, tell me a little bit about the house.

**FORD:** Oh, about the old house ...

**STEIN:** Yes, and how all of you fit in that house.

**FORD:** (Laughing). Well ...

**STEIN:** What was that like?

**FORD:** That's a problem, too, you know. How we all fit in that house. God almighty! [Laughing]. I recall being in the old house, and the last one I recall coming in was ... My youngest brother was in college and married. He married a young lady unbeknowing to my parents, and what not. My mother said to me one day, "Inez is coming to live with us." And I think my brother at the time was drafted in the Marines. She had nowhere to go. So evidently, she contacted my mother, so my mother said, "Come on," and she was in college in North Carolina. She came home and that was the last member I remember coming into that home, you know.

**STEIN:** How many people were in the house at that point?

**FORD:** God knows, I couldn't tell you. That would be hard to tell, believe me.

**STEIN:** A good dozen, anyway.

**FORD:** Yes, but you see, there's two homes there, and in later years, we acquired the other house.

**STEIN:** I see.

**FORD:** And both of the homes are like one, see. Today, like one house, almost. Although they're still separate, all but the yard. The rear yard. Just not a fence in between the properties. But it's two separate units, 308 and 310 SE [308 Ninth Street SE and 310 Ninth Street SE].

**STEIN:** Now tell me, where were you in sibling order? Were you one of the younger ones?

**FORD:** Let me see. I was among the younger ones. Oh, yeah. Just one brother and one sister, I was number 12. I had one sister, which is living; and myself. And my youngest brother, he's deceased, of

course. He had a lot of children. They have a lot of nieces and nephews. My youngest sister has a big family. She lost her husband a couple of years ago, but she has the gang. My oldest sister that's deceased, that died ... in 1992, my oldest sister died. She had the large family. And her family was the large family that lived with us.

**STEIN:** Oh! Oh, my goodness.

**FORD:** Their name was Harris [spells it]. Harris.

**STEIN:** So, did you all go to the local elementary school?

**FORD:** No, we went to the local elementary which was Saint Cyprian's, which is Eighth and C Streets SE.

**STEIN:** Was that a Catholic school?

**FORD:** A Catholic school, yes. And the home of the black nuns, and I have pictures of it that'll show you. Right where the new homes are at the corner of Eighth and C.

**STEIN:** Oh, yes. I know what you mean. And what was that school like at the time?

**FORD:** Beautiful. Black nuns knew how to handle you. [ed: referring to Oblate Sisters of Providence who ran St. Cyprian's School]

**STEIN:** Oh, really?

**FORD:** Right.

**STEIN:** What'd they do to you?

**FORD:** Beautiful. They did everything to you. Talked basic education, you know. Basic education and discipline was there. And to be hard workers. Those three basic things I recall. St. Anne's convent, it was called. Saint Cyprian's.

**STEIN:** And was it only African-Americans?

**FORD:** African-American, basically. Basically. And it was originally the Washington, DC, home of the black nuns. See? Very few cities had black nuns, years ago. Washington, DC, Baltimore, Maryland, and St. Louis, they were located in. Those three cities.

**STEIN:** Oh, really?

**FORD:** I don't know how many are left, but they're still located between here and Baltimore. They still have a school in Baltimore, which is a girls' school called Saint Francis. I think they still have it. And they have a huge home between here and Baltimore. What's the place that the Catholic nuns are located in, Eleanor?

**MRS. FORD:** Emmitsburg.

**FORD:** Not Emmitsburg. This side of Baltimore.

**MRS. FORD:** I don't know.

**FORD:** A little place, some little place, between here and about 30, 40 miles ...

**STEIN:** So were your parents Catholic?

**FORD:** No, my people came from southern Maryland. Most of southern Marylanders were Catholic.

**STEIN:** So, they were Catholic?

**FORD:** Yes. Oh, yes. All my family, basically, other than by marriage, are Catholic.

**STEIN:** So that's why they sent you to that school rather than sending you to the public school.

**FORD:** Yes. It was convenient, close.

**STEIN:** That's true.

**FORD:** Because if you were Catholic, naturally, Catholic schools were the thing. But it was so far and few. Until they built John Carroll High School, when we finally got our archbishop in Washington, a black couldn't receive ...

**STEIN:** A secondary education?

**FORD:** Yes. Couldn't receive it, and they couldn't get it in this city beyond what you would get at the St. Cyprian school. It was as high as you could get it at that time.

**STEIN:** At what point did they build John Carroll?

**FORD:** John Carroll was built since we had an archbishop. See, we never had an archbishop years ago. I don't remember the year.

**STEIN:** So, how far did you go in school?

**FORD:** I went to high school, through high school. Graduated through Armstrong High School. Public school. And that building is still there. [It is] one of the three original buildings that's left that were originally black high schools in the District. There were Armstrong, Dunbar ... And just the two are left, actually. Dunbar rebuilt right on New Jersey Avenue, and one small building left of Armstrong, which is across the street, which is in the vicinity of—what the devil street is that—oh, off of First Street NW, Florida Avenue—God, I can't think of the name of the street to save my soul.

**STEIN:** But near Florida Avenue?

**FORD:** Dunbar's on New Jersey, but it's a few blocks down off of New Jersey, and in the vicinity of the building that I was speaking of. New York Avenue and—not too far from there.

**STEIN:** I see.

**FORD:** New York Avenue, and—like you're coming up New York Avenue to hit the tunnel to go to Virginia. Are you familiar with that?

**STEIN:** Yes.

**FORD:** Well, you're right near those two buildings when you're there, before you turn left into the tunnel, at New Jersey Avenue?

**STEIN:** Oh, yes. I know where that is.

**FORD:** You're right near those two high schools, on the left.

**STEIN:** So, the two high schools were for black children ...

**FORD:** Black. Basically, black. Yes. Public.

**STEIN:** Were close to each other?

**FORD:** Oh, yes.

**STEIN:** Because that's where the kids lived ...

**FORD:** Not necessarily. Just happened to be located there.

**STEIN:** It just seems strange ...

**FORD:** Just like in far Northeast. Few people in this city know that you have Spingarn High School right off by the powerhouse on Benning Road NE. Spingarn High School, Phelps High School, Brown Junior

High, and Charles Young Elementary. Four schools right there at Benning Road before you get to the powerhouse, you know where the sub goes across Benning Road?

**STEIN:** Yes.

**FORD:** Right at that point, before you get to the powerhouse. They sit back, and very people know they're there.

**STEIN:** And what was your experience at the high school? Was that also a positive one?

**FORD:** Oh, it was good. It was good, you know. Separate but good. But, you know, overcrowded. You see, it was tech ... let's see. Dunbar was academic, Cardoza was business, Armstrong was technical.

**STEIN:** Oh, I see.

**FORD:** Armstrong was a technical trade school.

**STEIN:** Oh. So, what did you study there?

**FORD:** Carpentry, printing, and several things. I dittle-dabbled with a little wood, I guess that's why I followed behind Peter, I guess. [Peter Hackett, with whom John H. Ford worked as a carpenter's assistant after his retirement from the Library of Congress]

**STEIN:** Yes. Right.

**FORD:** Most of my work was in the Library of Congress ...

**STEIN:** So, how large were the classes in the public school?

**FORD:** Oh, they were overcrowded, believe me. Everywhere you went, it was overcrowded, because there was such a limitation of schools, you know.

**STEIN:** Do you feel like you really learned a trade, or not? Or trades.

**FORD:** Pretty good. Pretty good. Our biggest thing, we just were overcrowded was the biggest condition. You were up against overcrowding and a lack of material to work with, back in those days, you know. Everybody was poor in those days. School system, and everybody.

**STEIN:** So you didn't really have good tools?

**FORD:** Well, we had fairly good tools to work with, but they just didn't have material to work with. Building material to work with. To be really a successful carpenter right out of high school, I guess it requires more training than that, you know.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.. Now, did all of your siblings go to Armstrong, too?

**FORD:** No. No. My siblings went to Catholic school, right through high school. And the youngest boy, he finished public high school. But, back in my days, it was a must that you went to Catholic school. If you were Catholic, you didn't have no choice.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.

**FORD:** After school, "bye bye" [laughs]. Forget about other schools.

**STEIN:** How come you were different, then?

**FORD:** How was I different?

**STEIN:** Yes. Because you went to the trade school, you said.

**FORD:** Well, I was different because they only went so high, you know.

**STEIN:** Oh. Oh, okay. But your other brothers and sisters—this is what I was trying to get at—for high school ...

**FORD:** My other brothers and sisters, they went to various schools. Like my youngest brother, he went right behind me to the same technical school, because he wanted to play ball, and they had good teams, and he played three sports, then he went on from there to college, not completing. And Mick went to Cardoza, Margaret went to Cardoza, which was business—

**STEIN:** Ah, yes.

**FORD:** Which was located at—[consults wife]—Ninth and Rhode Island NW, Cardoza was located ...

**STEIN:** Tell me a little bit about what it was like living on Ninth Street, who were your neighbors ...

**FORD:** On Ninth Street our neighbors were mixed. It was just two black families, my family and a black doctor, only black doctor I knew when I was coming up as a child, real young. And her name was Simpson, and she had been taught from a one-room schoolhouse to a professor of German at Howard University.

**STEIN:** Really?

**FORD:** She died at such time, and it was so long ago I remember her because she was so famous for being on the block, above everybody else.

**STEIN:** Did she teach at Howard?

**FORD:** Yes. She taught at Howard, yes, before she died, but she had been retired for years. I think that she died in 1945. Dr. Simpson was her name. She owned a little property, she was the only black I knew at the time that owned property in the neighborhood. Three or four different homes and what not. Rented them out. Including the one she lived in. And her home is the second house coming from South Carolina Avenue on my side of the street.

**STEIN:** Okay.

**FORD:** Next to the little yellow house—

**STEIN:** Yes. I know what you're talking about.

**FORD:** Restored. That's her home, there.

**STEIN:** Oh.

**FORD:** And if I could get into some of my old pictures around here, I would really—I want to get in there to see some pictures of that old house and see basically the old-style porch it had on the front. It was so different than any other house. And it was basically metal. All metal. The bars running from the ground up, and cement base, and it was so different than most homes, you know?

**STEIN:** Yes. That's remarkable.

**FORD:** But now all of it's restored, they even added to the top, added to the back. And it's been restored all over.

**STEIN:** Now, did your family own your house?

**FORD:** Yes. We still own it, thank God.

**STEIN:** That's wonderful.

**FORD:** Hope to do something with it. In fact, my nephew's supposed to be getting in there soon to do his over, which is the one next—310. See, it's 308 and 310, it's two units there.

**STEIN:** You said that you were one of only two black families on the block?

**FORD:** On the block for years—

**STEIN:** And what were relations like with the white families?

**FORD:** Pretty good, considering, you know. It was what I call the run of the mill. We played together. Children played together. Had our little differences, and what not. And we only parted when time to come to go to school. Time to go to school and basically church was when we basically parted.

**STEIN:** I wonder, do you remember what you thought about where they went to school and what you thought about the fact that you went to different schools?

**FORD:** Did I think about it?

**STEIN:** What you thought about it ...

**FORD:** I didn't think nothing about it because that was the way it was in those days. The way it was, you just accepted it. You just had to accept it. You didn't have no choice. And then there was a matter of pride, going to your own school, being taught by your own people, a certain amount of pride behind it. And it wasn't all that bad that a lot of people think. But it's just the idea of separatism that you just don't like to accept racially. Discrimination. Segregation, and what not.

**STEIN:** And the idea that somebody is forcing you to be in that situation rather than you choosing it.

**FORD:** You see, but that's just a small part of discrimination. Our educational system was a very small part. Whereas other parts of discrimination hurt you worse. You couldn't go in a restaurant, have a meal. You couldn't go to a theater until later years, and all that. That hurt you worse, because you were so limited. But then our churches back in those days were so functional. We had the fairs that everybody else had elsewhere, we had at our church. Plays, theaters, dances, parades, you name it. It all came to your church and schools. I mean, it wasn't like somebody was standing over you, and you were in a penitentiary. It wasn't quite that bad. But it was the idea of separatism. I don't know of anybody that really liked to be forced.

But anyway, you go back to those times, there were some good things and bad things. But I recall my parents being stricter. "Don't you dare teach them to them to fight," or this or that and the other. You know, "We don't do this. We don't do that. That's wrong." And they were strict about that sort of stuff.

**STEIN:** Where did you go after high school? What did you do?

**FORD:** After high school I fiddled around at several jobs. I worked at the post office for a short while. I worked the Navy Yard for a short while. Then I finally landed in the Library of Congress and stayed there for 44 years.

**STEIN:** Goodness. And what did you do there?

**FORD:** I was considered assistant librarian, very good at handling unbound bulk material. I was a wizard at that. And in doing that, young lady, I could sort the languages. Japanese from Chinese, Russian, and what not, as if I had been taught and trained in that important line of field.

**STEIN:** Interesting. And was it a good place to work?

**FORD:** Pretty decent. Pretty decent. But promotions came slow. Work came harder. But you had to work. And being the third organization I'd been in, I said to myself, "Son, you've got to settle down and work somewhere." [Laughs]. Believe me, because you've got to eat and sleep—somewhere, you know.

**STEIN:** Well, it looks like you did that. So, at what point did you meet your wife?

**FORD:** Where did I meet my wife? Where did I meet you, love? 1946. Blind date. Buddy of mine. She came from the Eastern Shore. Maryland. And she was teaching school in Westminster, Maryland, at the time. And this girlfriend of my buddy's lived right on the other side of Lincoln Park. What was it, the two or 300 block of Tennessee Avenue NE. And I met her there, on a blind date. And a few years later, she had moved away. The friend of mine married somebody else, but we stuck close together and finally married. I ran from there to Baltimore and then Westminster, and Eastern Shore to see her, and she would come to visit me periodically, and in 1946, we finally married after ...

**MRS. FORD:** It was 1954!

**FORD:** Was it? Was it?

**MRS. FORD:** In '54 we got married!

**FORD:** What year?

**MRS. FORD:** '54!

**STEIN:** '54?

**FORD:** '54?! Hmm.

**MRS. FORD:** 1954.

**FORD:** Well, in '54 we got married. I don't remember the date. [laughs] Anyway, I was so in love I didn't know what to do. I never will forget. [Laughs]

**STEIN:** Well, isn't that wonderful!

**FORD:** Yeah. After being disappointed so many times with girlfriends and what not, you know. I said to myself, when I meet somebody that liked me well enough, that'll be it. So she came along and that was it.

**STEIN:** So when you first met each other, did you think that was it, or you didn't know then?

**FORD:** No. Didn't think nothing of it.

**STEIN:** Really?

**FORD:** At first. At first. But we courted for awhile, and dated, and I used to go to her aunt's. In fact, her aunt's still living in Baltimore, in the same beautiful home she was in. [To his wife:] Did she move to that home after we married?

**MRS. FORD:** Yes.

**FORD:** Did she live in there while we were courting?

**MRS. FORD:** No.

**FORD:** No. Anyway, she lived near her university, which was Morgan University in Baltimore, in that section of Baltimore, which is a pretty nice area. She's all alone over there now. One daughter and granddaughter.

**STEIN:** So now, did your wife teach school when she married you?

**FORD:** When she first met me, yes. She was working.

**STEIN:** And then where did you live after you got married?

**FORD:** Let me see. When we first got married, we lived in the 200 block of 16<sup>th</sup> Street SE, like going toward DC General. And then from there, we moved up into the home I was telling you about, where the black doctor lived. 328 Ninth.

**STEIN:** Oh.

**FORD:** And we lived there until we moved into this home, which is my oldest brother's house. He died—

**STEIN:** You mean this house on Girard Street?

**FORD:** Yes. Yes. It was my oldest brother's place, and he died, and we moved in with his widow. She didn't want to live by herself. And she finally decided to move out and remarry, and then her husband died a few years later, then for years she lived in a home and died in this particular home a few years ago.

**STEIN:** Now, tell me, do you have children?

**FORD:** Oh, yes. Two sons.

**STEIN:** Are they married, or are there grandchildren as well?

**FORD:** Oh, yes. I have four grandchildren. Four grandchildren doing very well.

**STEIN:** That's wonderful. Tell me a bit about your children and their upbringing, when they were younger? Tell me a bit about that.

**FORD:** When they were younger, they came along. They faced a little less discrimination than I did. They could go to attend any school they wanted to. If you could afford to attend, by the time they came along, if you could afford to pay your way through the Catholic school ... see, when we went to school, we paid nothing. It was free. Education was free. Up to the point that you could get. Then it got so that they started charging you for the high schools, and what not. Today, a lot of them are closed as a result of that. They just don't exist no more. St. Cecilia's at Sixth and East Capitol's a nursery now. Beautiful high school, girls' high school. I had two nieces, three nieces, that graduated from there. And they just had come along at such time when integration integrated the system, and they were able to walk right in.

**STEIN:** So what school did your children—your boys—go to?

**FORD:** They attended public school in the area. One of them, the oldest one, did for awhile, then we transferred him to this St. Cyprian's School, same as I went to. Then we moved in this area, then we transferred him to St. Anthony's, which is 12<sup>th</sup> and Monroe [NE]. At that time, they had elementary right through high school. They had nuns. They had well integrated situation there at that time by the time my children came along.

**STEIN:** So did your children get a good education also?

**FORD:** Pretty good, considering, I guess. Neither one of my boys, what I call, stood out as scholars. Both of them had a crack at college and didn't stay. But they had the opportunity to go.

**STEIN:** Yes. And what do they do now?

**FORD:** Well, one's working part-time, and the other's taking a test today downtown. He has a little medical problem. He lives in a setup that we had to put him in downtown, he lives in. He doesn't live here with us. He's doing a little better physically than he's been doing, and it's quite a private thing of ours. However, he's going to take a test this morning. I hope he makes out alright. The oldest boy, he's working part-time now. He unfortunately [divorced], his wife remarried, but the children are doing beautiful. In fact, the oldest boy just finished Maryland University with the library of computer science.

**STEIN:** Good for him.

**FORD:** He's working at the airplane factory in Baltimore.

**STEIN:** That son, does he live in Washington?

**FORD:** He lives in Lanham, Maryland, with his mother. She remarried, of course. Then the sister, she went to finish college, and she's an authority, sign language. She's thinking about going back to school. In fact, she's registered to go back to Gallaudet in September for further hearing education. Then the third boy, he's going to PG Community College, taking some courses. Then the baby boy, he's still in Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, which isn't too far from where they live in Lanham, Maryland.

**STEIN:** That's where your son lives ...

**FORD:** That's where the grandchildren live, with their mother.

**STEIN:** What about your son, where does he live?

**FORD:** One lives here, and one lives downtown. So that's that. But getting back to Southeast—of course, you're asking the questions and you can ask on.

**STEIN:** Yes, well—

**FORD:** But I thought we'd do more of the neighborhood, you know. Like tell you how Hines Junior High was rebuilt and Wallach was on the corner.

**STEIN:** Yes. Okay, tell me about those.

**FORD:** Did you know Wallach was at Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue? An elementary school.

**STEIN:** An elementary school, yes.

**FORD:** It was torn down at a certain date which I don't remember, completely. And then later on, Hines was torn down and rebuilt. But Hines was originally on Seventh Street near C [SE]. They did away with C when they tore the old building down. A lot of the old building and bricks and all are still underground, where they just covered it up.

The only thing originally they have now is the alley that's there. Going through the alley to the Market, to the Eastern Market. The street was done away with, which is C Street. The playground there. They cut it off at that corner. So between Eighth and Seventh, there's no C Street, which Hines then occupied that area of C Street. Originally, the building did. When they tore it down, they built it more toward Pennsylvania Avenue. At the far corner. But originally, Wallach Elementary School was where Hines

basically is now, years ago. They both occupied that ground. Hines Junior High and Wallach Elementary. A lot of people wouldn't know that. They've never seen it.

**STEIN:** No, I had no idea. So there were two smaller schools where there is now one larger.

**FORD:** One junior high, and one elementary. You went from the elementary into the junior high, naturally.

**STEIN:** So you were just telling me about Providence Hospital, where it was before. Maybe you'd like to say that—

**FORD:** Yes. Providence was originally right there off of Fourth, between Second, Third, Fourth, D, E, right before the Library of Congress [streets in SE]. Right straight across from that lot that's right in front of the St. Peter's elementary. The lot that's in front of St. Peter's is originally the site of the old Providence Hospital. That's a park now. You go through there now you never would thought a hospital building was there.

**STEIN:** You can't imagine it. So it must have been a pretty small little hospital.

**FORD:** Oh, yes. It was. It was small. Five or six stories high, and not much space other than where that park is. But it was equivalent to a city square, just about.

**STEIN:** And this is when you were a youngster that you were there.

**FORD:** Oh, yes. They did away with that recently. I have pictures of St. Cyprian and St. Anne's and those at 13<sup>th</sup> and C. I have pictures of those that I can show you and probably have some photos made of those to give you later. St. Cyprian's, St. Anne's Convent, and the home for the black nuns. I can have pictures of those to give you ...

**STEIN:** Thank you.

**FORD:** At a later date.

**STEIN:** Sure. Tell me about where you shopped, what was the shopping situation like?

**FORD:** Oh, yes. That's interesting. Where we shopped. That's interesting. Where we shopped. Seventh and D Street. Kann's, where they have that thing where they have the bands playing and what not. Down near the theatres. But Kann's is Seventh and D.

**STEIN:** This is Northwest?

**FORD:** Northwest. Where we used to shop from there. We could shop on Seventh Street as I recall as a child, on up to as far as you wanted, as many stores ... you know, there was Hecht's on one corner, there's Lansburgh, there was Kann's, and a lot of little small shops along there. On Seventh Street, you know.

**STEIN:** Yes. And what about for groceries?

**FORD:** For grocery shopping, there was a mom and papa store on almost every corner.

**STEIN:** And that was really where you got most of your—

**FORD:** We used to go right on the corner, a block from you which is Cuozzo's, one of the best stores in the city in its time. It functioned until recently when the son was shot and killed.

**STEIN:** Right.

**FORD:** A fellow went in there and robbed and shot and killed him. He died on the way to the hospital, and they closed that place and it never reopened. But they had one of the finest grocery store ever been in this city.

**STEIN:** Is that right?

**FORD:** And what made them more unique than the others, they would deliver your groceries to your house. You could call in your order.

**STEIN:** Oh, wow.

**FORD:** And they had a reputation of having such quality meats and everything, till a lot of people just would call.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**STEIN:** Tell me about McCoy's. The store on my corner on Tenth and South Carolina [SE].

**FORD:** Well, they were nowhere near as popular as Cuozzo's. But it was always there.

**STEIN:** Well, I was wondering if there was ever anything going on there, ever.

**FORD:** Oh, yes. They did business, too. But see it was typical. Then up on the next corner, Tenth and C, you had an A & P on one corner—the place was dug out—A & P on one corner and Safeway on the

other. Tenth and C. Then there was a lot across there where it was two or three new homes built on that corner. Two or three new homes built on that corner, Tenth and C.

**STEIN:** So that was when they got rid of the grocery stores there.

**FORD:** Seems like to me they all faded out at once. On one side of the street, there was a bar at First. Then they made a High's ice cream store out of it. Then from the High's ice cream store it became a Safeway. And now it just all belongs to the person that owned the buildings. But I understand that they used to rent that particular unit out to the groceries and what not. You know, rent it out. Yep. But see now, Cuozzo's was different. Cuozzo's lived in the same facilities. They just had the store to the front, see.

**STEIN:** I see. And the other people lived in other places and just operated the stores?

**FORD:** Yes. They were there all the time. And they had the finest of anything, and they were easy to deal with. My folks remembered the father when he first came from Italy, pushing a grocery cart around and buying groceries before he even acquired the store.

**STEIN:** Is that right?

**FORD:** So he used to always refer to my mother as his dearest and oldest customer.

**STEIN:** Now what about Eastern Market?

**FORD:** Eastern Market goes back, way back. Eastern Market ... was a sight to see the nuns go through C Street to shop at Eastern Market on Saturday morning. And they probably had me by one hand helping them to carry the groceries home, and what not. That was a lot of fun, and when I got home I probably got a piece of candy or something for my reward for helping them to shop and bring the groceries home, see.

**STEIN:** Now, are the shops that are now in Eastern Market similar to what they were?

**FORD:** Eastern Market had gone completely down. There was a fish market in one corner, a bakery in the other corner, and a little concession up in the right hand corner of the market.

**STEIN:** And at what time...?

**FORD:** It was gone down completely. Nothing else was in there.

**STEIN:** About at what point in time?

**FORD:** Oh, I don't remember the years. When I was a kid it was flourishing like it is now.

**STEIN:** Oh, uh huh.

**FORD:** Flourishing. Then when I became an adult it just slipped down. Most of them did. See, every section of town had a market like that. There's only two left. The other one—you may have read about the roof caving in the other day—at Seventh and P NW. It's still there but the roofs have caved in with snow. I don't know if it is still like that or not. But that's the only two of them left, other than the one at Florida Avenue. Now that functioned differently. They were like a ... where all your groceries and produce came in by railroad, more like a big wholesalers, that the stores dealt with, and bought their products from. The small stores on the corner bought their products from the big grocers.

**STEIN:** Yes, so that was the wholesale market.

**FORD:** Right, the wholesale market. It still is over there, right across from Gallaudet. Still there, and the wholesalers are more closed in to the left of the regular market, which you go downstairs under, where you can buy your greens, meats and stuff like that. Some of that still exists.

Gallaudet right on the other side. I never knew for years that Gallaudet ran from elementary right through college. Only the college is private. I think the elementary and high school belong to the District. I didn't learn that until my sons were in high school and they competed against them in basketball.

I used to go by there daily when I moved from Southeast to Northeast.

**STEIN:** Why do you think it was that Eastern Market was in decline? You said that there was a period when it was in decline.

**FORD:** Gone completely. Ninety percent gone. All of sudden it came back.

**STEIN:** What happened? I wonder what happened to the customers?

**FORD:** It was the same period when the stores were all going, leaving the city.

**STEIN:** So, was this like in the 60s, 50s?

**FORD:** There were people migrating out of the city at that time. Great migration out of the city, during World War II maybe, I don't remember.

**STEIN:** So you were fairly young?

**FORD:** I don't know what happened but there have been a lot of changes take place. You take such ... they did away with the black Catholic school in Southeast, and St. Cyprian's Church and School. There has been a great decline in blacks out of Southeast Washington.

**STEIN:** Really?

**FORD:** Believe me. In fact right around the area where my family owns and still lives ... I only know of one. My sister died recently and her home was sold—across the street, on the same side as Peter. I had one sister live across the street from the family home, next to the lady that is the big realtor—she remodeled the house.

**STEIN:** Oh, yes. Kitty Kaupp.

**FORD:** Kitty. She lived next to Kitty. Anyway, they got a good price for her house, thank God. Her niece feasts on that. I tell you what, I remember the time when the average house in this town sold for \$10,000.

**STEIN:** Do you?

**FORD:** \$5,000 to \$10,000. Yes.

**STEIN:** It's been awhile. Times have changed.

**FORD:** You couldn't buy a ... what could you do now to a house for five or ten thousand? You could hardly restore one for five or ten thousand dollars.

**STEIN:** I don't think so. You could hardly get it painted. Tell me, what was the transportation when you were growing up?

**FORD:** Streetcar.

**STEIN:** Where was it?

**FORD:** Well, the streetcars ran a lot of places where the buses run now. And in a lot of places the tracks are still under the street.

**STEIN:** Are there on Capitol Hill? East Capitol?

**FORD:** They are all over the city. That was a slick one that the transit system put on the District.

**STEIN:** Yeah?

**FORD:** Within the city limit the current was underground, see? Then, when it went out of the city, the current was overhead, and there was like railroad tracks. So when they did away with the streetcars, in that area all they had to do was take a few tracks up, that looked more like train tracks than streetcar tracks. And, there was a slick one that they put on the District. They just took those up, and a lot of the expensive ones are still underground and still have to be taken up.

I remember when you could ride the streetcar for ten cents.

**STEIN:** Do you?

**FORD:** And the car barn there, the old place which is an apartment at 14<sup>th</sup> and East Capitol? That was where the streetcars would run in one end and drive all the way through and come on out and go back downtown.

**STEIN:** That's right.

**FORD:** That was the main line downtown. Straight down F Street. Straight out East Capitol, past the Supreme Court, down ...

**STEIN:** First Street?

**FORD:** Down Pennsylvania Avenue, straight down Pennsylvania Avenue, back in those times there were a lot of private homes and all down in that area. They were torn down and government buildings were put all in there, see? Three story bricks and what not, houses and streets, more than today. You would be surprised at how many homes have been torn down recently to build this new center that they are getting ready to open on Seventh Street.

**STEIN:** Oh, yes. Northwest.

**FORD:** Yeah, Northwest. Quite a few homes have been torn down to build that. Of course, I think it's a good thing. At the same token they tore down housing for people too ... where are they going to put them? Up in the sky?

**STEIN:** Right. Yeah.

**FORD:** Or on the water, on boats?

**STEIN:** Right, and then there is the problem, too, that if people own houses, they can sell them, but then where are they going to move?

**FORD:** Well, you see, a lot of people ... when they start selling, I think they did it for a profit ... some of the older people probably. They are moving in different areas and what not ...

**STEIN:** Now in terms of your neighbors on Capitol Hill, was that a pretty stable neighborhood?

**FORD:** Oh, yeah. Always was pretty stable. People moved in ... they bought, and they stayed there for years, they never moved. Like the Proskys and what not. They been there a good little while, but not anywhere near the time that my folks ... I don't think. I think there's very few families around that's been around there longer than my family.

**STEIN:** It sounds like it.

**FORD:** I know we go back to the other side of the century. Believe me. And, I feel as though, today, that if I could prove, which I cannot—I've been trying to, in different courts and different historical places in Southern Maryland ... see, my mother was from a little place where they had the tornado early during the [inaudible], La Plata, Maryland.

**STEIN:** Oh, yes.

**FORD:** She was from that little area. And my father was from about 20 miles further down the road, a place called Wicomico, just before you went over the Potomac River bridge to the left. And, thank God, we own a little piece of land in there that we got to do something with. My youngest sister is about 20 miles over to the left. She's in a place near Indian Head, Maryland—a place called Pisquah.

**STEIN:** Oh.

**FORD:** But most of my family has moved out into Maryland since the great migration of the blacks out of the city. They all wanted new homes and that's where most of them are located. I would say that 90 percent of my family now lives on the other side of the river.

**STEIN:** Is that right?

**FORD:** Yeah. And that was predicted years ago.

**STEIN:** Yeah, well I guess—bigger homes, better schools, did they think?

**FORD:** I don't know about better schools but better homes, I'd say. But, I don't think other opportunities other than the homes are any better. I don't think that as far as jobs and certain opportunities—I think when you leave this town—depending on your education, you know, you are going backwards, I think.

Because I think that—for everybody for that matter—depending on your education, you can do just as well in Washington as anyplace I've ever been. In fact, I can make this statement, that Washington really is the only city I have been in where blacks and whites lived in every section of the town, like Georgetown, Northwest, Southwest, Southeast. See, most places you would go blacks are here, and whites are there in a lot of places. But Washington has never been that way. We've always lived in certain pockets, like maybe parts of Southwest, Southeast, Northeast, far Northeast. It's salt and pepper, it's scattered all around, see? It's never been on one side of the track, like in some cities.

**STEIN:** How did relations between blacks and whites in the Capitol Hill neighborhood change? You talked a little bit about what it was like when you were a kid, and then ...

**FORD:** When I was a kid, coming up, naturally you escape a lot of the different things. I remember going downtown—in fact I remember being 50 years old before I could go in a restaurant and have a meal. I was 50 years old. I worked on Capitol Hill when there was such—the Library had one building, the Supreme Court had one building—well the Supreme Court still has one building. The Library of Congress has three buildings today. When I started there there was one.

**STEIN:** Sure.

**FORD:** ... House office had the same thing, one building. Now they have three. Senate, same thing—three buildings today. So I was on the Hill to see it grow from one building each to three buildings each, excluding the Capitol and the Supreme Court.

I remember I'd have to go in the restaurants, and if there was something I wanted, I'd have to just order at the counter, a sandwich or something and bring it out. I couldn't dare eat a meal and what not. I do remember that the Library of Congress, for example, never had a decent cafeteria built until they built the third building—which is the Madison building. Now their cafeteria is round and on the fifth floor, as I recall. So I say thank God we finally got a cafeteria and I could eat a decent meal without going out of the building, before I retired.

**STEIN:** Now, years back, could you eat in the Library of Congress cafeteria?

**FORD:** They just didn't have it.

**STEIN:** They didn't have one at all?

**FORD:** They didn't have a cafeteria—a little snack bar where you could buy stuff.

**STEIN:** I remember that, yes. I worked there also for awhile.

**FORD:** The only place I knew I could eat without any problems before integration came along was the Supreme Court.

**STEIN:** Oh, really.

**FORD:** Yes, I could go in the Supreme Court. And they had the finest meals you'd want in there, believe me. So, my friends and I, we used to tuck on over to the Supreme Court every day, a group of us. And it was a group of us, black and white, we didn't care. We all wanted lunch, so we all headed in the same direction. And, my experience in the Library, some of it was good and some of it was bad. It was more like an international settlement, you know. I met people from all over the world, Czechs, Poles .... In fact, the day I retired, one of my best friends was Vietnamese, a Vietnamese lady.

**STEIN:** Yes.

**FORD:** So, I went in to see her once since I retired, and she was so surprised about my coming to visit her. She had remarried and things had changed so for her .... That's how she happened to come to this country, she married an American soldier. Something happened, they didn't get along—they divorced, and they had a family, children. She finally divorced and married another American. I never will forget when we were working one morning she came over and put her arms around me and kissed me.

I said "What's wrong young lady, this morning?" I said, "What's happening? There's been a great change in your life or something." Then she stopped and explained to me what had happened.

**STEIN:** She was happy.

**FORD:** Yes, she was happy. I have known people from Russians, Poles, Japanese, Chinese—just about every nationality. My working there was a good experience.

**STEIN:** That's so interesting. What was it like during the 60s and 70s during the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war and all that?

**FORD:** Well, with the demonstrations and things, things were more tense and what not. In fact, I remember the first demonstration that was held on Capitol Hill, where this fellow put this petition in and we walked from the Library of Congress down to the Court, to put in the petition. And we had a big picture of that demonstration, and it looked like it showed everybody in the picture but me. [laughter] I look at that and—fool, I was right above the leaders, right up front. I say it looks like they got everybody but me in the picture. My brother-in-law, my younger sister's husband worked there and had a pretty decent job, much better than I did.

**STEIN:** Now, what was the petition about?

**FORD:** I don't know what it was about, but in later years the petition went through, and they sued. It had something in it to prove that if you applied for a job and a non-black applied for the job and they were given the job over you.

**STEIN:** I see.

**FORD:** Something pertaining to that. I don't remember exactly what it was, but that was the thing of the day. Regardless of your qualifications you could never reach the top. I could never have been the librarian. I don't care if I had 25 degrees. Although they have an assistant now, I think. They have one now, but he wasn't appointed. I don't know if he will get the job or not. I understand they have a black

librarian now. But never in my time. They had an assistant that I've heard of—some time ago ... but never had a librarian.

**STEIN:** Were there any riots up as far as Capitol Hill, after Martin Luther King's assassination?

**FORD:** Well, as far as rioting goes ... the biggest fights I remember in this town, I don't even consider it a riot, was when they integrated the schools. Hine Junior High and Anacostia High School were where they had the biggest fights that I recall. A young girl was trampled by one of the Park policemen, and had a broken leg, and was sued. I remember that.

**STEIN:** Was it parents who were fighting?

**FORD:** Parents and children and everybody in the neighborhood.

**STEIN:** So that happened right at Hine, too?

**FORD:** Oh, yeah. Hines was closest to us. At that time we dare not go near there, and get in it.

**STEIN:** How long did it go on for, do you remember?

**FORD:** Oh, just kids fighting on the way home from school, something like that. [Inaudible] at that time were making a bigger issue of it.

**STEIN:** But you never went to Hine?

**FORD:** No, couldn't go to Hine. I wasn't even allowed on the playground. I used to go play on there, but I wasn't supposed to. And, of course, cops would come along, see me and my little black face. "Alright, come on, get off!" They would run you off. I'd come along, go home, so there were no problems. Naturally, I never thought anything of it. That was the worst part of discrimination for me, no place to play coming up. No playgrounds in the area.

**STEIN:** Yes, what about sports? You didn't have a place ...?

**FORD:** We didn't have a place to play. I had to go to 15<sup>th</sup> and C from where I lived. Payne School. And there were black cinders, cinders like coal dust on the playground and when you'd run and fall down, it would hurt you.

**STEIN:** Oh, dear.

**FORD:** If you ran track you ran in the street, on the black street, in the middle of the street. They would block the street off when they had events. And, I think the school is still down there, or part of it.

**STEIN:** So there were social events at the church, but there wasn't anything like recreation?

**FORD:** There weren't social things that we'd attend racially ... I remember as a little boy going in the Marine Barracks with some of the neighborhood kids. Neighborhood kids could go in there. When I got there they said, "You can't come in, no, that's the home of the Commandant, you can't come in there." That's the way it was with the big bad Marines, as a little child. My father worked at the Government Printing Office delivering paper. I remember at Christmastime, they used to have this show for the children, and each adult would have tickets, free tickets for each child they had. And my mother used to tell me how things were, she would explain the situation for me. When we would go downtown and shop, she'd explain to me, "You know, we can't sit down like everybody else in the restaurant and have a hot dog and a soda. We have to go over to a little counter in the corner somewhere and have a hot dog and a soda." So your parents would explain those things to you as best they could. But it wasn't too hot, it was pretty hard to accept.

**STEIN:** Must have been.

**FORD:** We played together with the children in the neighborhood, then we separated when it was time to come to school, church, and different things. We just separated and went our different ways, that's all.

**STEIN:** Did it make it difficult to have close friends who weren't ...?

**FORD:** No, not as far as children were concerned.

**STEIN:** That's what I mean.

**FORD:** I remember one or two boys in the neighborhood that were there for years. One by the name of Wellon that died a few years ago. I remember the first day he moved into Washington, we became friends and were friends until the day he died. He died about eight or ten years ago. We used to be in each other's homes just like any buddies would. His parents were from West Virginia somewhere. His parents and his family all died out.

We would have been even closer than we were, but he married a girl on the block and I knew her family didn't like blacks and minorities, so that separated us after he married. But, he used to always come to visit me. Always, till the day he died.

In fact, he and a Jewish friend on the job, and another fellow came down from Washington to my wedding. We were married down on the Eastern Shore, down at her little home in Easton, Maryland.

**STEIN:** That's a pretty place.

**FORD:** It is a pretty, and historical little city. In fact, she had an aunt that recently died and was buried in the Catholic Church and for years she was one of the few black Catholics they had in that town and in the

whole vicinity. They had a few. She was one of the older ones, and she had a big Mass said for her at church, and they had a big ceremonial thing for her. She had taught school for 40 some years and was a well known person.

We were married in the Catholic Church down there, and having so few blacks in the church or affiliated with them, when we went in the church and came out, it looked like the whole town was standing out front, waiting to see if we were going to haul the church away.

**STEIN:** Oh, my.

**FORD:** My Jewish friend came down. He was from New York City, he and his Danish wife, and then this buddy of mine. Those three came down together. I arranged for him to ride in the car with them.

**STEIN:** And some of your family was there?

**FORD:** All of my family.

**STEIN:** That's a crowd.

**FORD:** I was just speaking of my non-black friends.

**STEIN:** Right.

**FORD:** And then we went back and told the nuns at my church how we had married in my church which was Catholic, but it was so discriminated we had the wedding reception, because they had such a small home and it was such a crowd of people, in the basement of her church. And the nuns thought that was so funny, and cracked up. The black nuns. They never stopped laughing at that. It took nerve to do that—getting married in one church and having the reception at another.

**STEIN:** Well, good for you. What about politics in the city, and being involved ...?

**FORD:** Politics wasn't really popular years ago. Politics just became more popular since we had Mayor Washington, who was just about the most popular politician we ever had as far as I know. I don't think we have had one as popular as he. And then of course, the lady that was mayor. She was quite popular, too.

[Tape Pause]

**STEIN:** You were saying, you were telling Peter...?

**FORD:** I was trying to explain to him—he was explaining to a man one day about carriage houses. He was giving him his concept about carriage houses. I said, “Peter, you don't know what you are talking

about, Man. You know what a carriage house is?" I said, "First of all, the early black ... you can still see some of the courts restored. In carriage houses, horses were kept downstairs and blacks lived upstairs." That was a carriage house.

**STEIN:** And that was connected to a home?

**FORD:** It was connected to a home in the front where the whites lived.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.

**FORD:** And the blacks lived in the rear, and took care of horse, and drove the horse and buggy for the rich whites. And, blacks go back in this town further than I do in most places. We had a lot of positions that blacks have held in this ... like firemen for example. We've had black firemen in this city for years and years. But, they were never integrated, or worked together.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.

**FORD:** Only when they got to a fire. When there was a fire, then they worked together on the fire. There was only one company. Now I think we have as many as you are going to find anywhere in the country. I don't know about policemen. Policemen and detectives came along much later. I do know this much: that most of the early black firemen I've known ... they had to be college graduates.

**STEIN:** Is that right?

**FORD:** Today, all you have to do is learn how to read and write, and you can be a fireman, I think.

[ed: several questions and answers deleted; mentioned farmers because of a mishearing of the word fireman.]

**STEIN:** OK, so there was a black fire company and a white one?

**FORD:** Oh, yes. At first. But there was only one for years until they integrated. They never integrated the fire department and the police department until way later years. As integration improved, it all changed.

**STEIN:** Now, I have a question about ... you were talking about carriage houses, and you said you'd talked about that with Peter Hackett. On South Carolina Avenue, in the next block up from me, the 1100 block—on one side of the street, there are these big brick houses, and on the odd numbered side of the street, there are just these little frame houses.

**FORD:** Sure.

**STEIN:** And, so, I wondered ...

**FORD:** That's the way they were built. The rich had the money so they built the big ones. See, originally, those on the other side of your street—you're speaking of—between Tenth and 11<sup>th</sup> are a good example. Now, I know a black family that lived right in that block, the Greenfields.

**STEIN:** Yes, I know Mr. Greenfield.

**FORD:** The Greenfields are some of the oldest blacks still in the neighborhood.

**STEIN:** Is that right?

**FORD:** And then there is another lady at Ninth and C, her name is Marshall ... very fair. A good buddy of mine's wife, lived right in the first house. Ninth and C—that used to be a store on the corner.

**STEIN:** Oh, right.

**FORD:** That fancy corner house there, where they have the addition on the top that they built in later years. That was a store on that corner. There was a store on the other corner. And, next to that was a Chinese laundry.

**STEIN:** Uh huh. So, that 1100 block of South Carolina Avenue, on the side where the modest homes are—were those originally black families?

**FORD:** Some of them. See blacks were salt and peppered all through.

**STEIN:** OK, so it was just people who didn't have that much money who lived in those houses?

**FORD:** Right.

**STEIN:** And did they work for the people across the street, maybe? Or maybe they worked at the Navy Yard or wherever?

**FORD:** They worked various places, the Navy Yard and various places. They did menial jobs, jobs that paid the lowest—basically custodial, and what not. But even at that, you were glad to get that in those days. If you were a real hustler, and really wanted to advance and do anything, you took what you could get and didn't complain.

**STEIN:** Now you were talking about the horses, and you had mentioned ... you showed me the photograph of you and your brother on the pony. Tell us about that, the house and the pony.

**FORD:** That particular house was just next door. It was a huge house, and there was a driveway right beside the porch there that actually is where the Proskys live now. The Prosky house is actually in the

driveway of what used to be the house with the porch on it. That was closed in to enlarge that house. You see, it was one place, and now it is two.

**STEIN:** And they kept a pony? Did they have other animals?

**FORD:** They didn't have the pony. The pony didn't live there. He just happened to be there for the taking of the picture. The pony was all over town, for taking pictures. Somebody owned him, and they kept in a stable somewhere above the Market, around Seventh and A Streets. There was a coal yard there at that time, and on the side of the coal yard was the little pony house where they kept the pony, in a big garage.

**STEIN:** Do I remember correctly something about carrier pigeons?

**FORD:** I used to have them. You must have read that from the article my sister gave the lady ....

I had them in the yard for years. From childhood on, I had racing pigeons in the yard until the neighbors came along and didn't understand what was happening. I couldn't explain the difference between the wild ones and my well trained ones. They made me get rid of them. I had had them since I was a child.

**STEIN:** Oh, gee. I see, they thought you ...

**FORD:** I have books and literature on the subject. But, I don't have any pictures of my birdhouse or anything like that, but I can show you some pictures of them.

**STEIN:** How many did you have?

**FORD:** Oh, I had anywhere between 50 and 100—in fact, I still have them. I keep them at my grandchildren's place in Atlanta.

**STEIN:** Oh, really?

**FORD:** In Lanham.

**STEIN:** So what do they do?

**FORD:** Well, we used to race them before I got like this. Race them for trophies, and money, like you do horses.

**STEIN:** I never have heard about that. I just don't know about it.

**FORD:** It is one of the oldest sports I know of is racing horses. All of the other sports came afterwards. And it [bird racing] is done so scientifically today that you can time them by electric. You have your little identification, which is made of metal, carried on their leg, and that is primed to your electric timer. It is put into the trapping system—where they come in, where they come home—and as soon as they light

there, it is geared so that the number on their leg is recorded and the time as soon as they hit there. So, it does not have to be figured like it used to be.

**STEIN:** So, you learned how to train them?

**FORD:** Oh, yes. I had them ever since I was a child. It was one of the main things that kept me out of trouble as a child, having my birds and hustling and trying to earn a decent living, and a decent buck. An honest buck, that was my thing coming along.

**STEIN:** So, did you do a lot of odd jobs?

**FORD:** Odd jobs, cutting grass. I used to cut that whole lawn.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

**FORD:** ... cut the whole grass front with a push lawn mower, not electric. [Laughs]

**STEIN:** Of course.

**FORD:** I'd get 35 cents to cut the front and the back. I thought I had a lot of money. [Laughs] I'd be working like the devil. I'd get my little 35 cents. He'd pay me and I'd go on home. With that 35 cents in my pocket. By the time I got a haircut, and a couple of things I had to do, and buy a stick of candy or something, it was all gone.

**STEIN:** Where did you go to get your hair cut?

**FORD:** Oh, there was a barber shop right across from the Market ... Seventh and C SE ... two barber shops were there. Of course, they discriminated. The blacks cut black hair, and the whites cut white hair.

**STEIN:** In the two different shops?

**FORD:** Yes. Nowadays, you have to be able to cut both. You can't do that anymore. In fact, I was trying to get Peter ... it never did materialize since something happened and Peter just couldn't make it, and never stopped apologizing, because it wasn't a racial thing with him. I had arranged for him to take the test for a girlfriend of mine who was getting her barber's license. Now, see, in order to get your barber's license and if you want to cut hair, you have to learn how to cut everybody's hair.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.

**FORD:** And that's the way it was originally. But some strange things happened when things were segregated. Now, I had a buddy of mine, their father cut hair in Woodies ....

**STEIN:** Yes.

**FORD:** Woodies, they are just getting ready to reopen that building, right. Did the building open? Did they open it?

**STEIN:** You know, I'm not sure.

**FORD:** They are supposed to be renovating and doing it over, and making several stores there instead of one.

**STEIN:** Finally. We're glad.

**FORD:** It's supposed to be a big thing.

**STEIN:** Yes.

**FORD:** Anyway, to make a long story short, I had arranged for Peter to go ... I was supposed to be the black man, when she had her black man test, and Peter was supposed to be the white man.

**STEIN:** I see.

**FORD:** This friend of mine, which was a young lady ... well, anyway, Peter never showed up. I don't know what happened. Today she's a master barber, can cornrow, do any type of hair do you want. One of the best barbers in the realm, and she travels between here and New York City. She's originally from Kentucky, this girl ... a beautiful girl. She is somewhere between here, New York, and Kentucky, where she is originally from.

**STEIN:** Yes, uh huh.

**FORD:** Then she married somebody, moved south, and then came back, didn't like it down there. She came back here. She was a great friend of my oldest boy. She used to call me "Uncle Harry." [She'd say] "Come on let me cut your hair, man, since you are my model." She was the last one I knew that attended this technical high school.

**STEIN:** Oh, is that right?

**FORD:** Because, that's where she learned how to be a barber.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.

**FORD:** She was one of the last students I knew that went through there. She attended at night. They had night school.

**STEIN:** How many different trades did they teach there?

**FORD:** Just about everything you could think of.

**STEIN:** Were the classes ...?

**FORD:** Everything was so crowded .... That was the other thing. It was so crowded because there was so much going on. It was a small building. You never realized that the main building was a brick building, and then they had all these little portable class rooms on the property.

**STEIN:** Right, uh huh.

**FORD:** That's how they did my youngest son's school out at Eleanor Roosevelt. They have dozens of portable buildings out on the ground there, because they had to enlarge. They [grandchildren] all went to school out there and did very well. My wife had taught with a lot of the teachers out there, including the principal, which was a doctor. He retired from out there, and then took another principal job somewhere down South and is still earning retirement pay and still doctoring.

**STEIN:** Now we don't have your wife on the microphone, so we can't hear her. But, I was wondering whether your wife had taught on Capitol Hill.

**FORD:** No, she did all her teaching in Maryland. P.G. [Prince George's County] She didn't qualify to teach in the District. She had a certificate only qualifying her for P.G ... at that time .... I don't know how it is now. She taught for 30 some years, starting at Westminster. She lived right near Westminster College, if you've ever been to Westminster, Maryland.

**STEIN:** Yes, I have.

**FORD:** And, my niece was thinking of going up there and taking some courses. But she found out that she could get the courses at Gallaudet, which is much closer, so she is enrolling in Gallaudet in September.

**STEIN:** That's wonderful. So your wife ... part of the time she was commuting to Prince George's county.

**FORD:** Oh, yes. All the time she taught. What happened was, when the schools integrated, she transferred closer to the house. In her final days, she taught at Northwestern, which is just near the University of Maryland, not far from there.

**STEIN:** Uh huh.

**FORD:** But before that, she taught at mostly black schools until they were integrated. And then, when they integrated, she was able to move wherever she could, close to home. She retired from out there after 30 some years.

**STEIN:** I have a feeling that you could tell me many more stories but I think we should probably stop at this point.

**FORD:** Well, yes, because I haven't gotten into places like the Market and the Navy Yard and the neighborhoods, and ....

**STEIN:** I think I may have to come back, if you would like that.

**FORD:** Sure, oh, yes.

**STEIN:** Thank you so much. This has been great.

**FORD:** I'd like to tell you more because I think it's interesting to tell old tales like this. These children don't know about .... Like I tell Peter, your children wouldn't know about me telling you about the carriage houses, and the alley dwelling houses before public housing ... most of them have now been restored, and non-blacks live in most of them today, you know.

**STEIN:** The alley dwelling houses?

**FORD:** Oh, yes. You haven't been in any of those?

**STEIN:** Well I don't know if I have or not.

**FORD:** Well, [laughing] the alley dwellings are now fixed up with little porch fronts and they look more livable from appearances. When the blacks lived there, they didn't have the little livable-like porch fronts ... just a step part.

**STEIN:** Are they frame houses or some ....

**FORD:** Mostly brick.

**STEIN:** Brick.

**FORD:** That's where the blacks lived, in the courts, and townhouses. Then eventually public housing was built for whites, and then eventually public housing was built for blacks, some blacks. And a lot of them are still there. And Southeast is loaded with them.

**STEIN:** Oh, yes.

**FORD:** A fine example I could show you of [alley dwellings] is the one called Gessford's Court.

**STEIN:** I have seen that.

**FORD:** [Between] 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>—[between] C and Independence is a good example of it. Most of my friends lived there when I was coming up as a child.

**STEIN:** Oh, okay.

**FORD:** My black friends.

**STEIN:** Next time I walk by, I'll take a ...

**FORD:** Six dollars a month they paid for rent.

**STEIN:** Is that right?

**FORD:** Some of them had a hard time getting that ...

**STEIN:** Yes. Well, thank you so much for today.

END OF INTERVIEW