



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

---

**Interview with Lloyd Thompson**

**Interview Date:** April 23, 2004  
**Interviewer:** Ida Prosky  
**Transcriber:** Jack Womeldorf  
**Transcript Date:** October 2004

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

**PROSKY:** The interview is at the home of Ida Prosky. You told me you grew up here on Capitol Hill.

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. My family moved to the 1300 block of East Capitol Street in '53, '54.

**PROSKY:** Where did you live before that?

**THOMPSON:** In Southwest before they came through with the Big Lie.

**PROSKY:** The reconstruction ...

**THOMPSON:** It was basically known as ... how do we put it ... Urban Removal.

**PROSKY:** Not a pleasant thing.

**THOMPSON:** It's called right of eminent domain.

**PROSKY:** Your family owned a house over there?

**THOMPSON:** Uh huh. We lived at, first house I remember living in was 368 H Street and the second house we lived in was at 1318 Fourth Street, across from Wheaton's Row. Down about a block and a half from Fort McNair. Matter of fact, Wheaton's Row was one of the few houses that were not razed.

**PROSKY:** Was your house razed?

**THOMPSON:** Oh yeah.

**PROSKY:** How was that handled?

**THOMPSON:** From what I can remember, they came through and they would say, that they were buying property. I don't remember the exact process, but they just took everything. I think they offered everyone a price and I guess it was what they called "fair market value" and they started roughly up at the bridge and worked their way all the way back to Fort McNair, and to the river, and to First Street and they just leveled everything.

**PROSKY:** How long did that take?

**THOMPSON:** I believe it was done in stages, so I would probably say, I don't know, probably five to eight years, if not longer. I just don't remember all of it. But I went to school down there. Actually, I went to high school the first year schools were integrated. I went to Jefferson, over on Seventh Street

**Prosky:** Was that a junior high school then?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. You had two junior high schools: you had Jefferson and Randall. Elementary schools: I went to S.J. Boyne, that was on, I want to say, L Street, no, Ambush was on L Street and S.J. Boyne was on K, or vice versa, something like that.

**PROSKY:** Are they both there now, or are they both gone?

**THOMPSON:** They're both gone.

**PROSKY:** That first year of integration at Jefferson—was that an easy year?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah, most of us went from Ambush. If you lived on one side of Fourth Street you went to Jefferson; if you lived on the other side of Fourth Street you went to Randall. It wasn't anything that was a crisis or anything. And there were little or no distractions. Growing up in Southwest, it was an area that, to the best of my knowledge, there were no, quote, unquote "racial problems." Most people didn't realize that they were quote, unquote, "statistically poor," until you moved out of the area [laughs].

**PROSKY:** What was the shopping over there? Where did you go shopping?

**THOMPSON:** Every neighborhood had your little neighborhood store, and everyone had their, what do you call it, "their book," so you could go in and get stuff: "I'm Mrs. Thompson's son, put it on her book," and then we went shopping. If you went to department stores, you'd go up Seventh Street [NW]. You had Kann's, Lansburgh's, Hecht's, Goldberg's. Then you had the other stores in the 700 block of Seventh Street and the ones down on D Street. In the 600 block of D you could go in and "I want those pants." I'd put down 50 cents a week, or whatever.

This was also during the time when there were certain department stores like Woodie's, Raleigh's, Garfinkel's you couldn't go in, and then when you had Lansburgh's and Kann's and Hecht's, I forget exactly which ones were broken down, but some you could go in, and if you tried on a hat, that was your hat. You tried on a pair of shoes, those were your shoes. Then you had the other ones up by Seventh and K Street near New York Avenue, you could just go in and shop around, but the others, Hecht's, Lansburgh's, and Kann's, if you tried on a pair of shoes, those were your shoes; you tried on a hat, that was your hat. You didn't go into Raleigh's, or Garfinkel's, or Woodie's unless you worked there. Now I do remember a situation when I was in grade school where there were some teachers, I believe from Dunbar. They were both foreign language teachers, who went to Garfinkel's and did some shopping, and they spoke Spanish the whole time, and when they came outside, the *Afro-American* had a press conference. They wanted to point out that anyone could go in there and shop except for an African-American, and they proved their point. That's the way it was.

**PROSKY:** The stores where you would go in and sign the book: did you use that on Capitol Hill, too?

**THOMPSON:** No. By that time, we were at a little better economic base than what we were when we were in Southwest.

**PROSKY:** What did your father do?

**THOMPSON:** My father died when I was 11. He sold ice and coal in a horse-driven buggy. My mother did domestic work in the government. I'm the youngest of 14 kids. My mother had 14 kids in a span of 20 years. There's 20 years difference between me and the oldest, between myself and the oldest.

**PROSKY:** You must have gone to work fairly young.

**THOMPSON:** You did something. If no more than a paper route. Back then you could collect bottles, or scrap, or what have you. You could go to Safeway and carry people's groceries, things of that nature. In the wintertime, if it snowed, you shoveled people's fronts, things of that nature. There was always some way to make a nickel, dime, whatever. Because back then I remember going to the Jewel Theater on Fourth Street. It was like seven cents, and people almost had a coronary when they took it up to ten and then to 14 cents.

**PROSKY:** The Jewel Theater was on Fourth Street SE?

**THOMPSON:** Southwest. It was between H and Eye.

**PROSKY:** You went to Eastern High School?

**THOMPSON:** I went to Eastern High School in '59 was it? '58 or '59. I went to Eliot and then I went to Eastern.

**PROSKY:** Where is Eliot?

**THOMPSON:** It's the school that's behind Eastern.

**PROSKY:** Is it still called Eliot?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah.

**PROSKY:** What was that like, at Eastern High School? Where did you all play sports?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. By that time, my family had moved to, it wasn't even called Capitol Hill then, but we moved to the 1300 block of East Capitol Street and I would say that at that time there may have been a handful of black families on the block, I would say maybe somewhere between five and ten on the whole block. The 1300 block is the block that Holy Comforter [Roman Catholic church] is on. Holy Comforter

at that time was a white church, because the blacks went to St. Cyprian's, which was over at 13th and D, where the Barrett Linde houses are built now. That was Holy Comforter.

**PROSKY:** That burned down?

**THOMPSON:** No, it got torn down. They consolidated Holy Comforter and St. Cyprian's. And now it's called Holy Comforter–St. Cyprian's.

**PROSKY:** A black family who lived next to us for years was furious. Never got over it.

**THOMPSON:** You had on Capitol Hill ... I forget who I was speaking with, but he was explaining to me the different Catholic churches, because you had your ... St. Peter's—I've forgotten the exact order, but one was predominantly Italian, one was predominantly Irish, one was predominantly whatever, but each ethnic group had their own church that they went to. That's the way it was in the closer in ... by me being on the other side of Lincoln Park, that wasn't even called Capitol Hill. Capitol Hill at that point stopped at probably Fourth Street on the east. Probably what is now maybe South Carolina Avenue on the south, and probably Maryland Avenue on the north.

**PROSKY:** What of the areas beyond that? What were they called?

**THOMPSON:** I don't know if they had a name, but as real estate began to change and expand, Capitol Hill just moved out, moved out, moved out. Back then, what is now called Constitution Avenue and Independence Avenue, some place in the '50s, they were changed from B Street into Independence and Constitution. When we moved into the 1300 block of East Capitol Street, some place along in, I forget exactly what year it was, but the present chief judge of the D.C. Superior Court, Rufus King III, used to live on that block. He lived across the street from me, with his first wife Susan.

**PROSKY:** What about the rest of the neighbors? You remember much about them?

**THOMPSON:** Oh, yeah. The 1300 block of East Capitol has always been a kind of quiet block. There was the Walkers, there was the Henrys, the Plummers, Revis. There was a guy on the southeast side of the street that owned two houses, side by side. There were the Bennetts. Up on the corner of 13th and East Capitol when I was a kid, there was a drugstore. Around the corner from that was Roscoe's Food Basket. On the corner of 14th and East Capitol was Al's Deli. The Car Barn is where you actually had streetcars, because the streetcars went from Lincoln Park to Mount Pleasant. The other line that ran off from that was from 13th and D to Mount Pleasant.

**PROSKY:** Where is Mount Pleasant?

**THOMPSON:** Mount Pleasant is an area up in Northwest. Mount Pleasant is probably bordered on the east by 16th Street, on the west by Rock Creek Park, on the south probably by Irving Street or maybe Columbia Road, depending on how it's laid out. On the north probably by Rock Creek Park, Mount Pleasant, Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, they overlap at certain points. But that was the other end of the Lincoln Park streetcar line.

**PROSKY:** You mentioned drugstores. Were there a lot of drugstores here?

**THOMPSON:** Drugstores were like grocery stores. Where Antiques on the Hill is, used to be a drugstore.

**PROSKY:** I didn't know that!

**THOMPSON:** You had the one near Lincoln Park, the one at Eighth and East Capitol, the one at Fourth and East Capitol, where the condos are right there on Lincoln Park was a Peoples Drug Store. Matter of fact, that was one of the only businesses in this immediate area, if I remember correctly, that got burned out during the '68 riots. Those are the condos—Bob Bell built those. Then on the other side, right at North Carolina and 11th, across the street from where the laundry is now, used to be a theater. That's where Drew Scallan built those new houses right on that corner, and next to that used to be a High's.

**PROSKY:** What was the name of the theater?

**THOMPSON:** I don't remember. There were two theaters in the 600 block of Pennsylvania Avenue. One was called the Avenue Grand and the other was called the Penn. Then there was a theater around on Eighth Street, right there below, what's that, E? Next to the hardware store used to be another theater.

**PROSKY:** There are vestiges of that; you can see the marquee.

**THOMPSON:** Where the Natatorium is used to be a firehouse. I've seen Lincoln Park renovated two, three times. The Lincoln statue used to be further up towards 11th Street, facing in the opposite direction. Where 13th Street is used to be a Park Service house with bathrooms on each side, and the Park Service people kept their equipment in there for doing the park, and the park was flat all the way through. Then I think they redid one section of it, then they came back again and redid something else. I think they put the steps in, then they did put Mary McLeod Bethune's statue in there. They had hers facing Lincoln, but Lincoln's used to be closer to 11th Street facing the opposite direction it's facing now.

**PROSKY:** Were there theaters on H Street NE?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah, but I didn't go up there that much.

**PROSKY:** So you didn't shop on H Street?

**THOMPSON:** No, I cannot recall ever shopping on H Street. I don't think I've ever shopped on H Street. Since the streetcar/bus stop was in front of my house, I'd just get on that and go downtown.

**PROSKY:** I was taking the bus from Arlington when I was ten years old.

**THOMPSON:** Back then they had passes. You'd get a one-way pass, like 75 cents or a \$1.00, \$1.50, what have you. The pass was good from Sunday to Saturday.

**PROSKY:** Where did you go to have fun when you went to Eastern?

**THOMPSON:** I went to school to have fun. I played sports when I was in high school.

**PROSKY:** What did you play?

**THOMPSON:** I played football. Back then everything was more of a neighborhood. If someone gave a party, or a house-party, generally within your neighborhood, if you went to another neighborhood, you went with your friends, everybody knew everybody. I've always enjoyed dancing, you could generally tell what neighborhood someone was from by how they danced. Even if you had a disagreement with someone, that was in the era that if two guys got in a fight, after the fight they ended up shaking hands, becoming the best of friends. It was very different than it is with young people today. We thought we were being bad if four guys shared a beer [laughs]. For the most part, as a teenager, drugs was basically unheard of. You almost did a double take if someone was smoking a cigarette. It was just a different time.

**PROSKY:** Ever in the service?

**THOMPSON:** No. I had worked for a company and I had an occupational deferment.

**PROSKY:** What did you do when you started to work?

**THOMPSON:** I was one of the only people at Eastern who took mechanical drawing for three years, and I worked as a draftsman/illustrator for a company called Page Communication Engineers for six years, seven years. Then we had what was called a "reduction in force," and we had some people laid off, and I was one of those people to get laid off. I was walking down K Street one day and I saw a sign in a window: Icelandic Airlines. I think it was \$145 round trip from New York to Luxemburg, and I bought a ticket!

**THOMPSON:** I don't know what we missed. I sold real estate for Rhea Radin, and back then there was Rhea Radin, Barbara Held, Houses on the Hill, Beau Bogan, Cox Real Estate, probably a couple of others ... Kraemer, they were all around back then.

**PROSKY:** How did you meet Tati Kaupp?

**THOMPSON:** Kitty?

**PROSKY:** Her daughter is Tati.

**THOMPSON:** I met Tati through Kitty, because Kitty and I worked in the same office when she first got into real estate.

**PROSKY:** How long did you sell houses?

**THOMPSON:** Probably until the middle '80s. I got kind of burnt-out. I started a process-serving business, and that's what I do now. I sell process-serving, and I teach country and western dancing.

**PROSKY:** Oh my goodness. That sounds like fun.

**THOMPSON:** It's different. I can tick people off one day and make them smile in the evening.

**PROSKY:** You lived here throughout this whole urban renewal process that went on on Capitol Hill. What is your take on the urban renewal that has gone on here for the last ...

**THOMPSON:** I wouldn't call what's happening on Capitol Hill, Urban Rape—Renewal, as much as ...

**PROSKY:** Gentrification?

**THOMPSON:** It's a form of gentrification, but it's like a cycle. Capitol Hill for the most part, probably, if someone went back to the '40s, when I wasn't living here, but just by things in the neighborhood, if you went back that far, you'd find that Capitol Hill was probably predominantly a white neighborhood. You can tell that by the high schools. Because back then kids went to high schools in their neighborhood. That's one of the reasons Capitol Hill has so many elementary schools up here, because schools prior to '54 were segregated. You go into Northeast, and I know within a six-block radius I know you must have five elementary schools. There's one near 13th and Constitution and Tennessee, there's one at Tennessee and E, there's another one at 15th and Tennessee, the other one has just been turned into lofts at 14th and G. You have Lovejoy at 13th Street, and I probably missed a couple of others, and you have the ones off of Stanton Park. Then you get over to Southeast, they're scattered all over the place over there. You look at the neighborhood; it was racially mixed, but it was probably predominantly more white than black, even when I moved in. Now you have people coming back in, I guess it's for many different reasons why they want to move back into the city. There was a lot of gentrification. I think that could fit a lot of neighborhoods, but I don't think it fits Capitol Hill that much. It may fit Georgetown or other areas,

because the difference in Capitol Hill and most other areas is that people here speak. You can go to other sections of the city where people, for whatever reason, don't speak to each other.

**PROSKY:** Do you think that has to do with row houses?

**THOMPSON:** I don't think it's row houses as much as people looking for some place where they feel comfortable, where they can raise their dogs. In a lot of cases, the kids are already gone, so they're going to raise dogs, or they haven't had kids. And the other thing I notice about Capitol Hill: it's probably one of the few areas of the city where seemingly most of the landlords don't have a problem if people have pets. It's a form of socialization. You go to Lincoln Park, Stanton Park, Marion Park, and just walk around, just about every other person seems to have a dog of some type.

**PROSKY:** Was that always true?

**THOMPSON:** I really don't remember back when I was younger, but I've always had dogs. I've noticed it more and more now.

**PROSKY:** The house next door, there used to be always two dogs in the back yard, and when we first moved in, the dogs would bark every time they'd hear a fire engine go from Eighth Street, and they would harmonize. One would take a low note and one would take a high note.

**THOMPSON:** Mine barks at fire trucks and ... police cars—no; but ambulances and fire trucks, because their volumes are a little different. Capitol Hill is an interesting area. You have a vast cross section of people that are moving in ... young people ... they speak. They may not socialize, but in passing on the street, I notice, people speak.

**PROSKY:** Kind of Southern in that way.

**THOMPSON:** Well, Washington has always been a Northern, Southern, New England, Midwestern city. The reason I'm saying that, I remember even as a kid, certain sections were segregated, but other sections were very much integrated as far as a lot of the social aspects were concerned. Some things were racially mixed, and some others weren't. Depending on which section of the city you were in.

**PROSKY:** What were some of the places that were mixed?

**THOMPSON:** A lot of the bars, clubs. When I say mixed ... a lot of cases ... it was socially acceptable for a white person to go into a predominately black bar or club. If you took it the other way, a lot of blacks were not socially accepted in a lot of white clubs. Again, it depended on the neighborhood. In Southwest, you had white people, you had black people, you had Goldbaum, Silversmith, what have you, that owned corner stores. ... Everybody had a book. ... You'd go in and say "I'm Mrs. Thompson's son.

...” I was talking to somebody one day and, like I said earlier, I didn’t know I was poor until we moved out of Southwest, and also, I cannot remember having a key to my front door. No one had keys because everybody knew everybody. I don’t remember having a house key.

**PROSKY:** Did that change when you moved to East Capitol?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah, because people no longer knew everybody who knew everybody’s family, knew the mother, the father. ... People began to move around more. If you think back then, people lived in the same neighborhoods they grew up in. If the lady next door saw me doing something, she could tell my mother, or what have you, which isn’t true today, because a lot of times ... discipline’s a little different today.

**PROSKY:** And people may not know each other. I’m really interested in the number of theaters that used to be on Capitol Hill. My husband’s an actor.

**THOMPSON:** You had Avenue Grand, the Penn, the other one around on Eighth Street, you had the Atlas out on H Street. I know you had the Atlas, that’s the one right there between 13th and 14th on the south side of the street.

**PROSKY:** The one I think they’ve made into a theater now.

**THOMPSON:** No, it’s not anything now. It’s just a vacant building. There’s probably another one along there someplace. But then you had ... I can’t think of any others off the top ...

**PROSKY:** These were movie theaters?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah, movie theaters.

**PROSKY:** Do you remember any vaudeville theaters, other kinds of live theater?

**THOMPSON:** You didn’t have vaudeville, but there were some bars. ...Back then you had go-go clubs, but that came up, I would say the go-go phase came in the late ’50s, early ’60s. That lasted for a while, then they went from go-go to less and less clothing, till there was none: go-go to topless to none. Now, if I remember correctly, and this is a little ... stretching it, but I think there were some places along Eighth Street that were that way. I think there were a couple of burlesque shows along there, because the streetcar at the Navy Yard that ran from there to Roslyn, then another one ran from Barney Circle—I think that one ran to Roslyn or up Wisconsin Avenue. I’m quite sure that there were some places of that type.

**PROSKY:** The big burlesque house I remember was down on Seventh Street.

**THOMPSON:** We had a lot of stuff down on Seventh Street, Ninth Street. Then you had some stuff over on 14th Street. You had your predominantly black areas: U Street, Ninth Street, and 15th Street, 14th Street, (but the upper 14th Street). You had a couple over on H Street. I'm talking about the '60s now.

**PROSKY:** I'd like to go back to when you were a paperboy. How did you get that job?

**THOMPSON:** Obviously, back then you had the *Post*, the *Times*, the *Herald*, the *Star*, and the *News*. The *Times-Herald* became one newspaper, and you had the *Post*, the *Star*, and the *News*

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**THOMPSON:** I worked for, I served the *Star*, along East Capitol Street, A Street—I'm scratching my brain now. The *Star* was the evening paper. The *Star* and the *News* were the two evening papers. The *Times-Herald* and the *Post* were the morning papers. And they whittled it down; you just have the *Post* now. The other four have gone out of business or became part of ... Most of the big houses along East Capitol Street were basically tourist homes. You had a lot of tourists, or people working for the government, living in them. Most of the people who lived any place past Fourth Street was just like a working class neighborhood. It wasn't as "gentrified" as it is now.

**PROSKY:** How much were you paid as a paperboy?

**Thompson:** Not very much. In today's standards, you couldn't buy a bag of potato chips, but back then, you made \$3-\$4.00, you thought you'd died and gone to heaven! You had penny candy, you'd go to a movie for \$1.50, \$2.00. A soda was five cents, seven cents. You took the bottle back. A lot of things have changed. You'd get a pair of Converse All-Star tennis shoes for, I think, \$8.11. It's hard to really compare then and now when it comes down to what you could buy. It's like houses now, that whatever they cost back then ... What you'd pay for a house back then would be a down payment on a house today.

**PROSKY:** Probably. Did you have any trouble collecting as a paperboy?

**THOMPSON:** Nah. You'd go by and say "paperboy." You had a little book to write people off on. I hadn't thought about that in a long time.

**PROSKY:** I remember paperboys when we first moved to Capitol Hill. I remember you had to scrounge in the house for the money to pay ...

**THOMPSON:** Then you went to Safeway, you carried groceries, things of that nature. That's the way you made a couple of pennies. If it snowed, everybody got a shovel and went out, and charged people to shovel their fronts. During the summer, I used to go to Boys Club camp down at Scotland, Maryland.

**PROSKY:** How'd you get there?

**THOMPSON:** I went to the Boys Club down in Southwest, and by the time I was 11, 12, 13 years old, I started working at camp every summer. So I'd go down there for basically eight weeks or so.

**PROSKY:** What'd you do at camp?

**THOMPSON:** I started working in the kitchen, then ended up, worked my way up to be a cook. I still enjoy cooking. As long as it's fun. I would not do it as a vocation.

**PROSKY:** What do you remember about summers on Capitol Hill? You're a little bit pre-air-conditioning, right?

**THOMPSON:** If you want to keep your house cool, you open your windows and pull your shades, and don't jump around. If a house had a basement, you went to the basement in the summertime. Or you cut a fan on if you had a fan. Most of my summers I spent at camp, so I don't remember that much.

**PROSKY:** Was it a good camp?

**THOMPSON:** Oh, yeah. Metropolitan Police Boys Club Camp down in Scotland, Maryland. It was Earnest H. Brown ... something like that. I got there three or four days before the campers came in, and was there for the duration. I went down every summer from the time I was 12-13 years old until I got out of high school.

**PROSKY:** My sons went to Scout camp.

**THOMPSON:** I stayed the whole summer, and that I enjoyed.

**PROSKY:** Because you were working, were you allowed to participate in swimming?

**THOMPSON:** You had free time, you did whatever: swimming, crabbing, hiking, things of that nature.

**PROSKY:** That sounds fun, crabbing ...

**THOMPSON:** Back then there were a lot more crabs close to the shore in the Potomac River than you have now.

**PROSKY:** Where did you swim?

**THOMPSON:** I believe the Potomac but I want to say Chesapeake. Maybe the Potomac River. I'd have to see a map, but I want to say Chesapeake. I believe the Potomac came up the other side.

**PROSKY:** When you were growing up, did you do any fishing in the Anacostia?

**THOMPSON:** No. I'm not a fisherman. To tell the truth, I don't think I've fished in my life. Now, I like camping, backpacking, horseback riding.

**PROSKY:** Where did you learn to horseback ride?

**THOMPSON:** That's another story. Back during the '70s, I used to go down to a couple of bars on 19th Street like Pierce Street Annex ... we're going to get away from Capitol Hill.

**PROSKY:** That doesn't matter.

**THOMPSON:** One day I walked down L Street and I heard music coming out of this place, and it was a country and western bar named Bronco Billy's, so I started going in there from time to time. One day I went in and I saw this young lady—she was generally with a group of friends, but this time she was by herself. I asked her to show me how to do that type of dancing. ... Another time she was sitting at a table with three young ladies and I said, "I'll buy you all a round if each one will take me out on the dance floor." The rest of it's history. I learned how to do country and western dancing, and became somewhat proficient at it. I even did competition dancing for about ten years, and now, one of the things I do is teach country and western dancing. The horseback riding aspect is I started going out West to working ranches. I did the TX Ranch, whose mailing address is Lovell, Wyoming. They worked their cattle out of Prior, Montana, outside of Billings.

**PROSKY:** You've been a cowboy!

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. I've also worked ranches in New Mexico and Colorado; the MW on the Colorado-New Mexico border; the Shidley Ranch, which is outside of Billings, also. These are all working ranches; these are not dude ranches. Once you get there, your total mode of transportation is your horse. You learn how to ride, you learn how to geld horses, and make bulls into steers, and sleep in teepees, and sleep outside ...

**PROSKY:** It sounds like fun.

**THOMPSON:** It's fun, but I wouldn't recommend it to most people that are not outdoors people. I would recommend that most people go to a dude ranch, rather than a working ranch, because when you go to a working ranch, there's always something to be done.

**PROSKY:** Why did you start going to working ranches?

**THOMPSON:** I don't know. I asked someone where I was teaching at this bar called Zed's, out in Virginia, on U.S. 1, that I wanted to go to a working ranch. Since I was born and raised in the city I've gone to camp, but I've never really been ... At one point in my life, I'd literally been in more countries than states. So I wanted to see some of the United States. I went out there, and I just loved it. I didn't realize how many stars were in the sky until I got out West. When you go to Montana, you understand why they call it "Big Sky" country. Or you go to Alamosa and Encinitas and you can drink water right out of the mountains. In Alamosa the Rio Grand River is maybe a foot wide. That's where it starts. You realize just how vast and how beautiful parts of this country is.

**PROSKY:** We didn't talk about your going to church at all. What church did you go to?

**THOMPSON:** I went to Providence Baptist Church, which was originally in Southwest, M Street. Providence moved to Kentucky Avenue and 15th Street. That's the church that just got sold. Mt. Moriah, that's on the corner of 17th and East Capitol, was in Southwest. Those are the only two that I know moved to this neighborhood. They both moved out of Southwest. Mt. Moriah was on, I think, Third and L Street and Providence was on M Street right between Fourth and Sixth.

**PROSKY:** So when you moved up here, you went to ...

**THOMPSON:** My mother moved us to an area that was close to our church, so we could basically walk to church. They moved to 15th and Kentucky Avenue and I lived on East Capitol Street, so it was a five-block walk to church.

**PROSKY:** Now when you see large black churches on Capitol Hill, you get the impression that everybody lives someplace else.

**THOMPSON:** Because a lot of people have grown, and since a lot of folks don't stay in the same neighborhoods any more, they've migrated to different parts of the city, or maybe to Montgomery or PG County. That's why a lot of black churches are moving out to PG County, because that's where their membership happens to be right now.

**PROSKY:** The other thing happens, too. It seems like a family that starts with a church will stay with it.

**THOMPSON:** Yeah, that's why the churches are moving out to PG County. Like in Largo, I understand there are quite a few blacks living out in that area, they're going there to go to their churches. Now, I grew up in Providence; my whole family went there.

**PROSKY:** Was that a big center of activities?

**THOMPSON:** The church was the center of activities on Sundays. You go to Sunday school, church, maybe have some activities after church. Then you participate in church services, be it the choir, usher board, or just doing different things for any church. I'm not a big churchgoer any more. But it still plays a role in a lot of things I do. I haven't forgotten where I came from. By being from a large family, there are still members of your family that are within the church.

**PROSKY:** Does anybody in your family still live on East Capitol?

**THOMPSON:** No. I have two sisters who live in Maryland, one sister that lives up on Connecticut Avenue, I have a sister in Boston, and a sister down in Warsaw, Virginia. All of my brothers are deceased. My mom and dad and two brothers are in Arlington Cemetery.

**PROSKY:** Your father was in the service?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. My father was in the First World War, one or two brothers in the Second World War, one brother in Korea ...

**PROSKY:** So they put in military service.

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. I have a sister that was in the military service also. She was in the WAVES in what they call the Navy now.

**PROSKY:** Were you here during the riots?

**THOMPSON:** It was called the "civil disturbance." I actually, strangely enough, was on jury duty, and I'll never forget, that was April of '68, and I was on jury duty. Back then you had jury duty for a month. I know, people have coronaries now when they have it for just one day. What is it, "one day, one trial"? Back then you had it for a month. Up until that time I got picked on, I think, one or two juries. Now back at that time, I was a lot younger, I had a beard, and a whole bunch of hair on my head. And starting that Tuesday, whatever time I had to go back in there, every time I got picked, like "Juror No. 5," before I could even sit down, "Juror No. 5 excused." I didn't get picked for a jury the rest of the month. The only place I can remember—outside of H Street—that was destroyed, on what is called Capitol Hill now, was the CVS or whatever on Lincoln Park.

**PROSKY:** Did you have any trouble getting around, back and forth?

**THOMPSON:** No. I remember the military guys up on the Capitol lawn and around the city. It was just an unfortunate situation that happened. A lot of people just got caught up in the moment. I'm not justifying it because I don't think it's anything that was necessary. When you have things like that happen, unfortunately, people spend more time destroying their own community than someone else's.

**PROSKY:** What happened with the jury? Did they call off the trial?

**THOMPSON:** No. I just didn't get picked any more.

**PROSKY:** Well, that was good.

**THOMPSON:** Good and bad. Just because someone looks a certain way, if you try to pigeonhole them, you may get pleasantly surprised.

**PROSKY:** I see what you mean. I missed that completely.

**THOMPSON:** By me being a black male with a beard and an Afro, they automatically assumed that I would vote against someone that had committed a crime.

**PROSKY:** But you've served on juries since then?

**THOMPSON:** Once, in U.S. District Court. That [earlier one] was D.C. Superior Court.

**PROSKY:** It's hard to live here and miss it now.

**THOMPSON:** You just have to be a registered voter.

**PROSKY:** Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you'd like to talk about?

**THOMPSON:** I'll probably think of something when I'm walking down the street. I can't think of anything off the top ...

**PROSKY:** What about the Metro? When the Metro opened, was that a big deal here?

**THOMPSON:** It was a big deal because it opened in stages. I think a bigger deal here was when they took out the streetcars and just had the buses. One of the things that is a trivia question for most people when it comes down to buses, is that the bus lines that are two numbers are all old streetcar lines. The ones that have a letter in the number are old bus lines. If you have going out East Capitol Street 96, 98, whatever, but you had the bus line that goes out C Street NE, and D Street you have the D6. Now that's an old bus line. Some of the lines have been shortened or made longer, but over in Southeast you still have the 30s and the 90s. Going up Seventh Street they're all the 70s. You didn't really have that many streetcar lines.

**PROSKY:** There was one on M Street? And there was one on East Capitol, right?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. Streetcar lines ran on East Capitol Street ...

**PROSKY:** On Pennsylvania, too, didn't they?

**THOMPSON:** You had the “Lincoln Park” which was the 40s’ OK? You had the 90s that ran from the Navy Yard up to the Capitol Street Bridge. You had the 30 series that ran from Barney Circle out Pennsylvania Avenue, M Street, up Wisconsin Avenue. Or it may go straight out to Glen Echo. Then you had the 50s that ran up and down 14th Street [NW]. The 70s were Seventh Street. The 90s were up and down Eighth Street.

**PROSKY:** We need to draw a map of this. You remember this so much better than I ...

**THOMPSON:** I have a very interesting memory. I have met people that I was in elementary school with, and I can remember them. I can’t remember names, but I can remember their faces. I was always looking as I walked around. I’d go downtown ... There was an article in the paper this week about Jewish historical building at Fifth and I NW. It was a Jewish synagogue, then it became Corinthian Baptist Church, now it’s going back to being a Jewish historical society. When I was a kid living in Southwest, the area now called Chinatown, was called Jerusalem.

**PROSKY:** Really! So it wasn’t Chinatown?

**THOMPSON:** We didn’t call it Chinatown.

**PROSKY:** Were there Chinese stores there?

**THOMPSON:** Probably a lot less than there are now, because around that area, that’s where you had all your Jewish synagogues. There’s one on Fifth Street, one on Ninth Street, one on Third Street, three or four of them around there. Back then, a lot of Jewish people lived within walking distance of their synagogue. If you went on the 700 block of Seventh Street, most of them lived close to or above their business.

**PROSKY:** You don’t drive on the Sabbath.

**THOMPSON:** Right. Most of the corner stores were predominantly Jewish. The owners generally lived upstairs. Now maybe “Jerusalem” was just a slang expression from our neighborhood, but that’s what we called it.

**PROSKY:** What happened? Did the Metro opening make a big difference to you?

**THOMPSON:** No, not really. It was interesting. You have to know how to use it. It covers practically every corner of the city. Metro listened to some wrong people. Why, if they’d put one in Georgetown, they could probably have taken 500 cars off the street. The reason for that: It would bring in “undesirables.” But at the same time, they forget that undesirables can drive a car. The subway literally runs right under Georgetown. Nothing is impossible; they could probably put a stop in Georgetown Park.

They need something out there. In order to get from Washington to Virginia, or vice versa, you have to cross a bridge. You could eliminate a lot of traffic if you did that. Especially since Metro is talking about staying open until three o'clock in the morning, you could take a lot of traffic off the streets of people going out and enjoying the nightlife.

**PROSKY:** They could come home on the subway.

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. If you want to have people out, you just give them a way of getting there. If someone happens to be slightly impaired, it's a lot easier using the subway than it would be driving a car.

**PROSKY:** Did you ever make the suggestion at a neighborhood meeting?

**THOMPSON:** I've never gone to any Metro meetings, but if I ever did, that would be the last thing I'd bring up. But there are two other things I'd bring up with Metro. One, a number of stations, including Eastern Market, that doesn't have granite-grated edges. Most Metro stops have the little granite part and the little bumpy part for someone visually impaired. One of the stations that doesn't have that is Eastern Market. I notice because I ride the Metro all the time. Two other things I have: one is, you look at the maps in the Metro stations. A lot of times, instead of the map being centered, sometimes it's down in the corner or off-center, where you don't have, like they have the arts [?] illustrated by trade. There are certain things that catch my eye. Someone that has a map that isn't anywhere near centered. It kind of drives me up a wall. The other thing is, where they have their fares, they have "regular fares" and "reduced fare." Instead of what most people understand, they could say "regular fare" and "rush hour." I don't know how much truth it is to this, but someone told me, the reason they phrased it that way, was because some college kids didn't understand what rush hour was. It tells me that you have management that doesn't think too well, that doesn't get out amongst the people. Those would be the things I'd complain about to Metro. I'd venture to say that Metro has probably paid out more money in legal fees to people who've either stepped over the edge, or tripped over, because they don't know how close they are to the edge. I'm surprised that no one has ever made a comment on that, since people on Capitol Hill have a tendency to complain. [both laugh] Let me rephrase that. Some people on Capitol Hill have a tendency to complain a lot and loudly. Give me some other questions.

**PROSKY:** Have you ever been interested in local politics?

**THOMPSON:** No. I don't think I could deal with the scrutiny [both laugh]. I have known Harold Brazil for a long time. I've voted in Washington all my life, ever since you could vote. What a lot of people don't realize, people in Washington have been voting for less than 50 years—for anything. Do you remember the first year that they voted?

**PROSKY:** It was for the school board.

**THOMPSON:** What year was it?

**PROSKY:** I don't know, but I remember working for Marion Barry.

**THOMPSON:** The first year in this city they voted for anything, other than back in 1800s, was in 1964. The thing a lot of people don't realize ... I think this could have changed, but at that point, the bridges and the water is controlled or was controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers.

**PROSKY:** Water certainly is.

**THOMPSON:** I think, water and bridges. When they had the mayor/commissioners, one of the commissioners had to be the commander of the Army Corps of Engineers, because they controlled the water and the bridges. The other people were appointed by some southern congressman. All the D.C. Appropriations committees, you generally had a bunch of Southern congressmen that sat on them. It's a given.

**PROSKY:** I remember that. What about Eastern Market? Did you all ever shop at Eastern Market?

**THOMPSON:** Oh yeah. Eastern Market's been there for eons. At one time there were five [markets] in the city. Eastern Market, Central Market, O Street Market, Fifth Street Market, Western Market. The only one that has survived in the same condition is Eastern Market, and then you have people that want to gentrify that. The answer is: you fix the bathrooms, but if it's not broken, don't fix it. It's amusing to me that people will walk into Eastern Market, especially folks not from ... Sometimes I just hear people speaking, I just want to take them and shake them. People look at meat that's not wrapped and say "Oh my God, look at that!" Take them to Safeway and they're ready to buy it, sight unseen. People look at pork ... At least at Eastern Market, with Union Meat, you can look at a steak, you can pick it up. The guy will pick it up and turn it around for you. You can go to Melvin and pick out your chicken. The stand that Melvin runs now, I remember when the French gentleman used to be there. The only persons that are there in the same form that they were when I was a kid, is probably Chris [Calomiris] and his wife. Union Meat stand was a lot smaller, and then you had the Glasgows next to them. Where the seafood stand is, used to be somebody else there. Chris and his wife are probably the only ones that have been there the whole time in the same form.

**PROSKY:** A long time ago, there was a penny candy store in there too, wasn't there?

**THOMPSON:** Probably. At the far end, up there where the bakery is. That was many years ago. Where there used to be the Safeway across the street. Now there was also a Safeway in the unit block of Seventh Street. At Seventh and East Capitol there used to be another Safeway.

**PROSKY:** Any Acmes, any A&Ps?

**THOMPSON:** I'm trying to remember where. There was one over on H Street. I can't remember any Acmes or A&Ps, I can't remember where they were located, but there were Acmes and A&Ps, and there were also Giants.

**PROSKY:** There were Giants here?

**THOMPSON:** Yeah. They were sponsors of the Pick Temple show, a cowboy show that came on TV called "Pick Temple." That goes back to the '50s.

**PROSKY:** When did you get your first television?

**THOMPSON:** When my brother Joe was getting ready to go to Korea, and that would have been probably, the early '50s—'50 or '51. Black and white, two or three channels then.

**PROSKY:** Did that make a difference in the way your family lived?

**THOMPSON:** It made a difference in what you did in your spare time. TV back then was doing the same thing to a lot of kids that computers are doing today. They give them something to sit in front of instead of going outside and play. Back then, without a TV set, you went outside and played with your friends.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

**PROSKY:** ... street, and then go play with them? Did you go knock on somebody's door and say, "Can so-and-so play?"

**THOMPSON:** No. On my block, we had myself, Johnny, Henry, Skippy, guys we went to school with. We would always have something to do. Go and play, shoot some basketball, play football, or just hang out. There wasn't any devilishness. There was nothing arranged, that was structured ...

**PROSKY:** When did you understand that you had to come home?

**THOMPSON:** My mother said: "Be home at 11 o'clock." You're home at 11 o'clock! You're home, in the house, at 11 o'clock. She didn't say, "Be coming in the house." My mother ran what she called, or we referred to as a "benevolent dictatorship." If she said, "Be home at 11 o'clock," you were home by 11

o'clock and there wasn't any conversation! If she told you, "I don't want to see you hanging round that boy over there any more," that was it! It wasn't "That's my homey." "What did I just say to you?" I grew up with old-school parents. If you thought you knew more than they did, "let the door hit you where the dog bit you." If you thought you were that bad, "I brought you into this world; I'll take you out of it." There wasn't any of this talking back. When you reached that point, you're gone! My parents weren't physically violent, but that's the thing I understood from a child—that if my mother told me to be home at, let's say, 10 o'clock, that meant, "Be home!" It didn't mean, walking up the walkway, standing in the front. "Be in the house." ... conversations aren't necessary. Most people that grew up in that era ... Unfortunately a lot of them didn't carry it over to their kids. They listened to what's his name, Dr. Spark or whoever this ...

**PROSKY:** Spock.

**THOMPSON:** Whoever it was, he put everybody in a tailspin and they still haven't come out of it. When you have kids telling their parents what to do, that's a problem. That's how I grew up.

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

**THOMPSON:** We'll both think of something else as we're going someplace else.

**PROSKY:** I'm sure. I'm sure.

END OF INTERVIEW