



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Sidney Hoffman

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Interviewer: Ev Barnes
Transcriber: Jack Womeldorf

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

BARNES: I am interviewing Sidney Hoffman for the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. It's October 11, 2004, and we're meeting in Mr. Hoffman's home in Silver Spring, Virginia.

HOFFMAN: Maryland.

BARNES: Silver Spring, Maryland. Thank you. He just asked me where I was born, and I said, Virginia. But we're in Silver Spring, Maryland. Mr. Hoffman, would you start by telling us a little bit about your background, and where you were born, and that kind of thing?

HOFFMAN: I was born October 1, 1913, in Harrisburg, PA. My father was born in the 'old country', in Latvia, in 1882, but my mother was born right in Washington, DC, in 1890.

My father was in business in Pennsylvania. They were married in 1912, and I was born in 1913. I believe it was 1915, we moved to Washington, and my father opened a shoe store on H Street NE. He moved later to another location, a better location, at 1021 H Street. He was there until he died in 1924. My mother took over the shoe store for a while, but it was too much for her. She had two children and subsequently, due to a relationship with an uncle who was in the theater business, she got a job. She was an accomplished musician; she played in theaters. She reminded me at one time that she played the piano or organ, in the Home Theatre. She went to the Avenue Grand and stayed there until sound came in. From then on, she stayed in retail sales.

In the meantime I was growing up. The Avenue Grand was located between Sixth and Seventh Streets on Pennsylvania Avenue SE. The Home Theatre that I referred to was located at 1230 C Street NE and the Apollo Theatre, which was a later location that I was at, was located on H Street NE between Sixth and Seventh. In the meantime, in growing up, I had gone to grade school at the Madison School, a while at the Ludlow School. Both were on G Street, one at Tenth and one at Sixth, NE. And I went to another grade school, but I don't remember the name. But from there, I went to Eastern High School in 1927. I graduated from Eastern High School in 1927 [sic; actually 1931].

While at Eastern, I wasn't too much in athletics, but I became very involved in a paramount military group that they had in the high schools; it was called the High School Cadets. At the end of the year, there was a competitive drill which was as attractive as any of the athletic contests. In 1930 they had a drill for the best drill sergeants in the city. There were five high schools, and about 250 people that engaged in this competitive event, and I was the first person from Eastern to ever win that, in 1930.

I graduated in 1931 and I signed up to attend Wilson Teachers College at that time. I went there for a year, and at night I was working at the Earle Theatre, which is now the Warner Theater, and located on 13th Street NW. But I loved the theater, so I gave up Wilson Teachers, and for the next 27 years I worked in theaters. During that time, after being elevated to assistant manager at the Earle, my next available opportunity was a managership in the neighborhood theater. That was the time when I went to the Home Theater in NE, which I mentioned was on C Street, and next, to the Apollo Theater, and subsequently, away from the area. I was at the Colony on Georgia Avenue, the Kennedy, on Kennedy Street, all in NW, and the Sheridan, in NW, and the Tivoli, which is now being renovated. Then I went to the Metropolitan Theater, which was on F Street between Ninth and Tenth [NW]. For a while, I spent a few weeks to fill in at the Uptown Theatre, which at that time was running Cinerama. If I remember correctly it was ... anyway, I'll come back to the picture.

I stayed in the theater until 1957, and then I went into the jewelry business. My uncle, who was in the jewelry business, had tried to talk me out of continuing in the theater, because there was not much home life there. So I went to work for Benson's Jewelry on F Street [NW]. I got my gemologist's degree from the American Gemological Society, and from there an opportunity opened up, and for the next seven years, I was the supervisor for the Fine Jewelry Departments in the Hecht Company stores. That was taken over; it was what they called a 'leased department'. You operate just as though you're the store, and they do a lot of the work for you, but it really belongs to somebody else. When Gordon Jewelry took it over, we were not on good terms, so I left, and I went to work for Melart Jewelers and from there I remained in the jewelry business until about 1991 or 2 when I retired. And I've been enjoying retirement ever since. But kept busy.

BARNES: Yes. You did stay involved with Eastern High School. Can you tell us about that?

HOFFMAN: Yes. Strange thing, I referred to the High School Cadets before. There was a group, that as a result of three classes getting together for a 50th Anniversary, they formed a group called the "Eastern 50 Plus Club". These were people that graduated over 50 years ago from Eastern High School. I was invited to a committee meeting, because I had put on the 50th graduation for my class of 1931. I walked into this committee meeting, and a gentleman who had been my captain in the High School Cadets, his name was Harold Kern. He walked up to me and said, "Sidney, you're the next president of the Eastern 50 Plus Club" and I said, "Harold, I've never been to a meeting".

But anyways, from there on, one of my innovations was the introduction of the bulletin which contains people who attend, people who contribute, the names in memoriam of the deceased that fall within the period that you would have qualified for the Eastern 50 Plus Club. We have class representatives from each class, and they help to distribute the registration forms. We only meet once a year. Last place we've

been meeting—we used to meet in some of the hotels but I believe the first one I attended, there were about 200-250, but we started at Maryland University, and we've been having anywhere's from 400 to 500 people each year. I've stayed involved. When the treasurer's job was open, after I'd been president, I went into that on a temporary basis, and I've maintained the problem of preparing the registration forms for the event, and distributing them to the class representatives who then distribute them on to the individuals in their class, keeping me current on 'deceased', names to add, and addresses to change. And that's where it's been going ever since.

BARNES: That's been quite a job. You've been doing that since...

HOFFMAN: Since 1983.

BARNES: Since 1983. Because I'm looking at...

HOFFMAN: There were three years in there which I didn't do it. Two years, there was a girl from my class that took over the job, and another year one of the women who was president, also wanted to do it, and I backed off, glad to have somebody volunteer. But I'm back into it this year, which is 2004. I'm preparing the book for 2005.

BARNES: The book... Does it have just your class?

HOFFMAN: The book has all of the classes. Their names are put in there and segregated as far—I shouldn't even use that word, I guess—they're separated as to the class they were in, and also, the same thing with contributions, and now I've even put the people—we sell the book for \$6, and I mailed out about 160 last year. I have started to put their name in there because people like to see who is left in their class. They get some of this information—I don't give out any addresses or anything, unless I get the consent of the person involved, and I have had requests for addresses and followed up on them.

BARNES: So how many are still in this area in your class of 1931?

HOFFMAN: Well, I mail out about 1,500 registration forms. I would say in Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and even include West Virginia, there is probably about 35-40% of the people fall in those categories.

BARNES: Well, I think it's amazing that you've stayed so involved with Eastern High School over the years. I'm sure that there have been a lot of changes, and I wondered if you would comment?

HOFFMAN: Well, I don't read a lot of good things about Eastern High School any more. They've had some problems out there. My love is still with the school. I think that at one time we contributed something. They had a great choral society—they still have a great choral society there. I might say that

getting it to the very area that you're talking about, I can remember—let me go back for a minute and say that Eastern High School—the original location was Peabody School, I've forgotten the location...

BARNES: Northeast, near Stanton Park.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, Stanton Park, and later on, it went to Hine Junior High School...

BARNES: On Pennsylvania Avenue.

HOFFMAN: It was on Pennsylvania Avenue, and then in 1923 the new building opened up. Now. The chaplain, who is listed in here. His name is Hoffman, by the way. But I'll tell you something, he graduated from Eastern and later on became Principal of Hine Junior High School. But he also conducted the school for pages on Capitol Hill.

BARNES: Oh, he did?

HOFFMAN: He would be a wonderful person for you to talk to, but I wouldn't do it without his consent. He's been right ill, but I will go ahead and ask—I may be seeing him in a couple weeks.

BARNES: OK, that would be wonderful.

HOFFMAN: It might open a door for you. In addition, there was a group of women—this is to maybe indicate that somebody once said to me that the people in your education, the people that you remain closest to, are the ones in high school, because of your age, and when you go to college, you meet people from all over the world. But I do have in there—in fact, there's a picture in there of three of us who probably were together from the first grade through high school. One is gone. In fact, he was a professional basketball referee, and he's in the Basketball Hall of Fame, and his name is Dallas Shirley.

BARNES: Dallas Early?

HOFFMAN: J. Dallas Shirley, and was a—I talked him into being president of the club at one time. He's deceased.

BARNES: Oh. How do you spell his last name?

HOFFMAN: Shirley, the same as the girl.

BARNES: Oh. Is Dallas D A L L A S?

HOFFMAN: I think he signed it J. Dallas Shirley. A very good friend of mine over the years. We remain close. As I say, when he came to the club, I talked him into being president. In fact, I picked him; we never had an election. We've never had an election in this club. And I've gotten into trouble. I have a

beautiful letter somewhere, from a woman I had a lot of trouble with, because their group had picked one person to be president, no, class representative, let me correct myself, and another group picked another person, and she called me up, and we had a few words, but once things straightened out, she's a lovely person, and we have a marvelous relationship.

BARNES: Well, over the years, I'm sure that there have been lots of times that you've called on your high school buddies. Did you ever set up a regular time that you met, like every month you'd go out for dinner or lunch, or anything like that?

HOFFMAN: No. The only thing that we have done—each year, and they missed it this year, it's the first time—we have gathered those people who either were officers of the club in the past, or were class representatives at this time, or before, and we've had a little luncheon for them which the club itself gave money, part of the way of the cost of the registration; we've honored them in that way. We give door prizes at the reunions, too, but they're inexpensive prizes, but very much appreciated.

BARNES: But the source of income is just the events, the dinners...

HOFFMAN: Yeah, although I have a lot of friends in there that I didn't have in high school.

BARNES: Do you get donations from outside of the group?

HOFFMAN: Yes. Do you want to hear a strange story? There was a family in Northeast who—I'm Jewish, and this family was Jewish. The mother was a half-sister to Al Jolson, and I used to take the daughter out. There was another daughter who graduated from Eastern. She'd met a man there; his name was Alex Goodewitz [later changed to Goode]. He became a rabbi and eventually a chaplain in the Army. He was on the "Dorchester" [USS Dorchester], the ship that sank, where the four chaplains were supposed to be holding arm in arm as this ship sank during World War II. A man that came in, and I can't think of his name now, came to a session, his folks had a grocery store in Southwest, but he asked me if he could come that late, and we established a friendship after two sessions that he'd been there, and then he sent me a check for \$500 because he was taking care of the estate of Alex Goodewitz [Alexander D. Goode], the rabbi that died in the war, and donated it to Eastern High School.

BARNES: That is a wonderful story. So you do have people that make donations. But otherwise, you're dependent on the people that register and come for the events?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, and fortunately, I've made a lot of friends outside of that. There's a fellow who's on the District Police Force. That man named Frank Innocenti. He has become a very dear friend. There's Jack Hoffman, there's a fellow named Chester Speiser who worked for the gas company for many years—S-P-E-I-S-E-R. Just a thought comes to me—one thing I remember as far as we're talking about

the area we've referred to as Capitol Hill. I can remember when I was 14-15 years old going to high school, and we were given assignments to do something. I would go up from my house to the Library of Congress and we would go in there. It was a simple matter, and you got the books you wanted, and you had a chance to do a little research, which is a little different than the regimentation I think are the procedures today.

BARNES: I can't even imagine being able to walk into the Library of Congress... and check out a book?

HOFFMAN: We didn't take them out. No. But you could do your research there.

BARNES: And you could actually walk in the stacks?

HOFFMAN: No. No. You went to a desk—first you went to a file. Let's say you were doing a research on the Revolution, and you wanted to find out about a General, or something like that, and you would go to these files, and run it down, maybe, Oglethorpe or somebody like that, and you could run the file down, and get out books on this person. In addition, they had newspapers there from practically—the large newspapers from all over the United States. A lot of times, we'd just go up there to read the comic strips! [Both laugh] It was open access, and the Capitol—we used to walk in the Capitol—I have walked up to the dome. Today, they don't let anybody go up to the dome, you know. And you'd walked into where—the Supreme Court was in the Capitol at one time, in the early days. Before the [Supreme Court] building was built. And we'd walk in, not while it was in session. But as far as Congress was concerned, we'd walk in there...I liked to listen to speakers like Huey Long [of Louisiana], Johnson from California, and Borah [of Idaho], there was a fellow from Missouri, they were all great speakers. You were exposed to good oration, let's put it that way. Maybe I picked up something that way, I don't know.

BARNES: Yes, because you're an excellent speaker. I wanted to ask: how many places did you live on Capitol Hill while you were going to school?

HOFFMAN: I lived—we lived over the store on H Street, 1021 was the shoe store, and we lived upstairs. And by the way, you did not have a toilet, you had an outhouse. And then my father bought a—by the way, my father—I don't want to deviate too much from this—but my father and a cousin of his—this cousin had a bigger store in the same block and they were very close. They developed a friendship with a man named Cuno H. Rudolph, who was top teller or something in Second National Bank on Seventh Street, NW. But he became one of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, and during Prohibition, my father used to get liquor for Cuno H. Rudolph, and they went to him, and they wanted to put electric lights on H Street and they got them.

BARNES: What year do you think that was?

HOFFMAN: It had to happen before '24, because that's when he died. The early '20s. But getting back to—where was I?

BARNES: Where you lived.

HOFFMAN: Where we lived, yeah. Then we lived on Kent Place, which is about two blocks—do you know where Gallaudet is? We were about two blocks from Gallaudet. They were in between K and L, and Ninth and Tenth. Then I lived around the corner, with my grandmother, on Ninth Street. That was after my father died. My grandmother and grandfather moved to G Street between Seventh and Eighth, all in Northeast. Later on we moved back to Kent Place, because my mother still owned that house. Then later on, we moved to Southeast, and we lived on North Carolina Avenue, and then we lived on Seward Square. That was across the street from where J. Edgar Hoover's home was. You know that he had a home...

BARNES: Oh! What year was that?

HOFFMAN: That would have been before '28, I believe, because one reason we were there was because it was near the theater, and it was around that time—I'm guessing a little bit here. Then later on we moved to Northwest.

BARNES: How long did you live in Washington, all total? How many years? From birth till now?

HOFFMAN: When I moved out into Maryland was—let's see, we were married in '38. About '39 we lived in Maryland, and then we went back into Northeast, I mean into Washington. We lived in Silver Spring, Walden Road. I bought a house there. Then we moved back into Washington with my in-laws, because it looked like I was going in the Service. I was living on Oneida Place, across from Paul Junior High School, and from there, we went to Third Place, because I needed another bedroom...more room.

BARNES: Northwest?

HOFFMAN: These are within three to four blocks of each other. Then we moved to Farrell Drive in Silver Spring. I was there for 29 years.

BARNES: But you have managed to keep up with what was going on in Washington because you worked there for so many years!

HOFFMAN: I never worked in the theater outside of Washington. I was once offered a job, but my uncle—by the way, his daughter lives right across the street. He said, "Don't take it." The big boss wanted me to take it; I didn't want to take it because I'd have gone in a small town and that wasn't for me.

BARNES: Tell us about the theaters at that time, the different ones that you worked in, and the kinds of movies that you had back then...

HOFFMAN: Downtown was a vaudeville house. They had usually four acts, or they had a band, or they had a line of girls. The Earle originally introduced the idea locally of having a Mistress of Ceremonies, and her name—I've got a picture somewhere, taken with her, in my usher's uniform. They did collections of toys for tots, and there's a picture of her in the lobby. Her name was Maxine Doyle, and then they had another one after that. Her name was Gracie Barrie. And then after that, the third one was a girl that worked in Lansburgh's who participated in the contest to pick a new Mistress of Ceremonies for the Earle Theater, and her name was Audrey Seiber.

BARNES: When you left the Earle, you went to...

HOFFMAN: That was 1936. I went to the Home Theatre. The Home Theatre was about a 600-seat theater. It was a good place to get acquainted. One of the first things I hadn't had before was serials on Saturday. The light side of it was, when you had the serials on Saturday, you probably didn't want to come in there, because there was a little store. The Home Theater had two stores, which were part of the property that belonged to the company. One of them was a little tailor shop, and the other was a little confectionary store. But they sold dill pickles, and the kids would all buy dill pickles and come in the store...

BARNES: And go into the theater?

HOFFMAN: ...and go into the theater.

BARNES: Oh, so that was the Home Theater.

HOFFMAN: And then we went to the Apollo. The strange thing that happened there...of course I grew up attending the Apollo Theater, because it was our theater in those days. There were a couple of other theaters in Northeast. There was one called the Dixie, that nobody knows about, but I have a book on it, and I know about it, too. And there was one called the Princess Theater, where on Friday, if you got to the theater by 3:30, you could get in for five cents. You'd rush home to get a nickel from your parent, and run over to the theater.

BARNES: So you weren't managing that one?

HOFFMAN: No, no. Only the Apollo. The Apollo was *the* theater in that area. The thing that happened to me at the Apollo Theater was—we had a balcony, and we used to close it up because there was no reason to keep it open, but on Saturday we'd have a lot of people in there. And I wasn't thinking, I wasn't

being smart; I'd go up there—we had a comedy, I don't know if it was the Three Stooges, or Laurel and Hardy, or Charlie Chaplin, or whatever—Buster Keaton. They weren't laughing. I'd go up there—they weren't laughing. They were smooching. They were all from Gallaudet. I think that's in one of these books.

BARNES: You should have been suspicious, when they were all...

HOFFMAN: I should have known, because I grew up in that neighborhood! But it just didn't hit me right away. In 1953, during Eisenhower's inauguration, they invited stars in for atmosphere, you might say, and also because there were usually balls held and they wanted things to build up attendance, and one of them coming in was John Wayne. I was assigned to him, with a limousine, for three days. I went to the airport, he got off, I shook hands with him, he walked ahead, and his press representative, who was going to spend the three days there also, told me, "Don't call him John; call him Duke." We got to the car; I said, "Duke, would you mind if we took a picture"? My son Ron was with me. So Ron took the picture of the three of us, the press representative, Duke, and myself. And then we start to get in the car, while I said to the press representative, "You sit in the back, I'll sit in the back, and Ron will sit in the back. Duke will sit up front. But Duke turned and said to Ron, "Wouldn't you like to sit up front with me"? So that made him a star in my son's eyes the rest of his life, and he's 60-odd years old! In addition, when he left, which doesn't seem like a big deal today, the press representative pulled me aside (my son wasn't with me) and he said, "Duke knows that we are not to give you escorts anything, but Duke wants you to give this \$10 bill to Ron. We talked about it the other day—he says he's still got it.

BARNES: Still got the \$10—from 1953!

HOFFMAN: From 1953, but in the meantime, they were, during FDR's terms in office—every year they started having balls to raise money for infantile paralysis, not only in Washington, but all over the country. They had seven of them here, and we were assigned to stars, during the course of which, on one occasion, I had Bruce Cabot, and the only thing he'd been in was "King Kong". I picked him up at the Polish Embassy. The door was opened by an attendant with silk pants on. We went upstairs, and I was introduced to Count Potocki. Count Potocki is mentioned in—who's the guy who wrote "Hawaii" and so forth? Michener. In [James] Michener's book ["Poland"], as being from the royal family of Poland. Also there was Liz Whitney, from Virginia. You don't know about her, but she had quite a reputation in her day. Anyways, we went back to the White House, and they told the escorts to wait—this was at 11:30, after you'd made the rounds—wait in the East Wing, where they had a radio, and the stars went downstairs to the Oval Office, and be present with the President when he spoke to the country thanking them for their contribution to the Infantile Paralysis Fund. Well, they changed their mind; they took the escorts down...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

HOFFMAN: We were in the East Room, but they changed their mind, and the escorts went downstairs to be in the Oval Office with the stars. And there I was standing next to Bruce Cabot, and Errol Flynn I believe was here, and two of the Roosevelt boys, and they were making plans to go someplace in Virginia, down in Hunt Country, I don't know what for, but they were going to be together. In the meantime, then we were asked to line up, and we stood in line, and when you approached the President, there was a gentleman there, like a butler, standing there, and he said, "What is your name". I said, "Sidney Hoffman". He said, "Mr. President, this is Sidney Hoffman", and we got a chance to shake hands with FDR, and what could you say? I said, "A very good speech, Mr. President". And on I went, but when we came out, I was with Bruce Cabot, and we were standing on the steps of the White House, waiting for the limousine to pull up. In the meantime, a limousine pulled up—Eleanor Roosevelt went around to the hotels to represent the president, and she was just returning from one hotel, and she stopped and talked to us—she wanted to know how the speech was, and so forth. Very pleasant! During the course of the years, I had, on such occasions, I had Wayne Morse [the senator from Oregon], I had Pat O'Brien, I had a woman (and I've forgotten her name) she was the woman that rendered the best version of 'Star Spangled Banner' according to the president, so she was on the list. Who else? It went on and on. Maybe another one or two stars—I've forgotten who they were.

BARNES: How many years did you participate in that?

HOFFMAN: It lasted all through—I guess for five or six years of his term. Of course he had a long session, but I don't remember in the later years—well, later on, I went into the service, and it wasn't going on then.

BARNES: Did you serve overseas?

HOFFMAN: No. I had a very unique job. I didn't want to go in the Army. I might not have been drafted, but I didn't want to take any chances. I had a wife and a son, and the siblings of her family, there were two or three of them living with us, so she was well taken care of while I was away. So I enlisted in the Navy. I first went into the Amphibious Forces, but a friend of mine told me there was a good location for me, and what I knew, in Yorktown. So I went to Yorktown and spoke to the officer there, and with a lot of footwork, I got transferred the day before the amphibious crew sailed for the Pacific. I got pulled out, and I went to Yorktown. I became, you might say, the manager of the theater there, of all things. There were 2,000 civilian employees, and 2,000 military, and I stayed there the rest of my time in the service.

But I also became managing editor—they had a base newspaper there. I took photographs for the officers for Christmas parties, and all that kind of stuff. I really had a good time, let's put it that way.

BARNES: How many years were you...?

HOFFMAN: I was only in about twenty months, that's all.

BARNES: That was in 1944?

HOFFMAN: That was in '44, and I got out in '46. The war was over then.

BARNES: You didn't move your family to Yorktown?

HOFFMAN: No, although the friend of mine that worked down there that told me about this opening; he had an apartment down there, and he opened it up—my wife and son came down and spent a week with me down there, and I could go to the apartment every night, and come back on the base.

BARNES: That worked out really well.

HOFFMAN: The best of two worlds.

BARNES: You were saying one more thing.

HOFFMAN: Another aside here, that might open up an avenue for you. There was also a group of women who attended a funeral in 1978. They decided they were going to meet, and they called themselves "The Capitol Hillites". They now meet two or three times a year. In fact, I have an invitation—I joined it. Practically all women at first anyway. No male officers anyways. At one time I was making address labels for them and making up their bulletins, but I stopped that. They meet, get together, and just talk, that's all. It's a group that there might be some information that's useful to you. Not this one, but maybe the next one, I'll talk to the president and I'll invite you to attend if you like.

BARNES: That would be delightful. I'd like to know about them. In fact, we get a lot of cross-references with the interviews that we do, so whenever we get something like that, we look at other interviews to see if that has come up before. We want all the information we can get. We don't care how many times it's duplicated!

Can you tell us a little about what daily life was like on Capitol Hill?

HOFFMAN: It was a very pleasant situation. We never locked our doors. You associated—whomever you associated, regardless of race or anything else—for example, I used to play baseball in the back alley where my father's store was, with the black boys that lived on the side street there. We just played

together in that period! That situation was like—one day a policeman walks in and tells my father, “Ben, you know you didn’t lock the front door of your store last night?” Nothing happened. My mother was rather lenient with me as I was growing up. She was working hard, she’d go to bed and she’d go to sleep! If I got home late, she didn’t worry about me.

BARNES: Did you have brothers and sisters?

HOFFMAN: I have a sister. She was just here, because her granddaughter got married, and then she went back to Florida.

BARNES: There were two of you growing up together?

HOFFMAN: That’s right. We have a great relationship.

BARNES: Was she younger or older?

HOFFMAN: She’s younger.

BARNES: Did she go to Eastern High?

HOFFMAN: No. We had moved out of the area by then. She was born, I think it was ’21. My father died in ’24. She may have gone a year to one of the grade schools...and then we moved. It seems to me she went to school in the Northwest area.

BARNES: You played baseball with kids in the neighborhood. Were there any baseball parks?

HOFFMAN: There was one famous playground in Washington. It was called Rosedale. I’m pretty sure that’s it. They had a swimming pool there.

BARNES: Where was that?

HOFFMAN: That was about 17th and G Street, or something like that, in the Northeast section. In fact, that’s where I learned to swim, when they threw me in the pool. [laughs]

BARNES: It was a summer pool.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. There were playgrounds around there. In fact, today, they kind of close off the playgrounds, but in those days, if there were swings there, or if they had a bar that you used to climb up, and so forth, you could go in there during the day. In summer time you could go in there and play.

BARNES: Where did you shop?

HOFFMAN: Shopping was along H Street for people within five blocks. There was a shopping area in Southeast. Both Pennsylvania Avenue and Eighth Street. Eighth Street was the main place for the Marine Corps.

BARNES: Right. It's still there.

HOFFMAN: I think there was a library there then too, if I remember. By the way, there's a great cemetery at the end of Pennsylvania Avenue John Philip Sousa, I think, is buried there.

BARNES: The Congressional Cemetery, that's just off of Potomac Avenue Yes, they've done a lot with that. Eighth Street has now been renewed, and they've done a lot of work on it.

HOFFMAN: On H Street too.

BARNES: H is coming.

HOFFMAN: They were caught in that "Martin Luther King thing". There was a lot of areas that were caught in that. I have friends—one fellow, he lived two doors up, a friend from way back, had a hardware store on H Street and he was in Hawaii, and they told him his store was burned out.

BARNES: When you were in school, did they have sports within the schools during that time?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, they didn't have teams as I remember, but they did in high school. They were very competitive. Very competitive. Football, basketball, track, baseball. Eastern High School, at one time, had a baseball coach, and one of the other sports, maybe it was basketball, he was Indian, called him Chief Guyon, G-U-Y-O-N. He had a brother that played professional football, I think. They had regular coaches and everything.

BARNES: The baseball team—we're working to get another one back in Washington, but there was...the Senators.

HOFFMAN: I can remember, it had to be before 1928, I think that was the year they won the pennant or the World Series. My mother never had driven, but when my father died... My father bought a car and never drove it. He always had somebody drive it for him, but it wasn't my mother. But she bought a little car and she drove it. I remember that the car was sitting out front, and we heard on the radio that the Senators had won the World Series or something. I went outside, and I was blowing the horn on the car. In the next block, there was a theater called the Empire. Next door to it was an automobile shop. They were selling over the counter. They didn't do repair work or anything like that. They had a radio. Practically the whole area was in front of that store, listening to the World Series.

BARNES: Those were the days, I guess, that your neighborhood... was that pretty much where you stayed, in terms of...?

HOFFMAN: I didn't go in Northwest. I used to like to go to the library. I used to go to the library for my grandfather. In fact, I'd go to [for] myself. Anything that Dumas had written is what he'd like to read. He originally had a tailor shop, but it was on Seventh Street NW. He lived on Tenth Street NE. We lived with him.

BARNES: How did life change when you moved to Northwest?

HOFFMAN: It wasn't much different. We were near family, because our family was spread all over the city from Northeast to Southeast, near Georgetown, and so forth.

BARNES: So did you have a lot of gathering of family? That was your entertainment, more or less?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. I can remember, my father was a little bit of an organizer of fun trips. There was one, New Year's Eve, we were living on Kent Place NE. All the family was at our house. He had bought toy instruments for the family. There were talented people in our family; show business and so forth, and we went out and marched on the street; they did, I didn't, I was a kid.

BARNES: You were a kid and just the adults went out. They had their own little parade.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, their own parade. Another time (this happened in Northwest) we were going to visit a cousin... how long have you been in Washington?

BARNES: 18 years.

HOFFMAN: You don't remember a sports announcer by the name of Warner Wolfe?

BARNES: No.

HOFFMAN: He's a relative. He was in New York. He was here, then New York, came back here, then went back to New York. His father had a place near Washington Circle, and my grandparents lived at 444 K Street NW, near the market there. My father was going over there, he didn't have a car then, so he saw a hack, you know, with a horse; he hired it and we rode from there over to our cousins' and kept riding in circles in front until everybody in the house saw it. We did wild things...but they were very compatible.

BARNES: What were Christmases like when you spoke of that, since yours was a Jewish family you had your own holidays (Hanukkah) but there were always family affairs...

HOFFMAN: Always family. Each of the holidays was a gathering for some of the family: the New Year, Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur, the day of atonement; and the big thing there was the dinner when you broke the fast.

BARNES: Right, but that was always a family gathering.

HOFFMAN: Not just the immediate family.

BARNES: Oh, you'd bring other people in.

HOFFMAN: Well, like cousins. You were related to the people for the most part. I guess there were some exceptions too.

BARNES: At that time, was your family very much involved with politics in the city?

HOFFMAN: You know, I don't know if I can answer that question. I don't remember. Like I said, my father was involved with the commissioner, but we didn't even vote for them; they were appointed by the president. Actually we couldn't vote for anything in Washington anyway. I really voted for local folks when I moved into Maryland.

BARNES: Was there a fire station on H Street?

HOFFMAN: There was a fire station on Maryland Avenue. I think it was at 13th or 14th Streets. When I first remember it, they had three horses.

BARNES: Three horses, with the water wagon; that was what they had? And of course it was all volunteer.

HOFFMAN: No, I don't think it was.

BARNES: Do you remember when they got an actual fire truck?

HOFFMAN: No.

BARNES: They probably weren't even there when you left the Hill.

HOFFMAN: Oh I think eventually, before I left Northeast, they had a fire truck there.

BARNES: Were there any major disasters that you can recall during your...

HOFFMAN: I have a vague recollection that they called out the troops because they had a race riot there about 1919. But I'd have to say, put it in print. But there were racial problems there. Once again, with Martin Luther King, they had them along H Street, but that's much later.

BARNES: Do you remember having hard times in your life, when you were on the Hill?

HOFFMAN: Well, we were not well off, but we got by. My mother was a good provider.

BARNES: After your father died...

HOFFMAN: He had some property. Had a house for us to live in.

BARNES: And a business.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, and the business. They were investing in real estate. He and this fellow I told you, who met with the commissioner to try to get the lights. They were buying houses together, for 3 or 4,000 dollars, turn around and sell them for 5 and 6 thousand dollars, fix them up a little.

BARNES: So they were in real estate development.

HOFFMAN: They worked a little bit in that. I can remember them playing horseshoes out in the back yard, back of the shoe store.

BARNES: That was a popular game! Popular when I grew up! [both laugh]

HOFFMAN: It still has its moments.

BARNES: Yes. I always enjoyed horseshoes. I was pretty good at it, too. And that's when we played with real shoes, not those little plastic things they have now.

HOFFMAN: Were you on a farm?

BARNES: No, I lived in the country, but it was actually not a farm.

HOFFMAN: Near Monticello? In the store there was a stove...

BARNES: Was it a wood-burning stove?

HOFFMAN: A wood-burning stove, or coal, and in the house on Kent Place, was coal, because I can remember shoveling coal in there, taking the ashes out, and so forth.

BARNES: And the clinkers? Do you remember clinkers? They would be the hardened ...

HOFFMAN: And you couldn't do anything with them?

BARNES: And you'd have to get them out of the grates. Was milk delivered?

HOFFMAN: Yeah, milk was delivered. Every once in a while you'd get something else with it. In the wintertime where it would freeze and force the top up...

BARNES: What were the winters like?

HOFFMAN: By the way, they had outside...in the wintertime, they had a thing on the window that was a refrigerator. You had it built—it was like shelves in a box, but you put all the goods that could turn bad, you'd put it out there. Soon as you hit real cold weather, and over the winter, they would save ice.

BARNES: And in between, like in the summer, you had an icebox?

HOFFMAN: You had an icebox, with an iceman coming around. I can remember when we had lamplighters, when they had gaslights.

BARNES: Oh, really? There were gaslights on H Street.

HOFFMAN: On those back streets then...

BARNES: Certainly long before electricity. But were the winters colder than what we know now? Or about the same?

HOFFMAN: I guess now we cover up better. We have cold resistance. I can remember the great snowstorm of, it was either '21 or '22, and that was when the Ambassador, no, what the heck was it? The Knickerbocker Theater—have you heard of that?

BARNES: Yes.

HOFFMAN: ...collapsed. The snow was like this—from the weight of the snow on the roof.

BARNES: And you remember that?

HOFFMAN: Yes, I remember that. Not only that; when I became a manager, the man who had been manager during that time was still the manager. He was a good friend; older man. He survived it—when it came down it was mostly the center of the theater anyways. This girl here—her father was involved in having to—he was one of the people that was on call, because as a result of that he went over there to see what he could do.

BARNES: And that someone you referred to here?

HOFFMAN: Across the street.

BARNES: In your present condo.

HOFFMAN: She doesn't know anything about it.

BARNES: So the apartment over the store—how many rooms did it have?

HOFFMAN: It had three rooms. We had a back room, and that's where you ate, and you wanted to take a bath, they had a tub, you poured water in it, and that's the way you took your bath. The front room was the beds, and I guess generally at first I slept in the same room with my parents.

BARNES: Because people didn't have as many rooms...

HOFFMAN: The bedroom was a storeroom for the shoes, too.

BARNES: That's right, you had to have a place for that...

HOFFMAN: Although we had a lot of space in there.

BARNES: Do you know where your father and mother purchased the shoes that they sold in the store? Did they order them?

HOFFMAN: The only name I remember is Endicott Johnson. I think it was a firm in New York State. I think there's still an Endicott City in New York State, I believe.

BARNES: The manufacturer is still there?

HOFFMAN: That I wouldn't know. I don't see the name anymore. The other thing about the store I remember was, Dr. Scholl's came out with these things for corns, bunions, and so forth, and my father was the first one to put in a supply of them on H Street. The first *shoe* store. I'm sure that the drug stores had them, and so forth.

BARNES: Was there a drug store on H Street?

HOFFMAN: Oh yeah, there was a People's Drug Store. Then there was another drug store on the corner, and I remember that because, I don't know whether you ever saw it before—they had these big glass things—it was a container for something they would use for medicine, only it was tremendous sized, and they put colored water in it. Two sides.

BARNES: I think it was, a pestle—a mortar and a pestle?

HOFFMAN: No, no. It was just like a heart shaped, without the indentation at the top, it came down to almost a point, and it was just filled with colored water and hung in there. You knew it was a drug store. Not all the drug stores had it, but this was independently owned. It hung in the show window.

BARNES: Did the drug stores have fountains, then, where you could buy...

HOFFMAN: If I remember, no, I don't think so. Later on.

BARNES: Were there favorite candy stores, or anything like that, that you went to on the street?

HOFFMAN: Yes, there was a store across from the Apollo Theater, I can't, once again, remember the name, but it had a reputation all over for having good candy, and a couple of delicacies they had, some kind of taffy or something like that. Then they sold popcorn, which kids would bring into the theater.

BARNES: Because the theaters didn't have a concession?

HOFFMAN: No, no. That happened, I think... When I first went into theaters they didn't have even the machines, but then, when I finally got down to the Metropolitan Theater they had a candy stand in the lobby, but before that, all the smaller theaters just had machines. Everything was machines. And the thing you sold most of was a candy—J-U-J-U-B-E-S. Jujubes.

BARNES: Jujubes! What was it like? Was it like...

HOFFMAN: It was like a taffy. You would chew it. It was like a solid gel.

BARNES: Was that your favorite?

HOFFMAN: No, it had to be chocolate to be my favorite.

BARNES: I'm with you on that one. I know that you've said you have a great number of friends, probably all over this city, and you mentioned...

HOFFMAN: In both types of jobs that I was in: theaters and department stores.

BARNES: Over the years, though, you have kept up with those from Eastern High School, at least three.

HOFFMAN: In fact, I've got something here, I'm going out [in the mail] to a woman in Nebraska who was, when I had the reunion, she was my corresponding secretary, and then she took a job, and she was a class representative in the "50 Plus Club". She lives out there now. She's in a nursing home, but I'm sending her a couple of books that were important. One of them has her (let's see if I've got it here). I'm referring to Virginia Harvey Fisher. By the way, there were four sisters, and we used to call them 'the Harvey girls'. The movie? "The Harvey Girls". And, she worked with me, and then later on, she became president, and this is one book that I didn't do. She wanted to do it. She and her sisters put it together, and that was '89, and this other one is '83. This is...her husband was ill, his name is in here, but she was really the corresponding secretary for this. So I just wanted to send it to her, to reminisce about the old days.

BARNES: Yeah, that's so good of you, to keep up with all these people.

HOFFMAN: I've been active in the Lions' Club, too. Just for the Leisure World.

BARNES: ...in this area. We didn't talk about meals. When you went to school, did you take your lunch, or was there a cafeteria? Did you go home for lunch?

HOFFMAN: Yeah. We used to take some lunches, I think, or I'd run across [the street] to a store there. You'd get a sandwich or something. When I went to the Madison School, I could go home for lunch, I was that close. A little story about lunches and so forth—high school—in my third year, I'm walking down the hall, and the assistant principal, a man, walked over to me, "Sidney, would you like to work in the lunch room"? So I said, "Yes, I'd love to work in the lunch room." Could get my lunches free. So I worked there for two years. I always seemed to work the same shift when the principal of the school would come to lunch, and he had one favorite thing. Now, later on, the cadets had a night in which they would put on a program for the classes, and I was sitting on an end seat—I wasn't in it, and right behind me was the principal. He was a beloved man. In fact, there is a school [named] after him. His name is Charles Hart. And I turned around and said, "Mr. Hart, I think I know where you'd rather be than [here] right now". He says, "Where?" I said "Downstairs having a pineapple sundae!" He says, "You're right!" That was his favorite, every day.

BARNES: I can't even imagine, getting a pineapple sundae...

HOFFMAN: Fresh pineapple.

BARNES: Fresh pineapple?

HOFFMAN: I think it was fresh...vanilla ice cream. I got a good memory about small things.

BARNES: Well, they're very important. It's the small things that make life worthwhile. So your mom did all the cooking at home...

HOFFMAN: Yeah. My family, my mother's family was not real religious. They were synagogue members. In fact, another story?

BARNES: Yes! We love stories.

HOFFMAN: When I was born...I was born in Harrisburg [PA], but somehow they got the message to my grandfather, who was sitting in the synagogue, on one side, and my grandmother was sitting upstairs on the other side, and they could see each other, and they had arranged a signal, so what he did, when somebody from the family came in and told him they'd gotten a call that his daughter had a son, he looked up at his wife and he said "one." That meant a boy. The other time, my sister was born in Sibley Hospital, (both of us were born on religious holidays) and he was sitting there. My father, who wouldn't

go to the hospital—he hated hospitals. He’d go in and run out. He walked in [to the synagogue] and said—I believe I was with him—and he said to his father-in-law “two,” and he looked. My grandfather looks up to his wife and he says: “A girl.” One for a boy, and two for a girl.

BARNES: Oh, what a wonderful story! So your mom didn’t have help, she didn’t have any hired help...

HOFFMAN: When my father was first ill, her sister and her sister’s husband and their son, moved in with us, so there was really—my sister and I and my mother, and her sister, husband, and child—so we were all in that small house.

BARNES: Not on H Street.

HOFFMAN: On Kent Place.

BARNES: They came to help?

HOFFMAN: He was in Laurel Sanitarium, and I can remember him, I can remember the sanitarium calling, and my mother and her sister had gone to the movies. When I [they] came home, I said “They’ve called from Laurel; you’d better go out there”. What was I, 11 years old?

BARNES: Did he have polio or something like that?

HOFFMAN: No, I don’t think they really knew. They called it ‘sleeping sickness’. So whatever that was. It was like a brain disease or something like that.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

HOFFMAN: ...small house. We had an unfinished basement.

BARNES: What about storage?

HOFFMAN: Storage. Also the furnace was down there. If I remember right, my mother did the washing down there, but I don’t think we had a washing machine. She used a tub, or something like that. On the first floor there was a kitchen. But at one time my father, mother, my sister and I could eat in the kitchen. But if you got past four, you had to go in the living room. The living room was large enough to take care of ...

BARNES: There was no dining room?

HOFFMAN: Did I say living room? I meant the dining room. I can remember living there after my father had died, and when we first got a TV set, nobody would sit at one end of the table, because the TV set was in the next room against the wall, and you'd all sit around the table in a u-shape so you could all watch TV. 'Course, that was much later, but it was at Kent Place when TV came in.

BARNES: When you were watching then, what shows did you watch? Do you remember any?

HOFFMAN: You know, I might be wrong about the house. Maybe the next house. I don't remember which house it was. Be we used to watch...there was a cartoon character, I forgot, that we watched. There was a time when we had a...There was a prize fight. We were the only one that had a television set. The house was full of people, all in one room.

BARNES: The house on Kent Place: did it have a fireplace? Do you remember?

HOFFMAN: No, it didn't have a fireplace. The heat was from the stoves.

BARNES: Did you have running water in that house?

HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. We had a full bathroom, with a toilet.

BARNES: And electricity in that house?

HOFFMAN: One bathroom, and you had a pretty good linen closet in the hall, and that was over the stair where we came up. The closet was over that hall. They had a small bedroom, which was my bedroom, and then we had two larger bedrooms where my mother and sister slept, and the other one was where her sister and brother-in-law and nephew slept.

BARNES: When they came to help...

HOFFMAN: Well, they stayed there. They lived with us. I can remember when we had whooping cough, it went through all three of us.

BARNES: Oh my! That must have been a very...

HOFFMAN: The kitchen was also...there was a closet. It was a full sized closet, because one side was a stairway to the basement, and the other side was this large closet.

BARNES: Did your mother ever do any canning of vegetables? Did you have a garden?

HOFFMAN: No. She was a good cook, though. She was an excellent cook.

BARNES: So you bought your vegetables fresh, on the market?

HOFFMAN: Yeah. We were in the neighborhood, but there was one little store in the neighborhood where we used to shop. We didn't have to go far. And then there was A&P a little ways away, and a Sanitary Grocery. They were the competition way back when. Sanitary Grocery, which was like a Safeway.

BARNES: No wonder they changed the name from Sanitary to Safeway! I didn't realize that.

HOFFMAN: They mixed...a lot of times they ground their own coffee in those places. A&P ground coffee.

BARNES: That 'Eight O'clock Coffee'? I guess that was Safeway.

HOFFMAN: I can't remember.

BARNES: Did you go out to restaurants very much?

HOFFMAN: Not a whole lot. And a lot of times, I would eat in the restaurants along H Street. There was an Italian restaurant there, but it wasn't Italian food; it was American food. In fact it wasn't Italian, it was run by a Greek man who's... one of that family was in my class in grade school, and later on, there was a Greek family that had a candy place, soda fountain and so forth, and they opened, like a little night club in the back, and all of a sudden it became one of the most popular night clubs in the city. It was just in the back of this store.

BARNES: Was it on H Street?

HOFFMAN: The storefront was on H Street and this was the building attached to the other building.

BARNES: Like on a side street.

HOFFMAN: It wasn't on another street or anything, 'cause there was an alley behind that. And they had big acts there, too, but that was later on.

BARNES: Do you remember the name of the place?

HOFFMAN: Kavakos.

BARNES: That's history that we don't often get, about places like that.

HOFFMAN: I've got a cousin that lives about four blocks from here. Second cousin. He played there. We often talk about it.

BARNES: He played there? He's an entertainer?

HOFFMAN: He's in bad shape now. I saw him last night.

BARNES: He was a musician?

HOFFMAN: A musician, yeah. At one time he led bands, but downtown. You were asking me about people I've met. I'm not trying to name-drop, but either because of where I worked, or because I accidentally run into these people... For example, Ossie Bluege who was a ball player for the Washington Senators. Omar Bradley, the American general in Europe—and this is a strange thing—I was at the Hecht Company store downtown because that was my main location, although I went to the other stores, too. And I walked up, and this gentleman walks up and says to me “I'm looking at your watches. Do you have Bulova watches?” I said, “Yes sir”. He says “But you don't have an Acutron.” Well, at that time, there were two electric watches on the market. One was Acutron and the other was Hamilton. The Acutron was a much better watch than the Hamilton, but we didn't have it, but we had Bulova watches. He says “How come you don't have it?” I said “Sir, I've tried to get my boss to order, but he won't order them.”

He said “Well, you talk to him”. I said, “Yes sir, general”. Omar Bradley was on the board of Bulova. Whether he was going around doing that everywhere or not, I don't know. That's how that happened. Charles Brendler, who was the leader of the Navy Band at one time—there's a relationship there, but it's a little complicated. I won't go into it, but I had met him and his wife. There was a man that worked in our office; his name was Nat Brown. He was a great tennis player. We were in a restaurant below the Earle Theater there, and he had his sister with him. And I sat next to her and started to talk to her. She said her name was Mary Kay Brown, which didn't mean anything to me. She was women's tennis champion about 1916, and quite a nice person. Art Buchwald—when I was managing the Melart Jewelry Store in Georgetown—he came in there, and I was talking to him, and he bought two watches; one for his wife and one for his daughter. Bruce Cabot I mentioned to you before. Hillary Rodham Clinton you know about.

BARNES: Tell me about when you met Hillary Clinton. I think this was a chat that we had before I turned on the tape recorder.

HOFFMAN: OK. I met her because I was participating with two people who had formed the Hillary Rodham Clinton Fan Club. I was doing the labels for them. She had a gathering. She had [been] told that their names were Eugene and Ruth Love, and she had told them that they were her main support when she was having trouble getting that health care for children through in the early days of the Clinton administration. She is still—Ruth Love is still invited if they have a birthday thing at the Senate Office Building for Hillary—she's there. But anyways, she invited the leaders of each cell of the Hillary Rodham Clinton Fan Club to the White House, and I was also invited in that group. When it's about over, she

takes a picture with each person. The first time, I didn't say much to her, but the second time, my wife said (Gertrude) "What shall I call you?" She said, "Call me Hillary". And then I turned to her and I said, "Do you mind if I take a minute of your time?" She said, "No". It was time for, when the campaigning was going on, for Bill Clinton's second term, and I said "Something that happened brought back memories to me. When your husband, Bill Clinton, was standing on the back of the train in West Virginia and talking to the people there, it reminded me of my favorite president." She says "Who was that?" I says "Truman". Down to earth. I'm going to skip some of these.

Other people I met. Sometimes they would bring in a star. I had the job of taking them around. They were plugging a picture. I had the job of taking them around to the various studios where there'd be TV or radio. One was Felicia Fore. Who was Felicia Fore? The wife of Jack Lemmon. Merv Griffin, the same thing. In the early days, Warner's thought they could make a star out of him, but they weren't doing anything really. Tab Hunter, in the movies. Thomas Kelly, I knew very well. He was the deputy chief of the Secret Service, and he used to come in the Hecht Company I used to take care of him personally. Wayne Morse. Pat O'Brien I mentioned before. When we were on the trip in Scotland with my friends, he took us around. It was his job to inspect the castles. One was the castle where [Queen] Elizabeth's mother was born in Scotland, and we went in that one, taken around. Another one, was a Lady Ogilvie. Her husband—there was a royal family in Scotland, you know, and her husband was in the royal family. Potentially the king, if Scotland had a king. We met her, but she was coming out of the house, and the butler was taking us around. She stopped to talk to us. When we were leaving England, we were in the airport, and Gertrude, my wife, says "There's Lady Ogilvie over there". She started to walk over towards her and Lady Ogilvie had a man with her and he stepped in front of her. And Lady Ogilvie said, "It's alright. Leave her alone. I know her, because I remember the raincoat she was wearing when she came up there." She was wearing the same coat.

BARNES: Who was taking you around in Scotland?

HOFFMAN: This was—[phone rings] Don't worry about it. The gentleman that was taking us around in Scotland—by the way, this Lady Ogilvie was from America. I believe the name was Ryan originally. Some wealthy family from New York. But the gentleman who was taking us around was Nichol Hastie that was my pen pal for so many years who appeared on the TV show that I was in.

BARNES: On the BBC?

HOFFMAN: On BBC, yeah. That was my pen pal. Of course we were up there—we spent almost a week up there until we left London. We went to two castles and a couple of other places.

One night we were in a theater and a man and two other men walked in, and I thought I recognized him. He was in there for the last show. I saw them get out of a car. They weren't real well dressed, I'll tell you. They get out of the car, and they park the car right in front, so when they started out, I grabbed him. It was Elvis Presley.

BARNES: [Gasps]

HOFFMAN: He just stood there and talked to us for ten or fifteen minutes. There's a picture somewhere, but it isn't of any of us. The man who was manager of the Warner Theater, (the Earle Theater then), his daughter loved Elvis Presley, and I called him and told him he was in the theater. He had his daughter come down. Somewhere I have a picture of Mac (that's the man I'm speaking of), his daughter, and Elvis together.

BARNES: That was at the Earle?

HOFFMAN: No, this was at the Metropolitan Theater.

BARNES: Metropolitan Theater. He and just one other person came to the theater?

HOFFMAN: Two people. I think they were on their way up to the first show they appeared in New York. You know, that fellow...

BARNES: Ed Sullivan.

HOFFMAN: Ed Sullivan; you got it.

BARNES: They were on their way back?

HOFFMAN: No, they were on their way up.

BARNES: On their way to New York.

BARNES: Wow! And that's what started his career, when he went on Ed Sullivan!

HOFFMAN: Being at the right place at the right time. Even though he got kicked off, didn't he, or something? I guess that brings us up to date in that area.

BARNES: Is there anything you want to share with us having to do with life in Washington and surrounding area during your lifetime, because you've seen a lot, you've done a lot.

HOFFMAN: All of what happened to me, happened because I lived in Washington, so therefore I would never want to live any place else but Washington.

BARNES: Oh, what a wonderful tribute. I feel that way too. I've lived many other places, but I still think that's truly my feeling.

HOFFMAN: I had a 90th birthday party, Oct. 4th of last year. It was not a surprise, but my son and daughter put it on. But this was a surprise; I'm sending this [photograph] to friends who've asked me for it, even though it's so late. That's the daughter of the man from Scotland, and unbeknown to me, she flew over, and I didn't know she was here, and I thought once again a reverse of the original meeting. I thought she was talking to me on the phone. It was a 100 people there, and I yelled, "I'm talking to somebody in Scotland" and the phone went dead. Just the same thing, and they said "Look right behind you" and she calls me Uncle Sidney—she was in Scotland when I went up there. So we were together.

BARNES: I don't think I caught on tape the reversal that you did with your pen pal in Scotland. Tell the story about that, because I didn't get it on tape. Then we'll better understand the reversal.

HOFFMAN: What happened was, he wrote in [to] a wish-fulfillment-type program [Ask Pickles], and he wrote in and said he had been corresponding with his pen pal in Washington for 29 years, that was from 1926 until '55, I think it was. But it was before '55. It was '55 when we met. He would like to talk to him on the phone. Because they had a program on at the same time we were there where there was a serviceman who heard a girl sing in France when he was serving in World War II, and they brought that girl there to perform for him. It was that kind of thing.

BARNES: Oh, my. Make your wishes come true.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. In the meantime, they called me. "Can you get away, and we will pay your airfare," which I had to lie about, because they weren't supposed to spend money for the airfare. I said I paid my own way.

BARNES: This was BBC, right?

HOFFMAN: This was BBC, which has changed now. That was the only channel in Great Britain. So when you went on that, everybody that had their sets turned on...

BARNES: That was what you saw.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. What they did was, they brought him down, put him on the stage with a couple, the wish-fulfillment couple, and when they injected static into [the phone line] (that was artificially done) he says "I can't hear my friend any more" and he turned to Wilfred Pickles and said "What am I going to do?" "Well, look over here." And I was holding the phone in my hand, and my wife was right along side of me, and we walked on the stage that way. The best remark I heard was his wife Sadie who had a great

sense of humor, said “When you two men embraced, I thought you looked like two Frenchmen”. Kissing, you know?

BARNES: Kissing on either side? [both laugh] So it was the wish-fulfillment show that took you to London, and then from there, you went with him to Scotland, and that’s where you saw the castles, and that beautiful robe that you had on in the picture you showed me.

HOFFMAN: Yeah, that was a Lord Provost [robe]. I don’t know if that was an appointment or an elected office; I don’t know. I never asked.

BARNES: Were you in the Parliament when you put that on?

HOFFMAN: It was the Town Hall.

BARNES: The second wish fulfillment, in reverse was when his daughter came.

HOFFMAN: There was more. We went back once more. He came over here twice. They had—my wife—it was a July he came, and my birthday is October, but October would be my 50th birthday, so she moved it up to July and had a party in a restaurant outside of Frederick, because he was here. That was a surprise for me.

BARNES: A good one. And then his daughter came to your 90th.

HOFFMAN: His daughter had been here once before, too. And his wife came over once, alone, after he died. It has been a great relationship.

BARNES: An unbelievable relationship. How did you become pen pals?

HOFFMAN: Through the Boy Scouts. I don’t know, it was some organization a friend of mine told me about, told me to write.

BARNES: How old were you when you started?

HOFFMAN: Well, I would have been 12 or 13. I think I’ve got a letter dated 1926. I’ve got it somewhere. I save everything. A packrat.

BARNES: Well that’s certainly a wonderful story.

END OF INTERVIEW