



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Jerre Ness

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

BARNES: Mr. Ness, would you tell me a little bit about your background, where you were born, what year you were born?

NESS: Well, I was born in Sibley Hospital on North Capitol Street and M in November 5, 1922. That building has been torn down since and they moved out to MacArthur Blvd.

BARNES: Oh, they have moved, yes, you're right they're off of MacArthur Blvd now. And where were your parents living when you were born?

NESS: They were living in the Fairfax Apartments across the street from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing on 14th Street SW.

BARNES: And when did they move to the Hill?

NESS: That was in 1924, they moved to 314 12th Street NE, in 1924.

BARNES: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

NESS: I didn't have any at all.

BARNES: Oh, you were the only child.

NESS: That's all.

BARNES: Well, where did you go to school?

NESS: Well, first I started school at the Maury School on 12th Place and B Street NE. And then I was transferred to the Edmonds School at Ninth Street and D Street NE.

BARNES: And that was an elementary school?

NESS: Oh, yeah. And then another elementary school is Kingman. The sixth grade was at Kingman Elementary School that was 14th and E NE.

BARNES: And then, where did you go to high school?

NESS: Well, then I went to Stuart Junior High and that was on Fifth and E, NE. That was Stuart Junior High School and then I went to Eastern High School in 1937, graduated from Stuart in '37 and went to Eastern that same year, September, 1937.

BARNES: So then you graduated from Eastern High School?

NESS: In 1940.

BARNES: How long did you live on the Hill after you graduated from high school?

NESS: When I got married in '43, so then I moved up Northwest into my wife's home on Buchanan Street NW.

BARNES: With her family?

NESS: Yes.

BARNES: Oh, it was her family, OK. Then how long were you there?

NESS: We were there till about '48. '48 we moved to Takoma Park, Maryland.

BARNES: Now, were you working in Washington?

NESS: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

BARNES: Where were you working?

NESS: Let's see, in 1941 I started steam fitting on the Pentagon and then in '46 I worked different construction jobs out of Local Union 602 and in '46 I got my membership as a Journeyman in March 1946.

BARNES: So then what did you do after that? Who did you work for?

NESS: Well, I worked under a lot of contractors. I actually worked out of the local union and they would sponsor me for these different jobs in different places around the city, different contractors.

BARNES: Were there any projects that you recall, big projects that you worked on in Washington?

NESS: Well, of course the biggest was the East Front extension of the Capitol Building and that was in the late '50s and then from there, that was when the East Front was moved out 32 feet, we had to relocate steam and condensate piping facilities that were in the way of the East Front extension that came from the Capitol Power Plant to the Capitol Building and then, that was a couple of year right there. And then I went to the Rayburn House Office Building, still out of Local Union 602, the contractor was Lloyd E. Mitchell that we were working for on the Rayburn House Office Building.

BARNES: Was that when it was being built?

NESS: Yes! Yes! That was one fantastic job.

BARNES: How many years did it take to build it?

NESS: Well, I was there five and a half years on the construction of that building and I was Mechanical Superintendent for the Lloyd E. Mitchell Company on that construction. That is one fantastic building. It's a structural steel building and it goes down three garage levels. It goes down below the Tiber Creek Sewer, which goes through the center of the building and on to the Anacostia River, that's the Tiber Creek. And we built a canal over that and that was the first parking level of East and West across the top of the Tiber Creek Sewer, which is in the center of the first level of the Rayburn House Office Building.

BARNES: That must have been a huge project.

NESS: Oh, man! It was fantastic. I loved it, it was fantastic and it was the best. You see another important thing is the cornerstone was laid by John F. Kennedy in 1963.

BARNES: So, in 1963 he laid the cornerstone for that building? Were you there?

NESS: Yes, absolutely. And my father was there with me. My father came down, he was living up on 12th Street, he came down to be with me when Kennedy laid the cornerstone.

BARNES: So when did the building actually open?

NESS: Several years later, I'm trying to think, after remember he was killed in '63. After that, like '64, is when the building actually opened.

BARNES: Then, when you finished that project, what was the next one that you worked on?

NESS: Well, the next one was what we used to call the underground garages that are on the south side of the house office buildings and we had several heating and air conditioning units in the underground garages that we worked on. The carpenter shop was there and the printing shop and the upholstery shop and all that was under the underground garages right next to the Rayburn Building.

BARNES: Right next to the Rayburn Building?

NESS: Across the street like. South of the Rayburn Building.

BARNES: And isn't there actually a garden on top—it's a garden on top?

NESS: Yes! Yes! It's a garden and a fountain.

BARNES: And a fountain on top of the underground garage?

NESS: For each one of them, there's actually two different buildings, but they did connect underground.

BARNES: And how many stories underground, do you remember?

NESS: Well, they're not that deep; they are one, two to three stories down at the most.

BARNES: But they were already built when you went there to work on the heating and air conditioning systems?

NESS: No, they were being built after the Rayburn Building they started the underground garages and they moved right into the underground garages and did the heating and air conditioning.

BARNES: Well, that took you a few years.

NESS: Well, yes, it did take a few years. The next big project that I was on was the Capitol Power Plant, which was a complicated job where we installed new steam generating facilities and eventually new chilled water. Well, about that time is when I changed, I was working for the Lloyd E. Mitchell Company and then after that is when I went to work for the Architect of the Capitol.

BARNES: So then you became a federal employee.

NESS: Yes. Yes.

BARNES: And did you stay in the federal government until you retired?

NESS: Yes I did.

BARNES: So you were working at the power plant and the construction of the power plant?

NESS: Well, the plant was already an existing building. We put new equipment into the plant and then the first part of it I was working for the Lloyd E. Mitchell Company de-aerating feed water system for the existing boilers, is what we called that particular contract. Then I went to work for the federal government. Then the big contract came up, which went to the W. G. Cornell Company, I was working for the Architect of the Capitol inspecting and supervising the installation of the chilled water machinery, pumps and chillers. Big chillers, god they were big chillers! From that point the Capitol Power Plant, you know, we pumped chilled water all around Capitol Hill, through the tunnels.

BARNES: And it's still being pumped today through the same channels or tunnels?

NESS: Oh, yes! And also the steam, we generated steam from the Capitol Power Plant and circulated through all the buildings on Capitol Hill and the steam even went so far as Union Station and the Government Printing Office, which is—you know where Union Station is.

BARNES: Down on North Capitol Street.

NESS: Right.

BARNES: So you continued to work in the Power Plant until you retired or were there other jobs?

NESS: No, no, after the Power Plant job I worked on the Madison Memorial Library building, the new one.

BARNES: Oh, when it was built?

NESS: Yes, when it was built.

BARNES: But you were working for the Architect of the Capitol at that time?

NESS: Yes, yes. That was a very good job, too.

BARNES: So you were overseeing all of the systems, mechanical systems?

NESS: The heating, ventilating and air conditioning.

BARNES: How long did it take to build that building?

NESS: Oh, that was four or five years, several years in that construction. That's a very good building, too. Very good building, terrific air conditioning systems in that building. Are you familiar with that building?

BARNES: Yes I am. It's a beautiful building. I've often done research there.

NESS: And up on top the cafeteria and all. Well, on top in the penthouse (I know you haven't been up there)...

BARNES: Have not been to the penthouse...

NESS: It's a fantastic bunch of fan systems, heating and air conditioning systems that originate in the penthouse at the top floor is the penthouse, that's where all of the mechanical equipment is for the air conditioning of the building. Terrific.

BARNES: Well, I know you enjoyed that.

NESS: I did, yeah, I did enjoy that heating, ventilating and air conditioning, I enjoyed it very much and I also enjoyed the automatic temperature control, which was the Johnson Service Company, which was one of my specialties. I just loved the way the controls were maintained, they were pneumatic-electric controls over the heating and cooling.

BARNES: Was that new at that time, the pneumatic controls?

NESS: No, no. As a matter-of-fact, by Johnson Service Company, and also Minneapolis-Honeywell did the Rayburn Building—pneumatic air conditioning controls. So it was not new at that building but it was very thoroughly developed in those buildings, the controls were terrific in both of those buildings.

BARNES: When you completed that project, what was the next one?

NESS: The next one was the Hart Senate Office Building. That was from the ground up, all the way up to the top. And that was several years.

BARNES: So you have had a lot of experience with all the Capitol buildings.

NESS: That's right.

BARNES: So after the Hart, were there any more buildings that you were involved in constructing?

NESS: Well, we remodeled the air conditioning systems in the Dirksen Senate Office Building and we also did some air conditioning units in the Russell Senate Office Building.

BARNES: But those were older buildings. They were much harder to...

NESS: Well, it's not any harder, but it's a different type of construction. You had existing building that you were putting this air conditioning in.

BARNES: They did have air conditioning, you were just replacing it?

NESS: Modernizing it, we called it modernizing. It did have air conditioning, but we modernized quite a few units in those buildings.

BARNES: So all of the duct work and everything was already in the buildings? You just brought them up-to-date?

NESS: Yes, yes. Right. Then the next big job was the Library of Congress, the Jefferson Building, the main building.

BARNES: The renovation of that building?

NESS: Yes, terrific air conditioning, terrific.

BARNES: I can't remember how many years that went on, but it was a long time renovating that building.

NESS: Oh, yeah, yeah. The Jefferson and the Adams Buildings were done under the same contract, but I was still working for the Architect of the Capitol on the installation of the air conditioning units in the

Adams and Jefferson. Wonderful, wonderful air conditioning installed in the Jefferson (the old building), we did a wonderful job in there all through the book stacks and the duct work and the air handling unit downstairs.

BARNES: But it had air conditioning before...

NESS: Oh, yeah, but we remodeled it...we brought it up-to-date. I might as well mention this; the chill water came from the Capitol Power Plant into the Madison Library so we used that existing Power Plant and the existing chilled water to re-air condition the Library of Congress. Terrific job.

BARNES: And that's the way it works today.

NESS: Yes, yes, it's still working.

BARNES: Did you use the same chill units with the Russell Building when you modernized that?

NESS: It was not as extensive. We did some units down around the barber shop, I remember, and the cafeteria down there, we did some modernizing in the Russell and also in the Dirksen, but the big job was the Hart. The Madison, the Library of Congress, the Jefferson Building, was complete new air conditioning. That was terrific. That was a terrific job.

BARNES: So you were working with the contractor that installed the system, but were you kind of overseeing.

NESS: Yes, I was with the federal government, the Architect of the Capitol, overseeing the installation that was done by the W. G. Cornell Company, which was a very, very good company and they did very, very good work.

BARNES: So when you finished those projects, what projects were you on when you retired?

NESS: Yes, I retired on the Library Building, the Jefferson Building. That's where I retired. I was 69 years old when I retired.

BARNES: When they completed that, you retired?

NESS: Yes.

BARNES: Well, I would say that that was your crown jewel.

NESS: The Library of Congress, oh yes, we did a beautiful job in there, beautiful job.

BARNES: Well, you've had a long career working on Capitol Hill. Are there any interesting stories to tell about people you met or things that happened during the time you worked on the Hill?

NESS: Well, when we started out J. George Stewart was Architect of the Capitol when I started up there on the East Front extension. And then he was kind of sickly. I forget whether he actually died or what, but then came George White on the beginning of the Madison Memorial Building. George White was the Architect of the Capitol and of course the man that was the Assistant Architect [Deputy Architect of the Capitol, Mario E. Campioli], he was terrific. He did most of the work (an Italian).

[Ed: Mr. Ness's immediate supervisor during his years with the Architect's office was Gino Valenti, Superintendent of Construction.]

BARNES: He was under George White—he was his assistant?

NESS: Well, wait a minute. He was there under J. George Stewart and George Stewart was sick and this man [Mario Campioli] was actually doing all of the work. George Stewart wasn't doing anything. So even though [Campioli] actually came from Du Pont and he was in charge of remodeling Williamsburg. He was an architect. He was really the best thing we ever had on Capitol Hill as far as an architect is concerned.

BARNES: So he worked under J. George Stewart and then George White.

NESS: Yeah.

BARNES: And then did he retire after that?

NESS: Yeah, he retired...

BARNES: Before you?

NESS: Yes, he was older and, I think, he was a little sickly.

BARNES: So the last architect you worked under was George White?

NESS: Yes.

BARNES: So you worked under two architects?

NESS: Yes.

BARNES: But you really liked that assistant architect?

NESS: Oh, yeah, he was great.

BARNES: Did you ever meet any of the senators or representatives?

NESS: Oh, yeah, I knew a few of them. We weren't real friendly, but I'd been there so long that we had gotten to know a lot of people.

BARNES: Now, where was your office?

NESS: Well let's see, during the Rayburn Building the office with the contractor, Lloyd E. Mitchell, was right in the building, the Rayburn Building. We had trailers sitting inside and there were trailers out on First Street also. And then, of course, in the other buildings we more or less had temporary trailers sitting outside as far as our offices—was either outside or actually in the existing buildings is where our offices were.

BARNES: When you were working on the Library of Congress, the Jefferson Building, where was your office then?

NESS: It was actually in the Jefferson Building.

BARNES: Oh, in the building. So you worked right on site.

NESS: Down in the basement area, in like the utility area where the air handlers were and the air conditioning units and fans and pumps and everything like that is where we had our office at down there, too, in the utility area. Not like upstairs.

BARNES: Where was the office of the Architect of the Capitol? Where is his office?

NESS: Well, his main office was in the Capitol Building on the West Front looking out toward the Monument.

BARNES: I'm sure you went there a lot of times.

NESS: Oh, yeah.

BARNES: Are there any interesting stories you want to tell about Senators or funny things that happened when you working on any of those buildings?

NESS: Of course, there are lots of drawings available of the tunnel work on Capitol Hill where these steam lines and the chill water lines and all those pipe lines—you know these are big pipe lines lying underground all through there feeding around and that's very security minded. It has always been secure with locked manholes and things like that. But it is even more secure nowadays and the things I'm telling you about these tunnels are really available to the public because there are so many drawings that have

been made of the tunnel work and the pipe work that we put in or inspected to put in and welded up and tested and all of that stuff is available.

BARNES: It's public information.

NESS: Yes, it's public information, but it could cause a lot of trouble if anything happened to that stuff. It would shut down the Hill.

BARNES: There would be a lot of hot people in the summer time...

NESS: They wouldn't come in...

BARNES: There would be no air conditioning.

NESS: They wouldn't be here now with this 90 degrees.

BARNES: I think you are absolutely right; they would not be there.

NESS: The heating and the chill water, and don't forget the steam on Capitol Hill is used extensively for cooking. Cooking in all the restaurants.

BARNES: I didn't realize that.

NESS: It's steam tables.

BARNES: You mean public restaurants?

NESS: Well, yeah...

BARNES: Or do you mean the ones that are in the House office buildings and the Senate? Do you mean those restaurants?

NESS: Yeah, they have steam cooking.

BARNES: Only those, not ones that would be outside of the Capitol area. It doesn't furnish steam to any others.

NESS: No. The other building that uses steam was the Government Printing Office and the Union Station.

BARNES: Is that true today?

NESS: Yeah, yes, they get—and also the new (what do you call it) the Supreme Court Building.

BARNES: Oh, the Supreme Court?

NESS: Oh yeah!

BARNES: Well, of course it would, yeah. Did you ever work on that building?

NESS: What I was going to say is that the new (I don't know what they call that now) you know the new building that went up down there by the Union Station on Second and Third Street, something about the Court?

BARNES: Yeah, it's a judicial building.

NESS: Judicial Building (that's something like it, yeah), of course that gets the steam too.

BARNES: That's the Thurgood Marshall Building, isn't it? Is that the one?

NESS: Yes, yes, that's the latest one, that's the new one.

BARNES: And that also get the steam from...

NESS: Correct. And it goes through that building now and they tapped off the lines going to Union Station with chilled water and steam and then on down North Capitol and into the Government Printing Office. So it's quite extensive.

BARNES: Well, it really is. And something I certainly was not aware of and I'm sure a lot of people are not aware of what an extensive system that is and what a big part you played in it.

NESS: Oh yeah, I was in all of those tunnels. I might mention something else. They call this the Capitol Power Plant and years ago it was generating electricity for the Capitol Hill, but that has stopped. They don't generate any electricity there now, but originally they used to at the Capitol Power Plant.

BARNES: And that was for just the Capitol building.

NESS: Oh yeah, just the Capitol building.

BARNES: But now they purchase the power from?

NESS: Pepco...

BARNES: Pepco or wherever. But that is interesting, when did they stop generating their power?

NESS: Oh god, I would say in the 30's.

BARNES: Oh, so that was before your time?

NESS: Oh yeah, it was probably in the 30's when they were generating electricity.

BARNES: I'd like to go back and talk a little bit about your life on Capitol Hill when you were growing up and talk about stores where you shopped, movie theatres, anything like that you'd like to tell us.

NESS: Well, the most important thing I have to mention is that I started serving newspapers (I served the Times Herald) when I was about 12 years old I got my first route and it was around my house, right near my house, and of course the Home Theatre was right there.

BARNES: So that would be on what street, H?

NESS: C Street, D Street and 13th and 12th.

BARNES: That was your route.

NESS: Yeah, right around that area. But the next route was the interesting route down by the Senate Office Building and that was actually before the Dirksen Building was built, I was serving newspapers to houses along there.

BARNES: Oh, were those houses torn down to build the Hart?

NESS: Yes. And also back in an alley, you ever hear of Schott's Court or Schott's Alley?

BARNES: Schott's Alley...no I haven't.

NESS: You know, well it was a bunch of blacks that lived in there when I served, I don't know—it was run-down houses, it was kind of like (is this being recorded?)...

BARNES: Yes, that's OK.

NESS: It could possibly have been slave quarters...

BARNES: At one time...

NESS: At one time.

BARNES: Not when you were delivering papers, but before that.

NESS: Yeah, before that... originally. And this was between Second Street and First Street and then D and E, NE, which includes the ladies building on the corner of the Hart Building, you know where the National Women's Association is on that corner? It included that and right behind that is where Schott's Court was. And that was where, after I served newspapers there, they tore all that down to build the Hart and the Dirksen.

BARNES: That is so interesting that you actually delivered papers to houses that were on the property that eventually became the Hart and the Dirksen Buildings.

NESS: Correct, correct.

BARNES: You were about 13 years old.

NESS: 13, 14, 15 along in there. I was serving newspapers. Oh, I served newspapers to the Supreme Court.

BARNES: To the Justices?

NESS: Well, I forget now. I delivered one paper and I forget who it was for, it was for somebody in there and I can't remember now, who.

BARNES: And what paper were you delivering?

NESS: Times Herald.

BARNES: Oh, still the Times Herald.

NESS: Times in the evening, Herald in the morning—25 cents a week is what it cost.

BARNES: So you delivered the morning and the evening? You delivered both?

NESS: Yes... morning, evening and Sunday. It cost 25 cents a week.

BARNES: So how much did you make a week?

NESS: Oh, not much.

BARNES: Not much, but back then you could buy a lot for a nickel?

NESS: Oh, yeah, well I always had money in my pocket because I was always going down there trying to collect from people who didn't want to pay. So I was collecting almost every night in the week trying to get money from people.

BARNES: Did your parents go with you or help you in any way with your route?

NESS: My father did. My father used to ride me around down through there on snowy days I can remember working out of his car and serving East Capitol Street, like down by the Supreme Court. And, oh, the other thing about the Supreme Court is right there at Second and A Street is where I was standing on the corner when President [Franklin] Roosevelt drove by (it was like '32—I was 10—'32-34) and he waved at me. It was early in the morning. I was serving the newspaper, he was going down to get on the

Navy Yard to get on his boat, I read about that in the paper later. And he waved to me, Roosevelt. He was in his open car. It was good weather, it was summertime good weather. You remember those big four-door sedans he used to ride around in?

BARNES: Yes, I've seen pictures of them.

NESS: And I was so happy when he waved at me, I was the only one standing on the corner. And that was around '35, roughly.

BARNES: You said you always had money in your pocket. What did you spend your money on?

NESS: Well, going to the movies and ice cream, candy, soft drinks, you know.

BARNES: Were there lots of stores near where you lived? Where you could buy things?

NESS: The biggest group of stores was H Street NE. It was the Princess Theatre and the Apollo Theatre, couple theatres, a whole row of theatres, which ran from about Fourth all the way up to 14th. Fourth to 14th on H Street NE was the commercial neighborhood that we used to go down the hill and fool around with those stores. And then of course the Princess Theatre was there and the Apollo Theatre was there on Sixth and then the Atlas Theatre was the new one that came in about 1940.

BARNES: And they've just renovated that.

NESS: The Atlas? Did they really?

BARNES: The Atlas, yes.

NESS: Well, that's great. That was a big new building when I was growing up.

BARNES: So you had a lot of friends that you played with? What kind of games did you play?

NESS: Oh we played baseball, football, basketball. Oh, I wanted to mention Merrick Boys Club is right near Stanton Park on C Street and it was one of our best clubs. We had baseball teams and football teams, basketball teams and they had a big gymnasium there that we used to play in in the wintertime. We'd play baseball and basketball and everything inside the big gymnasium on C Street. The Merrick, it was like a foundation, Merrick Foundation that had put this building up before (I don't remember when it went up) but it was a terrific building and there were was a couple of coaches in there, the baseball coaches (Tom Garrity and Joe Christopher was another one of the coaches). Oh, they had boxing in there and pool tables and ping pong tables, it was a wonderful spot, a beautiful spot, especially in the wintertime. It was right down there...Sixth and C and then Massachusetts Avenue is behind it and it went straight on through the block. But it was the Merrick Boys Club.

BARNES: I'll see if I can look that up.

NESS: It was Merrick Boys Club. And it seems like Merrick was a millionaire and there was a foundation called the Merrick Foundation that took care of all the expenses. It was free. You know it was practically free. We would go in and out there all winter long playing and it was only six blocks from my house. The alley was 11th.

BARNES: Did you walk to school?

NESS: Yeah, yeah.

BARNES: When you went to Eastern, though, did you walk?

NESS: No, I had a car.

BARNES: You had a car? What kind of car?

NESS: My father had let me use his—well, let me tell you about my father. He worked at the Naval Research Laboratory, In 1922 he helped set the machinery in the Naval Research Laboratory and in 1920 he was at the Naval Gun Factory on Eighth and M Streets, SE, Navy Yard. And he would help me deliver papers if it was real bad weather, he would definitely help me deliver papers. And I served newspapers for several years maybe four or five years, somewhere along in there.

BARNES: So, you used your father's car to drive to school?

NESS: That was high school. See, when I was 16 I got the permit to drive the car and at that time I was in Eastern High School, so after I was 16 I got to drive to school and park in the parking lot.

BARNES: Do you remember what kind of car your father had?

NESS: Oh, it was a '37 Ford, 60 HP.

BARNES: And you drove that for four years to Eastern High School?

NESS: Yeah.

BARNES: And you graduated from Eastern High in 1940. You mentioned that before. Do you keep up with any of the members of your class of 1940?

NESS: Oh yeah, the reunion. You talked about the reunion we just had it on the 4th of June and there are still about 30 in my graduating class that are still alive. Of course we are all about 80-81-82-83 years old.

BARNES: How many was in your graduating class?

NESS: It was close to 1000. I don't remember exactly. But see that was the year before—wait a minute—Anacostia opened about 1939, then all the kids—but before '39, say, all the kids from Anacostia used to go to Eastern, across the river. Eastern was the biggest school in the city in those days. It was a fantastic amount of kids plus Southwest, Northwest, well Northwest went to Central, but we had a whole lot of people coming up from Anacostia into Eastern. In fact '37, when I first got there—oh, that's right, when I first got there it was two shifts there were so many kids, it was two shifts (8-12 and 1-5) there were so many kids when I first got there in '37. Before 1940, before Anacostia opened up and took a lot of the kids from that area across the river would go to Anacostia High School and that's when we stopped the two shifts about '39 we was going from 8-3 or 9-3, just one shift.

BARNES: So that's how you had so many people in your graduating class. You were running two shifts.

NESS: Oh yeah, terrific, terrific amount.

BARNES: Is that where you met your wife?

NESS: No, no... she went to Roosevelt High School and I met her down at Colonial Beach in about 1940.

BARNES: After you graduated?

NESS: Yeah, right about 1940. We used to go to Colonial Beach. Oh, I was in the fraternity Phi Alpha Epsilon, skull and crossbones fraternity, and we used to rent a cottage down at Colonial Beach like all of the other fraternities and sororities did for the 30th of May and the 4th of July and Labor Day. We would always go down there for about a week. And that's where I met my wife. She went to Roosevelt High School.

BARNES: And when were you married?

NESS: January 30, 1943.

BARNES: And you had how many children?

NESS: Two. My son is 60 and my daughter is 55.

BARNES: And you have grandchildren?

NESS: No. They didn't want to fool with kids. We didn't have any grandchildren. I have always been Democratic and always voted Democratic when I got a chance. In the District we never did vote, still don't vote in the District. But when I moved into Maryland, Takoma Park, Maryland, then we had mostly Democratic officers, senators, and congressmen.

BARNES: And when you moved to Takoma, though, you still worked all of your life in Washington?

NESS: Yeah, Local Union 602. See I'm coming up on my 60th anniversary of being a member of Local Union 602.

BARNES: Do you attend meetings?

NESS: No, I don't do that anymore. I used to do it a lot but I just don't feel like it. I don't go out at night, I don't go out at night at all. I don't drive at night.

BARNES: Well, during war time, how did that affect life on Capitol Hill?

NESS: I was driving a cab during the war. I needed the extra money and you can make more money driving a cab than you could at steam fitting. But I was working steam fitting and driving the cab at night during the war.

BARNES: And that was in Washington.

NESS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And I did that for about something like three years, I think.

BARNES: Did you have to go in service, did you serve in any war?

NESS: Yes, I was drafted in '43 and they gave me a discharge because of my eye. I was actually in the service for about 10 or 11 months, Fort Bragg, NC, and I was given a civilian disability discharge.

BARNES: And this was because of your eye?

NESS: Oh, yeah. My eye was taken out (I forgot to mention that) when I was about two years old. About 1924 the eye was taken out because it had some kind of infection/tumor or something, so they didn't know too much about what to do so they just took the eye out, so I forgot to mention that, but my mother used to say that we moved into 12th Street NE in 1924, then we had your eye taken out.

BARNES: Oh, is that what she always said?

NESS: Yeah, she was unhappy about that, but I've been lucky as far as being able to see with the one eye, I've been pretty lucky.

BARNES: And you still have good vision?

NESS: Well, it's slowing up a lot, I'm using magnifying glasses to read the newspaper.

BARNES: But that's still remarkable.

NESS: And the one eye, well I've got a cataract that's moving over, but my doctor is not recommending or talking me into having the cataract operation because I've only got one eye it's too risky with one eye. So I don't feel like taking a risk on it either unless there is some kind of a guarantee and I'm seeing pretty good, I'm seeing the television and I'm seeing this and that and I'm reading so I'm getting along without the operation. But you know I spent so much time, the irony of it, I remember a couple of neighbor kids started saving stamps and we used to go down to the Senate office buildings and down to the House office buildings and get some stamps off of the mail that was thrown away. And that was a big day's work to go down there and climb through all the mail and of course nobody ever asked you what you were doing or what you are fooling around in there for. It was practically no security, that was trash. We were rooting through the trash looking for stamps from different places.

BARNES: Did you have a big collection?

NESS: No, no never did have much of a collection.

BARNES: Well, did you play sports at Eastern?

NESS: I was actually stopped because of my eye at Eastern. But I used to play sports all around town when I didn't have to worry about insurance on the ball players. But I had made the baseball team and the assistant principal came out there one day and said I couldn't play any more. They were just worried about the insurance and something happening to the other eye, so that put me out. But I played a lot, like I played for Merrick Boys Club and I played for Southeast Boys Club and I played for—oh, another team we had was Number Nine Precinct. Captain Dick Mansfield was in charge of the Ninth Precinct on Ninth Street NE and we had a very good baseball team when I was about 12, 13, 14, along in there.

BARNES: Did you have any other jobs besides delivering papers when you were going to high school?

NESS: No.

BARNES: So there weren't that many jobs that young men could have except delivering papers?

NESS: Well, don't forget, that was the depression, too. And I didn't actually serve newspapers when I was in high school.

BARNES: Oh, it was before that.

NESS: It was before '37 I was going to Stuart Junior High School when I was serving papers, but at Eastern I didn't serve. It seems like my whole life has been built around Capitol Hill. In the summertime the band used to play on the East Front and we'd always go down there, I mean when we were young (like 13, 14) we would ride the bicycles down there and listen to the bands on the East Front of the

Capitol and then what I was telling you about going in there—oh, we would go all the way up to the top of the dome, there are steps up there. Did you ever do that?

BARNES: No, they don't allow that.

NESS: No, I guess they don't. But we used to do that and, of course, we did that at the Washington Monument, too, we'd run right on up the Washington Monument. But talk about Capitol Hill, when I was collecting stamps and when I first started (I was 10 or 11, something along in there) I was in and out of Capitol Hill pretty near my whole life. Serving newspapers and the Merrick Boys Club was down at Stanton Park and everything was right there at Capitol Hill.

BARNES: So your whole life was centered around Capitol Hill, either working there, playing there, collecting stamps there, driving a taxi.

NESS: Oh, yeah, taxi was the whole bit.

BARNES: The whole Hill.

NESS: The whole city.

BARNES: Oh, the whole city.

NESS: The whole city was driving the cab during the war.

BARNES: Well, this has been a wonderful interview and I thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW