



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Bill Driscoll

Interview Date: May 10, 2008

Interviewer: Rona Razon

Transcriber: Sarah Rouse

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

RAZON: Testing. Okay. I'm just going to start. My name is Rona Razon, today is May 10, 2008. This is the oral history of Bill Driscoll, who has lived on Capitol Hill with his wife since the 1950s?

DRISCOLL: 1960s.

RAZON: 1960s. This interview is for the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. The interview is held at Mr. Driscoll's house, and the time is 10:15. Bill, do I have your permission to record this interview?

DRISCOLL: Absolutely.

RAZON: For the record, please state your full name.

DRISCOLL: William, middle name John, Driscoll, D-R-I-S-C-O-L-L.

RAZON: Okay. Tell me about when and where you were born, and where you grew up.

DRISCOLL: I was born in New York City in 1932 and grew up in New York City, principally Brooklyn, until 1953, when I came to Washington to attend law school at George Washington University. And have lived in Washington with the exception of three years during which I was in the U.S. Army.

RAZON: So tell me about your life in New York when you were a child. What schools?

DRISCOLL: In Brooklyn, I went to parochial elementary school and boys' Catholic High School in a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn, which was at that time inhabited principally by Scandinavians and Puerto Ricans and Irish. It was an interesting neighborhood.

RAZON: Uh-huh.

DRISCOLL: And I attended college in New York City, as well. Manhattan College, which in fact is located in the Bronx, not Manhattan, and graduated in 1953, and as I said, came down here to Washington to attend law school.

RAZON: Okay. So how about your parents. What did they do for a living?

DRISCOLL: My mother was a public school teacher in New York City—Brooklyn. My father had been a public school teacher and became a lawyer. And when he died he was practicing law in Brooklyn.

RAZON: What are their names?

DRISCOLL: My mother's name was Marie, her maiden name was Casey, and my father's name was John.

RAZON: Okay. Do you have any siblings?

DRISCOLL: I do. I have a sister, a younger sister who lives on Long Island. And a younger brother who lives in Florida.

RAZON: What are their names?

DRISCOLL: My brother's name is Richard, my sister's name is Mary.

RAZON: So what did you do when you were in New York as a child? What kind of games or neighborhood activities did you guys have?

DRISCOLL: Neighborhood, that particular one where I lived—somewhat different from where I went to high school—was Italian, Irish, Scandinavian. And there was a lot of sports, basketball, baseball, a lot of hanging out, as kids would hang out in a mall today, we had street corners, ice cream parlors, and luncheonettes and whatnot. And it was possible, as a late teenager, to go over to Manhattan and attend music concerts and stuff like that. No one had cars. No one had cars in New York City. For one thing, in New York City you had to be 18 to get an operator's license, and nobody had cars, none of ...

RAZON: You mean a driver's license?

DRISCOLL: Yeah. But we had public transportation, which was pretty effective—the subway, and buses.

RAZON: So you guys were fit? [Laughs] Walking all the time.

DRISCOLL: Yeah, this was post World War II, and I look back and think—I can't imagine a growing up situation that would have been more fun. [Laughs]. Put it that way.

RAZON: What is your family's ethnic descent?

DRISCOLL: Irish. On all sides.

RAZON: So what's the history there? Are you second generation, or ...

DRISCOLL: Actually third generation.

RAZON: So your grandparents were the ones?

DRISCOLL: Well, three out of ... I only knew one of my grandparents. Three out of four grandparents were born in the U.S.A. One was born in Ireland. So I guess that's third generation. Principally in New York, Brooklyn, Manhattan ... my paternal grandfather lived in upstate New York, on a farm. My mother and father both came from large families. Of course, that was not unusual in those days. Families of eight in the early 20s.

RAZON: So both were Irish?

DRISCOLL: Oh yes, oh yes.

RAZON: Okay. Do you know the history, how your family came to the United States?

DRISCOLL: Not much, and I have—my sister's doing some genealogical research here. I mean I assume that, well, I know my grandmother whose family I believe had a small grocery store in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. And my paternal grandfather was born in 1865, so I'm presuming that his parents came, refugees from one of the potato famines in, you know, Ireland. And I know that my maternal grandfather, who was Irish-born, came here in the 1880s perhaps. So, the truth of the matter is I don't know a great deal about my mother's and father's families beyond their generation.

RAZON: So, do you still have relatives in New York?

DRISCOLL: For the most part, on Long Island. Yes. I have cousins. My sister lives there.

RAZON: How about in Ireland. Do you know any?

DRISCOLL: No idea. No idea.

RAZON: Ever been to Ireland?

DRISCOLL: Oh, yes. I've been to Ireland, and on one occasion went to the town that my grandfather was born and grew up in, but I couldn't find much. There were no records there, available. So.

RAZON: So, after college, you decided to go to Washington, DC, for law school.

DRISCOLL: That's right. George Washington University. I finished there in 1956 and almost immediately went into the Army and was there for the next three years.

RAZON: So why G.W.?

DRISCOLL: It was a very easy choice—I had a scholarship. [Laughs] Tuition was all paid.

RAZON: What scholarship was that?

DRISCOLL: Well, it was trustees' scholarship. They tried to get a half dozen or so college graduates from different parts of the country. And one of my classmates, one of the people who was also there on a scholarship, was Robert Casey, who was governor of Pennsylvania, who was the father of the current Pennsylvania senator. And so, that was a good experience. I didn't know much about Washington, nothing about George Washington University, and it was a good experience.

RAZON: Was the scholarship supporting, um, I guess, minorities?

DRISCOLL: Not particularly. One of the people as I remember was a Hispanic guy from Texas. The rest of us, as far as I can recall, were all Caucasian males. This is at a time when, unlike today, there weren't that many women in the legal profession. That was changing at that time. And 1953, there was not yet a great deal of integration in law schools and graduate schools. That came a bit later. I think probably the first African Americans that I'm aware of at George Washington University probably began to arrive in the middle 50s, perhaps.

RAZON: Was it the same situation in New York, too, when you were growing up?

DRISCOLL: No. Not at all. I went to college with African Americans. So that was not true. I really can't talk about law schools in New York City. My father went to law school in New York. I wasn't particularly familiar with it.

RAZON: Where did he go for law school?

DRISCOLL: Fordham University.

RAZON: What was he practicing, what kind of law?

DRISCOLL: He was a trial lawyer. Mostly civil trial work.

RAZON: Is that what kind of inspired you to enter the law field?

DRISCOLL: As a matter of fact, in a sense it was. When he died—he was only 49—when he died there was a typical Irish wake before his burial, and many people came and there were any number of people that said that my father had helped them, perhaps adopt a child, start a business, to recover money, stuff like that. And these were all ordinary people. And seemed to me that this—it sounded like a pretty good way to make a living. And at that time, I was already about to enter my senior year in college. Up until that time I hadn't given five minutes' thought to becoming a lawyer. Began to think about it then.

RAZON: How about your siblings, what kind of ...

DRISCOLL: My sister is a retired school teacher on Long Island. My brother is, I guess I'd call him a businessman. He's in Florida, entrepreneurial guy, but he's now in his late 60s.

RAZON: So your sister kind of followed your mom's ...

DRISCOLL: Pretty much. There are a lot of public school teachers in my family, cousins, aunts, so that was something that women of—middle class white women, often Irish or Jewish or Italian, that was a profession that was very available.

RAZON: That was the trend back then?

DRISCOLL: Yeah. Sure I'm talking about the 1920s, 30s.

RAZON: Okay. Well, talk about your days in George Washington University. It's a new place, how was that?

DRISCOLL: I had an aunt and an uncle living in Maryland, in Bladensburg. Other than that I knew no one here. And I had been a choral singer in New York, and one of the first things I did was connect with the choral singing at George Washington University. And for a while, that was kind of my family for a while, when I first got here. In connection—and with the chorus at George Washington, for several years during the 1950s, that group went and entertained servicemen in the Pacific, Alaska, Greenland, North Africa. And so a couple or three trips I made with them to north of the Arctic Circle, Azores Islands, Iceland, places like that, which was one of the unexpected but interesting experiences of being here here in Washington and being at George Washington University. I finished law school, took the New York Bar, and immediately went into the Army.

RAZON: So where did you stay when you were taking your law degree? The dorms?

DRISCOLL: No, no. Oh, no. I lived for part of a year with this aunt and uncle in Maryland. And the rest of the time I just lived three or four different places in DC, with other students, group homes. In Northwest Washington, Foggy Bottom, Dupont Circle, Adams Morgan. Different places. And then when I came back to Washington after the Army, that was 1959. My wife and I had one child. We lived for about a year in an apartment, far Southeast Washington, called Naylor Gardens, which is still there, still a very pretty area. In summer of 1960 we moved into this house. And the following—no, we had two children when we moved into this house, and the following year the third child was born. So we've been in this house since 1960. The neighborhood, my recollection that—I thought about this a little bit, knowing we were going to talk here. In the 60s and 70s, some of the early, what would you call it, I suppose we might have been called yuppies, I'm not sure. There was during that period a real sense in this

community—at least the community we knew—of really supporting serious social concerns. For example, I remember going down to and taking our oldest child down to the Capitol to attend the Kennedy inauguration in 1960. And then, a couple years later, down there, when they had a funeral cortege for John Kennedy, and the Capitol itself. I remember standing alongside the street there, watching the limousines come in, and seeing through the window of one of the limousines, Robert Kennedy with Caroline on his lap, just looking devastated. A short time after that, an hour or so, someone with a portable radio was reporting that in Dallas, Lee Harvey Oswald had been shot by Jack Ruby.

So [static] it was a different time. Many things were going on. There was—in the early 60s, there was a Poor People's March, and people came from—perhaps you're aware of this—came from all over the country and they set up a camp, if you will, down alongside, near the Reflecting Pool. They put up tents and shacks and stuff like that. And we, and well, the people just like us put up many of the organizers and attendees, you know, slept on the floors and like that. That wasn't only us—many people like us were doing the same thing. I happened to have been down at the Lincoln Memorial when Dr. King made his "I Have a Dream" speech. And, as I say, people would, for peace marches and Poor People's March, and, you know, a variety of demonstrations, people would come and they would just find a place to crash in people's houses. I remember one time we had, I'm not sure what event this was for, but we had people staying here and it included black people, Puerto Ricans ...

RAZON: This house?

DRISCOLL: This house.

RAZON: Wow.

DRISCOLL: Blacks, Puerto Ricans, white folks from Texas, and even a man and his wife were here who was an organizer for the ILGWU, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, who had been a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, it was in the Spanish Civil War. So this was just a connection back decades to past history, which was pretty fascinating for us.

RAZON: Let me just go back to when you were talking to Kennedy. Tell me about the time when he was assassinated. What was the feeling in the neighborhood?

DRISCOLL: Well, the feeling was—I do remember—I don't know why, maybe because we were a big house, I suppose. But, almost spontaneously, people, neighbors from here and there wound up just sitting in this dining room here around the table. Somebody probably had a small TV, you know. But very little conversation, just complete shock. And it was an organization here ... So you know, and then, of course we began to hear all of the church bells all over town. Tolling. And then as I said, a day or so later, this

witnessing of people, they were perhaps ten feet away, alongside the sidewalk, and you could see the people clearly through the car windows, then this report of what had been the shooting in Dallas of Lee Harvey Oswald. It was kind of surreal, I suppose. That's the best way to ...

RAZON: What was going on in Capitol Hill?

DRISCOLL: Well, of course at one point there was a long, long line of people wishing to go through the Capitol Rotunda. It extended all the way down East Capitol Street to maybe Sixth or Seventh Street, just a long line of people.

RAZON: Were you part of that? Did you go?

DRISCOLL: I did not go. I did not go. And I don't know why. I suppose, probably, there were so many people that did not get in, I mean, they had to cut it off at a certain time, and there were still people waiting. There were a couple of years in the early 60s there was an organization which we called the Capitol Hill Community Council. And it was mostly youngish white professionals, you know, family people. And one of the purposes of the organization got going was to sort of bridge—at that time there were—and these were groups of citizens—there were citizens' councils which tended to be whites, or from Southern background, and civic organizations which were African American. And so this Capitol Hill Community Council, the purpose of that was to try to bridge this gap between the two civic kind of organizations. And I do recall meeting with a group of people from two organizations, Capitol Hill Citizens, and Capitol Hill Civic, maybe. And at somebody's home up on D Street Northeast. And during the meeting, word came that Dr. King had been assassinated. And the meeting just ended. Nothing was said. People just folded up their papers and went away, without any comment or discussion. What was there to say? And then of course, the next day the disturbances began in Washington. And then it affected Capitol Hill, somewhat on the fringes, not directly. Although, in Marion Park, which is down by the police substation on Fifth Street [Southeast], there were regular Army troops bivouacked in that park for several days. They had field kitchens and mess tents, and whatnot. And that's where a group of U.S. Army were encamped. From time to time you'd see them patrolling the streets.

RAZON: Because of the people ...

DRISCOLL: Because of the riots ... And ...

RAZON: So the Capitol Hill Community Council, it was created in the 1960s?

DRISCOLL: Yeah, the early 60s.

RAZON: And you were part of the board, I guess?

DRISCOLL: I guess I was, I suppose. I don't know. It didn't last more than several years. And perhaps it just outlived its usefulness or something. Or the people who had been movers and shakers, maybe they moved on, or something. But it was an interesting exercise, and I think it reflected the general feeling of the younger families in the neighborhood at that time. And you know I said that they tended to support a lot of social movements and stuff like that. I do remember a little bit later at a meeting where Cesar Chavez came to help organize and raise money for the grape pickers in California. By that time, he was ... I don't know how old he was, but he wasn't well. And the meeting was over at Reformation, Lutheran Reformation Church on East Capitol, and Chavez was there and he was in a rocking chair.

RAZON: Wow. What did you guys discuss during the meetings? What were the discussions? When you had the Capitol Hill Community Council, when you had those meetings?

DRISCOLL: I suppose some of them related to schools, some of them related to, you know, various services, and I think the idea was, what the hope was—I don't know how successful it was—to perhaps set a bridge, perhaps to lessen the suspicion of the two groups of each other. And this Capitol Hill Community Council sponsored a couple of very—I thought—fun, successful block parties a couple or three or four years, on Labor Day.

RAZON: Where was that? What block?

DRISCOLL: Well, one of them was in Brown's Court, which is back on Sixth Street. Another one was held across the street from Hine Junior High School, on the corner of Eighth and C, which now is private homes or row houses, was a ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

DRISCOLL: Hello. Okay. Go ahead. [Laughs.] Sorry about that.

DRISCOLL: The southeast corner of Eighth and C, Southeast, was a big old frame Victorian house on a hill which was the convent for these nuns, an African American order of nuns, that served St. Cyprian's. One year the party was on that property. That's long gone now, as they say; it was taken down and houses built there. Another time it was at St. Joseph's, back of St. Joseph's Church in Northeast. And I'm not sure where else. But there were three or four of them, and they were, you know, really, really community efforts.

RAZON: So people got along in this area, in spite of the differences in terms of ethnicity and social class?

DRISCOLL: Yeah, oh, sure. That's true, although what was also happening, the economics of the fact was that some of the working class black families, if I can put it that way, in the area were leaving because the gentrification, you know, had a tendency to raise property values and prices, you know. I know there were some longtime black families who lived here who found that they were being offered the kind of money for their homes that they couldn't refuse, you know? So that was happening. So it became—and when I say Capitol Hill, I'm really referring to the area that did not include the public housing south of the Marine Barracks, down that way. There was a lot of public housing. Ellen Wilson, I've forgotten the other ones. And that was, those homes were largely African American folks. So, you know, what I'm talking about, Capitol Hill generally, I'm talking about an area between Stanton Park and Garfield Park, and maybe as far over as 11th Street, you know. And of course, in more recent years what they call Capitol Hill is a lot bigger. So in the 60s and 70s it was, I suppose still is, in that area, largely white, middle class, you know. A lot of professionals, government workers.

RAZON: So, what kind of job did you have then?

DRISCOLL: Well, when I came back to Washington, I was a member of the bar in Washington—in DC and New York, both. And when I got out of the Army, I had a job here and I didn't have a job in New York, so where I wound up, the choice was made easy.

RAZON: What year was that?

DRISCOLL: That was 1959. And I was clerk to a federal judge for a while. And I worked for several—as a lawyer—several different federal departments until 1983. About 25 years. Something like that.

RAZON: How old were you then? In your 30s? Still pretty young?

DRISCOLL: When I got out of the Army and came back here?

RAZON: Yeah.

DRISCOLL: Yeah, 27, something like that.

RAZON: Where did you work, like, in Northwest, or ...

DRISCOLL: Well, the first job I had was at—then it was the United States Court of Claims, and it's been reorganized. It doesn't exist under that name any longer. And I was a law clerk for the chief judge. And the court was located in the building where the Smithsonian Renwick Gallery is, on 17th and Pennsylvania Avenue [NW]. And I worked there for a couple of years. And I worked for the Civil Aeronautics Board, which no longer exists. That was located up around upper Connecticut Avenue,

almost to Columbia Road. Then, subsequent to that, all the jobs I had were ... When I changed jobs, they were progressively closer to my home here. The Commerce Department which was down at 14th Street and Constitution, and the Department of Transportation at that time, which was in Southwest, L'Enfant Plaza. I was there for the longest period and I could often walk to and from work. And it worked out very well because I was often able to be at home and have supper with my kids and everything, and if I had to go back to work, so ... And that's what I was working on when I left the federal government.

RAZON: Were you a lawyer throughout that time?

DRISCOLL: Yes, oh, yeah. I was a lawyer. I was working as a lawyer, and in fact for part of the time in the Army, I had worked as a lawyer as well. In fact, being a lawyer is the only full-time job I've ever had. [Laughs.]

RAZON: What kind of law?

DRISCOLL: Well, when I was working for the federal government, all sorts of stuff—I mean, civil rights and contracting and international law, and whatnot. I was very fortunate because one of the—in one period at the Transportation Department, the job I had took me to U.N. Meetings. I often went to Geneva, or Paris, Montreal, Hamburg. So I was very fortunate, it was just—I thought at that time it might have been the best government lawyer's job in Washington! And then when I left the government in 1983, I began to do the sort of practice that I'm still doing now, which is in DC Superior Court, Family Court, representing abused and neglected children, and delinquent children, families, and stuff like that. It was a lot of—referring back again to the 60s and the 70s, which is pretty much the period when my wife and I, and friends who were about the same vintage, were doing different stuff in the community. Pretty much existed for us in the 60s and the 70s. We—we being my family, my wife and I, and some others in the neighborhood, the Keenans who live on Sixth Street, the Parsons who lived up the street—were involved in establishing the first Montessori children's school in Washington, which at that time was located up in northwest. A couple of years later, many of the same people organized the Capitol Hill Montessori school. And over the course of the years that was located different places. Part of the time it was in Reformation Church. Other places. It no longer exists. But it was around for 10-15 years. And I was president of that.

RAZON: You were pretty active, just in terms of development.

DRISCOLL: Well, I was for a while. In the 60s, it was difficult up through probably the end of the Vietnam War, it was hard not to get involved. I mean, there was so much going on, it was hard not to be

involved, and of course, like so many other people in the country, there was not a great love for the war in Vietnam.

RAZON: [statements dealing with tape recorder] Go ahead. We were talking about involvement.

DRISCOLL: You said that we seemed to be involved in a lot, but that was true of many of the people we knew in the neighborhood that were involved in some of the same stuff. And many of us had children of about the same age. There began to be, I think, about the time we moved in to the neighborhood and others like us, there began to be more children in the neighborhood than there had been. For example, just on this street, some of the neighbors at that time were retirees whose children were long gone, so I think probably, yeah, I'm sure, on this particular block of Fifth Street, our kids were the first kids living on the block, on this particular block. So, you know, it was ... I don't think the kind of stuff that we, my wife and I, were involved in was much different from what other people were doing. And there were a lot of cooperative things. There was—Marguerite Kelly, who lives on the corner of Fifth and Constitution, organized a baby sitting co-op, where people would take turns babysitting neighbors' kids, an exchange ... when we got here there were maybe two dozen families; within a short time there were a hundred, and they had to, you know, subdivide the group! And people were, for example, there were enough people—professionals—who if I can use the term “wired”—who may have worked in Congress or who had some influence, and I think it was the efforts of people like that that resulted in the Brent School building that exists now. In the early 60s it was an old Victorian age building. And I think that there was enough agitation from people who had friends, that they were able to get the city to replace it with the building that's there now.

RAZON: Was it pretty mixed, the people in this neighborhood? Were there black families, too? Latino? Or Asian? Were there Asians?

DRISCOLL: No, not much. Not really. I mean, as I mentioned earlier, one of the problems was of course that as gentrification went forward, it became pricey to live in this neighborhood. And some of the people, like us, who got here and were able to afford at a rock bottom price a building that at that time was, you know, seriously in need of work. But as that went on, then, you know ...

RAZON: What were the prices before? Do you remember?

DRISCOLL: [Laughs]

RAZON: Now it's like five hundred thousand, or [laughs] ...

DRISCOLL: Let me tell you that, it may have ... some properties—we're talking about ones that back in the 60s were in need of serious work. I think it is not unreasonable to say that some of these properties have increased—yeah, it's 40 years later—increased a thousand percent. It's a huge difference. But that would include improvements made, as well. No, there were no Hispanics in the neighborhood. Now, back then, there were Hispanics, significant number of Hispanics in the District of Columbia, but they lived, and to a certain extent still do, in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood. Even back in the 50s that was a Hispanic neighborhood. And as I say, there were certainly African Americans on Capitol Hill, but many of them were living in public housing. Not all of them, by any means, but ... And there were—I know this to be true—at that time, there were African American people living within this immediate area who had been there a long time, at least one case, several generations. But I would have to say that in the 60s and the 70s this became, and still is, the core of Capitol Hill—Seward Square, Stanton Park—was and is now predominantly Caucasian.

RAZON: How was the—when you moved here, what did it look like, were there a lot of houses already, did you see a lot of developments in the area? Developments, urban renewal? What kind of developments did you see at that time?

DRISCOLL: Actually, in the immediate area to where we are now, where I'm living, the housing stock is what you see now, is pretty much what you would have seen in the 60s. Now, the different properties have been ... a lot of work's been done, but the exterior, and even before this was designated a historic area, the exterior of the house today is pretty much what it was like then. With a few exceptions. On this block, for example, there is a house that was built in the [19]80s, maybe, on what was a vacant lot then. There wasn't much of that. Most of the lots were occupied.

RAZON: So even back then there weren't a lot of vacant lots?

DRISCOLL: No, oh no. One on this block. Just trying to think. I'm not sure I can think of any others immediately in the general area here. They did a couple of things. In some places, there have been buildings taken down. On the corner of—northeast corner of Fifth and East Capitol, where there are several brick homes, quite nicely done in a Victorian style, they were built on a vacant lot which was owned by the Baptist Church, and prior to that there was a little restaurant there called Mary's Blue Room. That building is long gone. What else?

RAZON: Talking about your family, where did you meet your wife, and when?

DRISCOLL: I met my wife in 1955. My wife at that time—here in DC—at that time she and her mother were living on 15th Street near Pennsylvania Avenue Southeast, near Barney Circle. And she was a

student at Catholic University and she had been a drama student. And she was in a play with Mary Martin and Helen Hayes and it was a play called “The Skin of Our Teeth.” And this cast—she had a very small part in the cast of professional Broadway stars, Mary Martin and Helen Hayes! And that cast, that play ran in Paris for a couple of weeks, it was a State Department exchange if you will. And when they came back they did it in Chicago, they did it in New York, and even on television maybe. And here in Washington. And when it was in Washington, they picked up extras. Just locally. One of the extras was a friend of mine from George Washington Law School, who was an extra in this play when it ran in Washington. And he had a cast party one night, I didn’t realize it but I think he was probably setting us up, my wife and I, although neither of us realized it at the time. Yeah.

RAZON: What was the play? Where did they ...

DRISCOLL: In Washington it was at the National Theater, which is on 13th and E Northwest. At that time, 1955—that was—that and—there was no Kennedy Center—the National Theater was *the* only legitimate theater in Washington, really. I mean, there were places like the Lincoln on U Street, that did vaudeville and music shows and stuff like that. But the National Theater was *the* theater. So we met. This friend had set us up and neither one of us really were aware that that was happening. We weren’t married until a couple of years later. My wife was going to graduate school at Catholic and I was—we got married while I was in the Army.

RAZON: Where did you guys do for entertainment when you were dating? What places?

DRISCOLL: Well, we were both students. As much as we could find that was free. I think—I haven’t been there in a long while—I think they still have free Sunday night concerts at the National Gallery of Art, and there was always the free or nearly free. There was stuff going on at the different universities, theater and stuff like that, or else if you had a few cents you hung out and drank beer with your friends, you know. Like today, I guess. [Laughs]

RAZON: And you got married what year?

DRISCOLL: January 1958. At St. Peter’s Church on Second and C Streets SE. And I was in the Army then.

RAZON: Where were you stationed?

DRISCOLL: I had been stationed at Charlottesville, Virginia, the University of Virginia; the Army’s law school was located there. And the next place I was supposed to go after that was to California. And so the day of our wedding, that evening, we packed a few things in a Volkswagen that my wife owned, a little

bug, and we drove to California, by way of New Orleans, and Texas, and whatnot. And then got out there and started what I was supposed to do for the Army out there, and then was there for the next couple of years.

RAZON: So you guys lived in California for a couple of years?

DRISCOLL: Yeah. We lived in Pacific Grove, which is the town next door to Monterey. It was—I was going to say—I was very fortunate in being stationed there, because it was just a really interesting place to spend a couple of years.

RAZON: So when did you move back to DC ?

DRISCOLL: When I got out of the Army, we—in this same little car with one child—we drove back across country, and spent some time in Minnesota, which is where my wife was originally from, and I was meeting much of her family for the first time, cousins and whatnot. So, we stayed there for a week or so maybe, and then got back to DC. Because as I said, I had a job here.

RAZON: So there weren't any job offerings in California?

DRISCOLL: Well, I really didn't look. I mean, frankly, at one time I had considered staying out there, getting admitted to the bar in California, but my wife's mother, who was back in Washington, her health was beginning to fail. And I did have what turned out I think, professionally, to be a good opportunity here. And you know, I had been away from New York for six, seven years at that time. I go back to New York as often as I can and I would love to live there, but who can afford that, you know? So we worked our way at a fairly leisurely rate back to DC and started to work here. And after we had been back here for, gosh, less than a year, we found this house. And at first, part of the reason we were here was because my wife's mother, who as I said her health was beginning to fail, sold her house on 15th Street Southeast and lived with us for a while. So.

RAZON: Well, let me change the tape.

DRISCOLL: Okay.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

RAZON: Hello, okay. You were talking about your family, your wife. So, how did you guys find this house?

DRISCOLL: Oh, that's kind of interesting. One Sunday, we were just driving around, because I think, both of us—even though my wife grew up in a small farming community as a kid—we were both kind of city people. I mean, I've always lived in cities, except for when I was in the Army, I always lived in cities. So we were driving around one day and we passed an open house just a block south of here, but it was the end of Sunday and they were closing. The woman who—the real estate broker, agent was coming out. A woman who became a good friend of ours, who died a few years ago, named Josephine Turner. And she said, "I know of a place in the next block that you might be interested in." And so she arranged for us to come by one evening. And we rang the doorbell and a young woman with a couple of small kids answered the door bell, and she said, "Pat, how nice of you to come to visit." Turned out that the people living here were a couple that my wife had known at Catholic University. And she thought we were coming for a social call, to visit. We said, "Well, uh, we have to be honest about this. We're here to look at your house." You know. [Laughs] They were moving to Florida or someplace like that. And it just was on a great street, and it suited the space needs we had, and the price was right. I mean it was such a wreck and it was so cheap, we couldn't have afforded it ... If we had been coming here looking at this perhaps a year later, we couldn't have afforded it, because the prices were going up. So, I mean it was in such bad shape and it was cheap, so.

RAZON: What do you mean, "in bad shape"?

DRISCOLL: Well, for example, these chandeliers you see, they came out of other houses in the District. It was just a single light bulb. There had been a wall separating this room, it was knocked down. There was no heat in the kitchen. Broken oven, you know, things like that. The bathroom that was pretty bad shape. Two of them. And on the third floor, we learned, during World War II, when the city was so crowded with people working here, it was rented space up on the third floor, so there had to have been an apartment up there. This is, you know, this is back in the 1940s. It was a very old house. The house is probably, roughly, built shortly after the Civil War. So, you know, it's a pretty old house. It was an old house then. It was almost a hundred years old then. So, and that was another reason why the price was right.

RAZON: Okay. And where did your children go to school?

DRISCOLL: For grade school, at various times they either went to Brent or St. Peter's School. They're just about a block apart. Southeast. They're both on Third Street, between E and D, sort of.

[interruption]

RAZON: We were talking about children.

DRISCOLL: Three sons, all fairly close in age. And I can't remember who was going to which school when, but they were all going to either St. Peter's or Brent—Brent's a public school, St. Peter's is the parochial school connected to St. Peter's Parish here. And then high school—the two older boys went to high school at St. Anselm's, which is in Brookland on South Dakota Avenue. And they got there by taking a bus up North Capitol Street, I guess. They would go on the bus. And the younger [noise] high school at Gonzaga, on North Capitol. So they were, I mean, for high school, they weren't able to walk to school, but it was reasonably convenient.

RAZON: There weren't any high schools in the area?

DRISCOLL: Well, there was, Eastern High School would have been the high school here. And, you know, even back then, DC public schools were very uneven, and Eastern High School, in those days was not one of the better ones. But that's—Eastern on East Capitol in 1970s—that would have been the public high school. It was a choice we made, and it certainly was more expensive than using public school.

RAZON: Were their schools pretty much integrated, were there different kids in different ethnicities?

DRISCOLL: Well, the elementary schools were. I mean, there were, in the two high schools they went to, there were African American kids. Some Asian. Eastern, for example, even back then would have been largely African American kids. So, I mean, that high schooling, while we had to pay for it, and while it wasn't the same as a neighborhood school, it worked. It worked for them.

RAZON: What type of transportation did you guys take during that time? This was before Metro.

DRISCOLL: This was before Metro. Metro arrived in 1976, and it started out with just, the Red Line was the first one. I mean, if you were going to use public transportation, you took buses. Until maybe the end of the 60s, 1970, there were streetcars running right down the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue, the mall that's there now was ... And so I remember going down with my children, who were young kids then, and I said, this is important, we are going to take a ride on the streetcar, because tomorrow, all these streetcars will be buses. And they kind of looked at me as if I were crazy. I mean, how were these streetcars going to be turned into buses? So I corrected myself. And I said, no they will be replaced by buses. But I mean, public transportation. Streetcars and—I'm trying to recall when ... Up until that time, pretty much the surface transportation was streetcars. And at the end of Pennsylvania Avenue was Barney Circle, and it was a circle, in fact, it was a circle where street cars would turn around and come back down. There was a streetcar line from Georgetown that ran parallel to the C&O Canal, all the way out to Glen Echo, which was an amusement park out in Glen Echo. Streetcars went all the way out Rhode Island

Avenue to Maryland. So I think until they began to replace them with buses—and I don't recall precisely when that was—public transportation was all streetcars.

RAZON: Do you remember how much it was, cents? It's \$1.65 now for Metro.

DRISCOLL: Probably five or ten cents. [Laughs] I'm old enough to remember when New York City subways were five cents.

RAZON: Wow. [Interruption] Okay, we were talking about public transportation.

DRISCOLL: Yeah, and it was, certainly until—it went from being, as we said, all streetcars, it began to be replaced by buses, and I just don't recall when the last of the streetcars were removed, I think they may have been in Georgetown, I'm not sure.

RAZON: Was that better, to replace them? What was the discussion then?

DRISCOLL: This was interesting. I think it's interesting. We were talking about better. The streetcars were not as flexible as the buses, because they were on fixed railway. And I'm sure some of the other people interviewed mentioned this. But the night before John Kennedy's inaugural. It was very cold, icy, and sleet, and snow, stuff like that. Particularly down on the other side of the Capitol on Pennsylvania Avenue, there were just terrific traffic jams. The argument—observation—some people made was, had there been buses at that time, they could have maneuvered around, whereas these streetcars were stuck in this one on the guide ways there. So, the other side of the coin was, back at that time, pollution, smog, was not a concern, but certainly the streetcars had been a little bit cleaner than the buses. I don't recall any great public outcry when they replaced the streetcars with buses.

RAZON: Okay. Talking about the Vietnam War, what was the feeling, the people in this area?

DRISCOLL: I think that this Capitol Hill area was always a little—at least during the period we've lived here—it's been what you'd call a liberal neighborhood. And I think there was a lot of opposition—particularly as it went on and on—a lot of opposition to the Vietnamese War. Vietnam War. And so whatever, there were marches and rallies and stuff like that, and many people from around here would participate. One thing I remember, was the Boy Scout troop at St. Peter's—and our youngest was in it for a while—the scoutmaster was a Marine lieutenant, stationed at the barracks here, I think. And he had been in Vietnam, maybe two tours or something, and he was really against the war. So he would make sure he wasn't identified, he would be out of uniform all the time, and he would lead a lot of these anti-war parades. But he would make sure that he wasn't identified as a current Marine officer. And so finally—it was pretty funny—and you know, he became known, at least in the Marine Corps, as one of these guys

that, even though he had been there and paid his dues, a couple of tours over there, he was willing to come forward and oppose the war. So as I understood the story, the Marines—his name was Bob Brueger, I think—the Marines approached him and said, “We understand you want to go to graduate school over at Hopkins.” But he still had a commitment of time to the Marines. And he said “Yeah, that’s right.” And they said, “Tell you what. We will make it possible for you to do that.” What they did was, just to get him out of here, and away from the action here, they arranged for him to be released early from the Marines so he could start graduate school. That was the deal: “We’re going to help you get to graduate school real quick.” Quid pro quo was, of course, was when you’re out of here, you won’t be marching in these demonstrations.

RAZON: What did you do at that time? Were you against the war? Did you participate in any protests?

DRISCOLL: Probably not. I mean I certainly was against what was going on, but truth of the matter is, I was not as active as probably I ought to have been.

RAZON: Okay. I was told that—are you involved with the Capitol Hill Restoration Society?

DRISCOLL: I’m a member, I have not been an officer. Why?

RAZON: Oh, okay. Bernadette informed me about that.

DRISCOLL: Oh, we’re members, we go to the meetings, and I helped out last year—we both helped out on their house tour a year ago. But other than that, I mean, we haven’t been really active in the sense of being officers.

RAZON: Are you involved in any organizations now, here in this neighborhood?

DRISCOLL: That’s a good question. I guess, other than things at St. Peter’s Church, I sing in the choir there, and stuff like that, I don’t ... I guess the answer would be, at this time, I guess not. Interesting question. Am I doing anything? No, I’m not doing anything. Hmm. There’s a lot of these organizations—CHAMPS, the Restoration Society, organizations like that, I give them a few dollars now and then when I can, but in terms of being active, no.

RAZON: What do you like—or don’t like—about living on Capitol Hill?

DRISCOLL: There’s not much I don’t like, actually. I mean, I grew up in New York City, in a part of Brooklyn, where you could walk to everything. You could walk to all your merchants, your hardware store, your barbershop, all that stuff. And to a great extent you can do that in Capitol Hill. And I like that, it really makes a big difference. I believe that there is a sense of community, cooperation, support. One

thing I think—without there being organized organizations, is a lot of just spontaneous helping of neighbors, helping one another, you know? Cases where people have a temporary injury, stuff like that, spontaneous help of neighbors helping each other. What else do I like? It's kind of a neat looking neighborhood, too, I think. You can't get away from the fact that you are just within a short walk of the Capitol Building, which is a pretty impressive structure.

RAZON: Does that still impress you? Even though you see it every day.

DRISCOLL: Oh, yes. I remember the first time I saw the Capitol. I was coming down to visit a relative, an aunt here. And coming in on—this would have been the late 40s maybe. Coming in in the evening on the railroad, from New York into Union Station, seeing this dome all lit up there, pretty impressive! [Laughs] I like the physical presentation of the neighborhood, the access to ... And you know, the merchants here, you do get to know them rather well, and you know, it's a nice feeling.

RAZON: Was that the same thing as before, like in the 1960s? Like, where did you go for grocery shopping?

DRISCOLL: Well, back then there were still the mom-and-pop stores that there are up on East Capitol, they've been there God knows how long. The Eastern Market wasn't as—there weren't as many merchants in the market as there are now or as there were before the fire. Across the street from the Eastern Market there was a small Safeway.

RAZON: Really?

DRISCOLL: Yeah, a small one. Yeah. Right across from Eastern Market. Just below Tunnicliff's there. In fact, at one time there were three Safeways. One of them was down on Seventh Street where the Mormon Church is there, and one of them was up on Eighth Street, up north of Massachusetts Avenue, and there were small places. There was ... No big supermarkets. Oh, there was an A&P at 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue, where the CVS Pharmacy is now. That was an A&P supermarket. So there were little small places in the neighborhood, and there were a couple of supermarkets. That's where you would shop. I don't remember ... Have you been at Eastern Market on Saturdays? The farmers' market?

RAZON: Yeah.

DRISCOLL: I don't remember much of that. The place which is now—we're running out of time there? The place which is now the Natatorium on North Carolina next to the Eastern Market was a firehouse. It was a firehouse that was not used except to store telephone poles, lamp posts and stuff like that. And some people, none of whom are around anymore—a man named George Cheeley, who was a newspaper

guy, and a man named Jim Hodgson who was a historian, I think—pushed and agitated so that that property, that space that had been a disused firehouse, became the site of the swimming pool which is there now. Yeah, so that's one—you were asking a little earlier about the physical changes—that's a change there. The other one I mentioned was—where the convent used to be, nuns' convent from St. Cyprian's. That sort of change. But for the most part, physically, it hasn't changed that much.

RAZON: Did you go—were there pubs, bars?

DRISCOLL: Yeah, there were, there were. The 600 block of Pennsylvania Avenue, where Mr. Henry's is, that was always a bar. It was, as I remember it, was pretty much a working class bar before Henry Yaffe turned it into a Victorian pub. The Tune Inn down there has been there forever, I think.

RAZON: Tunnickliff's?

DRISCOLL: The Tune Inn, on Pennsylvania Avenue, a little place down there.

RAZON: I don't think I've been there.

DRISCOLL: Maybe not. Where do you live?

RAZON: I live in Southwest.

DRISCOLL: Oh, okay,

RAZON: But I go to Tunnickliff's for breakfast, or [laughs].

DRISCOLL: There was—right around the time that we were moving here—and you know, other people I'm sure will have talked about this. The square block where the Madison Building, Library of Congress Building is—there were a lot of restaurants, and, you know, bars and stuff like that. They were all taken down. Some of the places, the place that is called, I think, the Capitol Hill Lounge, maybe? In the 200 block, that was always a bar, it was called Mike Palm's, and Mike Palm was a retired professional football player who ran the place. The Hawk 'n' Dove came along a little bit later, and the place that is, what do they call it now? The Pour House? That's also in the 300 block there, that was there. So, quite a few of the places between Second and Seventh, mostly on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue, many of those bars, and bar-and-grills, and little restaurants were there back into the 60s and 70s, but most of them have changed hands several times since then.

RAZON: Well, let me change the tape.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

TAPE 2/SIDE 2

RAZON: Testing. Okay. Yeah, I just want to know about your military experience. So basically you entered the Army after law school?

DRISCOLL: After law school. I was fortunate in many ways. I was able to ... My draft board was in Brooklyn and I was very fortunate. I was able to get student deferments not only to finish college but also for law school. So I was really very fortunate in that respect. I was able to finish school. I finished law school in May and took the New York Bar in June and I was drafted on Labor Day. Yeah, Labor Day. So I was drafted pretty quick afterwards. And, I was very fortunate. I think I can say that probably in three years I was not ever stationed where I didn't want to be. I would love to have gone overseas, but other than that. I spent the first eight weeks ...

RAZON: That was after Korean War, right?

DRISCOLL: Yes, it was. Well, yeah, it was. I mean, it was after the armistice in 1953, I guess. Korean War started in '50, in June, and I think in '53 was the armistice, whatever it is. Right. And it was before the Vietnam business. So, it was a period of time where you were not likely to be under unfriendly fire or anything like that. I spent eight weeks at Fort Dix, New Jersey, which was close enough so that once or twice I actually got home to visit. And from there, I had voluntarily extended the two-year draft commitment for another year and I entered the Counter-intelligence Corps. At that time, that was located at Fort Holabird, in Baltimore, in the Dundalk-Sparrows Point area of Baltimore. It's now an industrial park, but at that time it was a military installation where they trained counterintelligence, you know. They had a big school there. And that would have been—that was another eight month program. While I was there, I learned that the Judge Advocate General corps in the Army had once again reopened, and they were still accepting people. So I said, well, I'm already committed for three years. And if I can get accepted there, I can spend the rest of the time doing something in my profession, rather than something else that might have been interesting but wouldn't be particularly related to it. So I applied and was accepted. And so I became, on one and the same day in the Army, I became a private first class and a first lieutenant, on the same day. And so I went—I had—and this happened at the time that I had completed the program in Baltimore. And so I then spent the next six months at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, where the Army law school was located. About half of that time was on the staff, the other half of the time I was a student. I was there for about six months. And I was very fortunate. I got assigned to Fort Ord, California, in Monterey, which no longer exists. It's now been turned over to the state of California; it's a campus for one of their community colleges.

RAZON: Oh, okay.

DRISCOLL: That happened quite a few years ago, maybe ten years ago. So, I mean, some of the buildings that were on the base there are being used by this college. So I was there for a year and a half, a year and three quarters, something like that. I was able to go—the way it worked, I didn't have to take any officer basic training because I had already had all that kind of stuff—so I was able to just go right out there. And I spent the next time as a trial lawyer, for the most time defending general courts-martial, which were felonies. And I got to defend people for the usual military offenses like desertion and stuff like that. And I also got to defend a bigamy case once and a kidnapping case once.

RAZON: Wow.

DRISCOLL: It was really just a very interesting experience. I became very close to the other young lawyers that were there at the same time. And although we are dying off, we still as recently as a couple years ago still had reunions of that group. And so as I said, my Army experience was never stationed anyplace I didn't want to be.

RAZON: So from 1956 until when?

DRISCOLL: '59. Three years.

RAZON: Okay. Why did you get out?

DRISCOLL: Why? Because my time was up. And for a short period I considered trying to stay in the Army as a regular officer. And I thought about it for a while, and decided that I was really not a professional soldier. My time was up and I moved on.

RAZON: Okay.

DRISCOLL: But I don't regret it. I mean, it was in many ways a very useful experience.

RAZON: You weren't drafted?

DRISCOLL: I was drafted.

RAZON: During the Vietnam War?

DRISCOLL: No, no. Because I was in and out before that ever started, before that ever got going. I remember the first I was really aware of something bad going on there was in the early 60s, when I was working for the Civil Aeronautics Board, one of the other lawyers working there had a brother-in-law, who was a probably an infantry officer, who was killed over there. Now, at that time, supposedly they were advisors, advising the Vietnamese government, but it became clear that they were more than

advisors. So it really was not until, I don't know, '63, '64, that people—me anyway—became aware of what was going on over there. But by that time I had been out of the Army for a couple of years.

RAZON: Okay. Did you want to ... I don't know what else to ask, but ... Did you want to add anything that I haven't asked you?

DRISCOLL: Whoa. Probably. [Laughs] Being in Washington in the—and this was not particularly Capitol Hill, because I wasn't living on Capitol Hill while I was attending law school. But Washington was really a small town, it really was still a small town. And the changes have been enormous. A corner in Foggy Bottom on Pennsylvania Avenue, which, between the time I was first aware of it, which was a little over 50 years ago, it's now part of the World Bank, and there's now a third building that was on that same site, physical changes other than around here have been pretty substantial. It was really was a small town. It really was. It was a small town but it was a city, you know? Which really appealed to me because I'd grown up all my life previously in a city, New York City, so there was that respect to it. But it was a pretty sleepy place. A city but a sleepy city. [Laughs]

RAZON: [Laughs] Did you go to the Lincoln Memorial when Martin Luther did the speech? You said you did.

DRISCOLL: Yeah, I was there.

RAZON: So how was that?

DRISCOLL: Well, I'm not sure, yeah I think so, you know I had just wandered down from—I think what I had done if I recall correctly. I'm not certain exactly where I was working at that time but it was in Northwest. I wandered down with some other people and, kind of, I was reasonably, as I remember it—sometimes you don't remember things the way it actually happened—but I think I was reasonably close to him, to the podium and the mike he was on, maybe 50, 100 feet. But you know, up top, up on the steps there. And I think I realized even then that this was a—thousands and thousands of people all along the Reflecting Pool, and I think I was aware that this was a, that I was present at a fairly significant point in American history. I think I realized that at the time. I think I realized that at the time.

RAZON: Were you guys affected, I mean at least this neighborhood, during the riots?

DRISCOLL: Not directly. There was maybe one, there might have been one or two businesses on Pennsylvania Avenue Southeast that were disturbed. Now, I mean, H Street Northeast was another matter. That's a different matter. There was serious stuff going on there. We walked over to Tenth Street, to friends who lived there, white friends, Tenth Northeast, maybe C, D Street, something like that. And we

got up there and the rioting had started, pretty interesting. If we've got enough time on this tape. This was while the rioting was going on and we went up there and noticed some of the bricks in the sidewalk had been disturbed and we said, Oh, boy. And we checked and they said no, that's not a problem at all, our kids were just playing here, our black neighbors on either side are really kind of watching out for us.

RAZON: Oh, okay.

DRISCOLL: This is kind of amusing. Another thing, you asked me about the neighborhood, what I liked about it. Another thing is that, you know, I mentioned it a little bit, spontaneously people would kind of show up and help others. Shortly before the assassination and the rioting, there was a building, some brick homes being taken down where Georgetown Law School now is, on New Jersey Avenue. We learned about it from a friend and they said you can get them for cheap and a guy will come by with a dump truck and just dump you a load of bricks. I said, that's great, because back of the house, that area was just mud and mess, and we were going to put in a brick patio ourselves. So they dumped them. They were all out on the sidewalk, big truckload of bricks. And sure enough after Dr. King was killed, assassinated, the rioting begins, and there's a whole bunch of bricks out there. Out on the sidewalk for anybody to come along and get. So a lot of people from the neighborhood that I had never met before volunteered to come out and help me move all of those bricks off the sidewalk at the back of the house, during the disturbances. I had no problem at all finding people who spontaneously came along and volunteered to "Let's get those bricks off the sidewalk there and out of sight."

RAZON: Wow. [Laughs]

DRISCOLL: It was interesting, during that time, also to see the kind of thing that people in, you know, other countries where there were revolutions and, going on frequently, to see armed troops in battle gear marching up and down your streets. It was kind of sobering.

RAZON: Oh, Okay.

DRISCOLL: Heard enough? Too much?

RAZON: No! If you want to add more, go ahead, feel free.

DRISCOLL: [No reply]

RAZON: Okay. Well, I thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate this.

DRISCOLL: This was fun for me, and useful to put in context what's been going on with me for a lot of the last 400 years. [Laughs] Just seems that long!

RAZON: [Laughs] I'll stop the tape.

END OF INTERVIEW