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Neighbors

Edna Collins

A photographer friend told me about a plucky old lady in a nursing home, named Edna Collins, who talked about having worked in a mill. I went to meet this person, and learned that she had just celebrated her ninety-fifth birthday, and that in 1906, at the age of twelve, she had gone to work at the Mt. Vernon Mill.

Edna has been in the nursing home for several years. Shortly before she had fallen and broken her wrist. About this same time, her oldest daughter died and left her a ring to remember her by. Edna had to leave the home for an eye operation, and when she returned, the ring was gone. It was at this time that I first spoke with her and asked to photograph her. She was very depressed, and she refused.

The next time I visited Edna, however, she had regained her customary good spirits, had put on the lovely blue dress and pearl necklace shown in the accompanying photograph, and was all ready for my camera.

My name was Edna Collins.... I lived with my husband till he died. I lived with him forty-one years.... My maiden name was Edna Johnson.... And I married a man by the name of Walter Collins.... I used to live in Spring Row.... That was the company houses.

I was born... April the 16th, 1894. I was ninety-five years old the sixteenth of this month.... [I went to work when I was] twelve years old.... Well, my mother and father were parted.... And he lived with his mother. And my mother's mother, she didn't work at all. And I lived with her.... And then after a while my mother and father went together again....

I didn't go to school till I was nine years old, at 55 school.... And I only went up to the third grade. And my mother took me out and put me in the mill.... Then I swept alleys.... I went to night school.... a couple nights a week.... You know, a kid twelve years old don't mind anything....

I had two brothers, [and].... I had four sisters. Now they're all gone....

I was about six years old [when my parents separated].... The manager of the mill had that big place.... And they had a fishpond with goldfish in it.... So, my aunt give me a quarter to buy a pair of stockings.... Instead of going to the store, I went over and watched the goldfish. And I lost the quarter. And when I got home, I got a whipping.

And then I remember running away because I got a licking, and I went all the way up to Falls Road and 36th Street, where my father was living.... It was cold weather. I was afraid to go in, afraid to get another whipping. So I sat on the back steps. And my father came out to go to work--he was a conductor for the Roland Park line. And I was almost froze to death. And he took me in, and my father's mother--my grandmother--bathed me in water.... and warm me all up. And I stayed there....

Mr. White, he was the boss up in the upper mill.... George Baseman, he was the boss of the slubbers. And he made me so mad one day, and I picked up a big bun, and I slung it down the alley and hit him on the leg--almost set him crazy.... He was the boss over the frames. Of course, I wasn't running the frames yet then, I was sweeping the alleys.... He...
"Clean them alleys up!" I said, "Well some of them chew snuff, and I get my hands all in it!".

Well, the slubbers, they'd just drop the cotton, and when the alleys got cotton in them, we'd have to sweep the alleys, and get the cottons up and put the cottons in a waste basket—or box. Sometimes you'd get your fingers in it, and oh myoooi!

[One worker] would chew snuff. And the card grinders would be working. And she'd go over and ask about a chaw of tobacco! And they'd cut her off a piece. She'd chew tobacco... [Her name was] Het Lochner. She was a rough kind of a woman, anyhow... Sometimes we'd be sitting in the window, when we didn't have no frames to doff. And she'd take our shoes off, and throw them down the "rat hole"—down to the first floor.

Up above the upper mill was the--we called it the barnyard. But the carts was in there and horses in there. And when we lived in Spring Row, we'd go through the paling fence and go through the barnyard to the upper mill.

There was... a little row of houses along [Singer Avenue], and there was cows in that field and there was horses... I remember the graveyard. That was up where the horses and all was at... The horses and cows was in the graveyard.

I didn't go over on Stone Hill much... I got married... I didn't work any more till I was sixty years old, because I had a family of children... I lived in Spring Row... right on the Falls Road... and we didn't have any water; we had a spring... My mother would have a bench with water buckets... There was only four frame houses in Spring Row...

And my father would tell all of them to fill their water buckets up, and he would clean all of the water out of the spring and whitewash it all inside. And we would have to wait until the water come up—clear water and cool water. And people from Roland Avenue and different places would come with a bucket to get a bucket of cold water... Those houses were tore down, and the Noxema plant [was constructed there]...

And Charlie Woods was the manager. He had a big house... There's where the pond was with the goldfish...

And I went to work. I worked a week for $2.70. And then they got a raise to $3.90. And then [they] put me on running speeders, and I had to work myself to death to earn $14.00 a week... That's when they put me on running the frames... First time I went in, I swept alleys; then I went to doffing, and then they put me on running frames... I gave [my pay] to my mother. [She gave me] ten cents spending money... [I could] buy some candy with it...

After I got married... I moved up on Elm Avenue... and--[it] used to be 1st Avenue, but it's 33rd Street now...

I was married forty-one [years]. My husband died. And he had heart trouble and dropsy... I went to work at Women's Hospital... If I was off a day, why I'd get my family to come down and have lunch with me... This was on a Saturday... The television was on, and there was a couple singing "When Your Hair Is Turned to Silver." And my husband came in and sat on the sofa beside me. And he and I were singing... (Snap!) He dropped dead against me...

I couldn't sing it to you... You know, your pipes get rusty, [and] you can't sing! I can't sing. You know, I was a local member of the Salvation Army in 1922 till I fell and broke my... right hip...

When your hair has turned to silver, I will love you just the same
I will always call you sweetheart; that will always be your name.
In a garden filled with roses, on the sunset trail we will stray,
When your hair has turned to silver, I will love you just the same...
Police Tall... One time... my mother and father were away. And my father knew Police Tall. And it was cold weather. And we lived at Spring Row. Of course we had a cook stove to cook on, and water out of the spring... And a rap comes at the door, and it's Police Tall.

And he said, "Can I come in?" I said, "Well, my mother and father's not home." But he come in and sat down, and he took his belt off, and his gun--laid it on the table--scared me all the way to death. I didn't know what was going to happen. So he set there a while, put his belt and his gun on, said "Thank you," and went on home... It was at night then...

I got married... 23rd of June, 1910... I had four girls and one boy.

Clarence and Roland Martin

When I ran out of oldtimers living in Stone Hill, I was advised to see Roland Martin for more information. I met with him, along with his brother Clarence, in his home at the lower end of Keswick Road next to the filling station.

Clarence, the gravelly-voiced older brother, poured forth such a flood of information, that Roland, who speaks haltingly, scarcely had a chance. So, the next meeting was held with Roland alone.

The accompanying photograph shows the two brothers standing near the North Avenue bridge by the Northern Central tracks, the line on which Clarence worked for forty-six years.

CLARENCE: [I was] born right across [the road] at 2910 [Keswick Road]. [I am] eighty-four... Where Stieff Silver is built, that was a low place in the ground. We used to call it Consumption Hole. We was all kids around. It was forbidden to play around it... And then there was a fence right in back of that, that we called the hay field, that supplied the horses for... the Mt. Vernon Mill...

This nasty hole always had green slime on it. I was down there playing, and I cut an artery in the bottom of my foot. And just by luck, or I'd have been dead, the doctor and his horse and buggy was right across the street...

And he run over here, and he got the blood stopped, or I wouldn't be here. It was so thick in the that hallway there, that they took a fire shovel or a dustpan and gathered the blood up after it had jellied there. That's how much blood I lost...

Stone Hill sat between this hay field and that one up there... [from] Bay Street33 and up as far as Singer Avenue was the other hay field, that run down as far as Oyster Shell Road.

There was three mills here... And when they let out at five o'clock in the evening, there was just a string of people that went over in here and up here, that worked in the mill. And to live back there, you had to work in the mill...

And right down the bottom where you go down that curve... there was a store there.34... That was for the mill employees only. But us kids used to go down there and get penny candy--they'd sell it to us, see.

33 i.e. Field Street.
34 The company store, where Pacific Street met Oyster Shell Road.
This was nothing but railroad people... This street here was "Railroad Street." I could sit here and name you twenty-five families right in here that lived on this street...

There were six boys... in my father's family. There were two girls. Five of the boys was conductors on the Pennsylvania Railroad. The two girls each married a fellow [by the] name of Wilson, and each one of the Wilsons was a track foreman between here and Parkton.

And all of the boys had boys on the railroad. My brother and I—he was two years younger than me. He was Charles M. Martin... And one of the boys lived at 2910. He was an engineer. He got gassed in the tunnel from coal gas and [it] killed him... I was on forty-six years. I've been retired now since 1968, so there ain't many people with the joys of retirement and live that long after that...

My uncle lived at 2926 [Cedar Avenue]. And I was eight years old when he moved up to Parkton... as the conductor on the work train on the Northern Central. And the first year he went up there, he took me up for vacation... And my father came up and told him to keep me up here; all the kids down here had scarlet fever. And he started me into the Parkton School. And they never could get me back home no more. I stayed up there until I got married...

ROLAND: I was born in 1912, and lived in this house seventy-five years...

On the hill over there was a big mansion... where the Boy Scouts are [now]... The mayor of Baltimore City lived there... The two mills, or three mills, used to play ball over there... That's back in the twenties. I used to go there with buckets of water and sell water. That's the gods' truth... There wasn't no fountain or nothing around... [Bring water from] home... in a bucket, and sell it right out of a cup...

Where the 29th Street bridge is down there, that was build about 1939. They'd hit a home run, and we used to go down and look for the balls for them, and maybe got a penny or so... [The house] was torn down for the playground... The teenagers, they practically tore it down. They set it on fire a couple times... We used to call [it] Cook's Hill, where the Boy Scout building is...

CLARENCE: I used to come down from Parkton, where I stayed with my uncle, and I'd spend a couple days down here. And they'd want me to stay longer. And he used to get me a railroad pass... And when I got down here, I'd hide it—the return part. And if things didn't go to suit me, I'd be out playing with my older brother and the other boys, and I'd disappear. I'd walk over to Woodberry, and get on the train and go back up, and nobody would know it...

I remember the old policeman when I was a little boy, and he wore a tall, derby hat. And he walked; he didn't ride... Old Mr. Tall. And when we seen him coming, we'd hallow. And I don't mean maybe!... He never bothered any of us, but he had us bluffed...

ROLAND: And the police department on horseback used to come down the street here...

CLARENCE: About twenty [of them]... Traffic directors down at the wharf, and all of them were downtown. At 8 o'clock they reported up here. They came down the street in military fashion... They went across Cedar Avenue bridge... Then Mt. Royal Avenue extension came up as far as Cedar Avenue... About 6 o'clock in the evening, they came back. And the stable was right up there in back of the Northern Police station. It's still there!

Because I live right there...

An old man by the name of Walters lived at 2928. He worked at the produce terminal... And we had a wagon—kids' wagon. We called it a billygoat wagon. It was build in Emmitsburg, Pennsylvania. And like a farm wagon... Mr. Walters told us on Saturday morning to come down, and he would give us watermelon—my brother and his son and I.
We went down here, down Mt. Royal Avenue, down to the produce terminal—we got a load of watermelons for three of us. We come up Mt. Royal Avenue, and my brother started to holler Watermelons. And we sold them all and come home and went to the movies. And we all three got lickings for it, too... He was going to have a party on Sunday, and we sold them on Saturday! I never forgot that!

[Uncle Merle Martin] started a double-head engine through—we called it the B and P tunnel, from North Avenue to Monroe Street. There's three sections to that tunnel. One caved in—there's an opening there at John Street... And then the next opening was at Pennsylvania Avenue. The passenger trains stopped there for local passengers...

And this freight train went in there... and my cousin, he got an awful dose of coal gas. I've been in there when they had me down on my knees! That ain't no kidding... [He was the] engineer. And he got overcome by gas. And he never got over it... He got hung up in there... I worked in that tunnel as a conductor with the work train in there at night time... [That's] the main line between Baltimore and Washington...

My brother and I—he was two years younger than me, but he was much bigger—we both went on the railroad the same day... When we could hold a regular job, we worked the same job all the time. And... the bosses said they never knew which one of the Martins was the conductor, because we worked as a unit. In other words, if he wasn't right there, I was there. And he knew that he could depend on me...

And we worked that job from the 29th Street bridge to New Freedom, Pennsylvania, up and back, the highest paying job they had, for seventeen years... Up until... 1967... And he was a wizard. I ain't kidding nobody! He was a whole lot better than I was—because I had too much foolishness... They changed it [and] I left... And my brother left. And they begged us to come back, but I wouldn't...

I worked down [in] the mill... the lower mill... for one summer... My uncle, Jake Furman... was the foreman in the twisting room... That's where they took the cotton and made the cord to make the duck... And I worked down there for Uncle Jake, and I didn't like it... [I was] around fifteen. I'd come down here from vacation, and Uncle Jake give me a job...

There was a little old lady—I'll never forget this—she swept up between the frames—that's the spinning frames, now, and cotton was all over the place. She was—she couldn't talk... They called it deaf and dumb, but it wasn't deaf and dumb. Anyhow, Sarah used to... sweep the cotton out from underneath the frames... She'd have cotton... sometimes two, three feet deep.

And I used to watch—they had air hoses to blow the cotton off the frames, to keep them from catching on fire. I would get that hose, and stick it under the frame... And when she got next to it, I'd turn the air on. And you couldn't see Sarah for cotton and hollering! And my uncle, he told me, he said, "If Howard While"—that was the superintendent—"catches you, he's going to fire you." And Howard caught me. And he sent me home before lunch; at 2 o'clock in the evening, they were up here to get me to go back again...

Between the old cobblestone road and the brick sidewalks here was maple trees. And us kids always—there was about, I'd say, three foot wide [of] dirt. that was our marble [spot]—shooting marbles all day long out there on that road... This side didn't have... the dirt and all... And from here down to the bridge was a dirt road, but it was lined all the time with oyster shells... And the same way over on Chestnut Avenue...

I remember when Billy Sunday had his tent up there [in the Cow Field]... on the upper end at Singer Avenue... There were plenty of seats in the tent. And—this is the truth! There were plenty of seats in the tent, but there was more outside looking in. And a thunderstorm came up, and it started to rain. I've never forgotten that. And everybody ran in the tent. And
old Billy Sunday said, "Thank God for the rain. It brought them in, whether they wanted to come in or not!"

ROLAND: I remember when Cedar Avenue bridge had wooden planks to walk across. And I've seen many a car hanging across Cedar Avenue bridge, too. My brother was walking across there one day in the wintertime ... and the man that owned the Ideal Theatre, he came down from up in the park.

And that day we had snow ... and the cars kept taking water on the bridge, and the water froze. And Mr. Goodman came down, and my brother Melvin, he had to jump out of the way ... and Mr. Goodman went and landed in Jones Falls [and was killed].

I went to work ... in January '27. I was only fourteen. I went down to the mill and worked under my uncle...boss of the twisting room. My mother told him to be strict with me. And my job was to doff the twisting machines.

Clarence talks about fires...[from] grease and cotton. They had plenty of fires down there, but no real major fires. We used pyrene fire extinguishers. Then we had water buckets, too, stuffed with sand. Then they had the regular hose. I don't know whether they had a whistle, or what, that used to go off. Then the engines would come there. They had the old [Stanley] steamer.

CLARENCE: I remember the steamer when it went over the M & P 35 bridge on Remington road that Sunday morning. Killed both horses--just below Beech Avenue. That was a wooden bridge then days...

Underneath 29th Street [bridge]. Tell you how many tracks was in there. There was eight tracks on the north-bound side, and thirteen tracks on the other--toward Mt. Royal Avenue. The Mt. Vernon shops was down there, where they repaired the cars...

On this side ... there were three main tracks. And then there was five tracks from there to the bank of Jones Falls that run all the way to North Avenue. Freight cars ... by the hundreds! All the freight come down from Enola yard, right on this side of the river at Harrisburg.

This sounds impossible! When I went on the railroad, there was twenty-six crews in that N.C.-Enola pool. They called you when they wanted you.

ROLAND: I believe the right name for this neighborhood is Mt. Vernon. The name of the railroad yard down there was called 'Mt. Vernon.'

CLARENCE: Right down there [on Pacific Street], half way, before you went down over the hill, there was an areaway, like, between the houses ... and there was a big handpump. Everybody on Stone Hill got their water out of that pump ... wash water and everything.

ROLAND: I was born March 2, 1912. My father was born in 1863 ... and my mother was born 1875. My father lived up near Parkton; my mother lived near Cockeysville. [I was born] right in this house.

Many many many times I got chased in this house, throwing rocks and stones at the Rementers. And we chased them into their house, too. We had regular battles! I'd say at least ten [on a side]. Then we had a fellow that lived across here at 2910 named Wyck

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35 i.e. Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad.
36 i.e. Inhabitants of the neighborhood of Remington.
Marston. He was our leader. And he'd be out front on these stone battles. And we used to have some good battles here—I'm not kidding...

I hit my brother one time. We used to swim down in that [Stoney Run] creek. And I was up on the railroad track... and I threw a rock down where they were swimming, and hit him in the head—cut his head. It wasn't done on purpose. He was in the wrong spot at the right time. He came home crying. I don't know whether I got a beating for it or not...

Beatings didn't matter too much. They wasn't that bad. Most of it was done by hand. But when my father was mad, he got the razor strap... It stung... We was well behaved. As long as we did our house work... it was all right then...

Back when I was growing up, I never heard of dope. We used to pick up stumps.37... And then we used to take Indian cigars.38... They wasn't actually cigars. We used to get them off the woods down here... We used to smoke the corn husks; wrap them up in newspaper and smoke that...

When I worked at the Ideal Theatre... I was twelve years old... Mr. Goodman, the one my brother Clarence talked about... at Christmas time—my father was still living—and he gave me a five-dollar Christmas present... I was ushering up there...

I worked on Saturdays most of the time... They had these [serials]... I guess I put maybe five or six hours in up there ushering [on a weekend]... Then before that we used to go around the neighborhood with the programs for the whole week and put them in doors... I wasn't working regular...

My father died in '26 and I went to work down in the mill in '27, and I had to get a permit because I was only fourteen... When we served newspapers, we had to go downtown and get a badge...

Old man Hackley was my cousin's father-in-law... He... collected tickets when you went in [the Ideal]... And we used to go down to work down there in the aisles, and if they had an empty seat, we'd put one finger up—that's when they had a crowd. Then he'd send one person down... Then you'd show the people where their seat was... They only had one aisle...

I never had no time for sports. I'll be truthful with you... Now, my brother Lou, who was a little bit older than I, he was more into sports—baseball... I kept on working all the time...

Five dollars was lots of money back in those days... Well, you seen your movies free, too... They were all silent pictures. If you couldn't read, you might as well stay home. And they had a piano player... He was there for years... The screen would be over top of his head... and, like, the horses would be running, and he'd be playing the music real fast... And that's the truth...

Then the picture cards that they used to send along with the pictures—they used to tack them up on the board out front. Then when the show was over with—I had stacks and stacks of those pictures... My brother-in-law Duke, he took a bunch of them and tacked them on his wall in the summer kitchen, for insulation. And anybody tears that wall down, they're going to have a treasure... They're in demand on collectors...

I sold newspapers... and delivered them... There used to be two men that owned newspaper routes here. One was Archie Ford... If you're up on 36th Street, any time he's up there, he'll stop you. As long as you tell him you'll be in church Sunday, he'd let you go... He'd keep after you—talk, talk, talk... Don't matter what church; just so you going...

37 i.e. Cigarette butts.
38 From the catalpa trees.
He built a Bible class up in Hampden church, supposed to have been the largest one in the country... I went down to his church sometime, when they had a contest... to see who had the biggest men's Bible class... I wasn't a member of Hampden [Methodist] church, but I went there to help them out on contests...

So, the other man, his name was Campbell, Mose Campbell. He had one arm... And he had the Sunpaper... And we used to serve papers from--had a house out on Druid Hill Park, the other side of the swimming pool... from there up to 40th Street, to Falls Road, to Wyman Park Apartments on Beech Avenue... That was the Sunpaper route. The American paper on Sundays used to have two Sunday papers--one in the morning and one in the afternoon... I served the Sunpaper...

Some papers... like Thursday or Friday, they would have five-hundred-and-some pages... All these department stores advertised then... The wagon was free. You had to get so many new customers to get a wagon... metal wagons with four wheels and a handle. And you'd put the paper in there... The delivery trucks... put them on the corners...

Never had the morning paper. I had the afternoon paper... Right after school you'd start your route... The people wanted their papers... Mr. Straw at 2902 [Keswick Road]--if his paper wasn't there around a certain time, he went up to 33rd Street and took his paper out of the bundle!...

Mose Campbell... used to have parties up [at] his house. And one time he had a party--just for the newsboys--and they had a checker game started. And I was the champion of the checker players that night... There wasn't no drinking or nothing like that, because there wasn't nothing there to drink, because that was before 1932...

[For snow] we had a strap about two inches wide... You put the strap over your shoulder, and you put the newspaper like that... See, not every house got a newspaper. The Baltimore American was pretty strong. That's Archie Ford's papers...

My job [at the mill] was what we call doffing... We took these bobbins of cord... and put them in this wagon. And then we'd put the new empty spools on. And when we got done these frames... we just set around until the frames would fill up again... The person that operated the machine... cut it off. Then you went around and picked the spool up... Put them in the wagon, and push the wagon down; they went--they was sent down to the weaving room...

Somebody else would take them down to the elevator... The man that ran the elevator... would bring the empty cart back... [Then we had] ten or fifteen [minutes]... enough that you could sit down for a while... sit in the window--see, we was facing Jones Falls and the railroad... And sit there in the window and watch the trains go by...

I only worked eight hours a day, because I was on permit--until I was sixteen. Then... I worked fifty-three hours and a quarter a week... That's back in '28... $13.10... that's what I got [a week]... My mother took it... I got fifty cents a week, and I used to take the girl to the movies... We used to go out to Carlins Park... We walked... I liked the racer dips.39 I still like them...

For the Sun Oil Company... I worked practically every station that they had... I got laid off at the Sun Oil Company in November of '31. Then I worked down here at the incinerator for four months, separating tin cans and all...

Then Carroll Dalton, whose father owned a grocery store, he was in industrial engineering at Corcoran and Hill, and he got me the job. I went there in February of '32... [I was there] thirty years and two months... [I] lost everything I worked for--they closed down. I got service pay,40 but I didn't get any pension...

39 i.e. Roller coasters.
40 Severance pay?
And I got a job just like that. . . I took a heck of a big drop in pay, but I didn’t let that worry me. I was fifty years old. . . I took a job as a security guard. . . I get a very small pension. . . When I went to work at Corcoran and Hill . . . a pound of pork cost . . . twelve cents . . .

I remember [someone] getting killed down [at the mill], but I can’t remember his name. He lived up in the next block. He got crushed with a roller down there in the rolling machine down on the bottom floor. . . I was up on the twisting floor then when he got killed. Just before quitting time. . . I didn’t see him, but they tell me he was caught in the roller . . .

He’s the only one I knew that got killed. . . Lots of people got splinters in their hands. We used to use turpentine when we pulled the splinters out. . . Didn’t have no first aid room or nothing. . . Wasn’t like it is nowadays . . .

We used to play . . . Red Star . . . We used to travel all around—up as far as the cemetery on Roland Avenue . . . The boys, mostly would play that game. . . We would follow the clues that they would leave . . . until we’d catch up to them . . .

We used to pitch pennies up against the houses . . . We used to take these caps off of bottles and flatten them out and throw them up against the thing. And we used to take the corks out of them . . . Lots of the caps were made from reject metals that had names inside, and we’d see what names we would get . . . And we used to play Hot Butter Beans . . .

I think my best time was serving my country, and then second was when I got married, and then when I came back out of the service, I joined church. That would be about my three best things . . .

Vernon McDonald

I met Vernon McDonald when he came to my photographic exhibit at the Hampden library. The first time we talked, he told me about his ancestors, showing me photographs and paintings of them, documents and writings pertaining to their lives, and former possessions of theirs. It was not until later visits that I began to record the many stories his great-Aunt Kate and others had told him about his ancestors and about Stone Hill residents.

Vernon never lived on the Hill, but his parents on both sides grew up there, and he himself was raised at 3014 Keswick Road, a house whose back yard faced the Hill.

I spent many delightful hours in the antique-store-like home where he lives today in Mt. Washington with his friend Marvin Soloman. (On the seven hours of recorded conversations, it is Marvin’s whispering that repeatedly jogs his memory.)

Vernon is shown in the accompanying photograph at the home of his Aunt Katherine (his mother’s sister), standing with a portrait of his great-grandmother, Mary Catherine Brown, and the corner cupboard she brought to Maryland from Martinsburg, West Virginia.

[My mother] was baptized Lide Bell, but if you were, in those days . . . Roman Catholic, you had to have a saint’s name . . . so she was christened Catherine . . . And she married my father John Thomas McDonald. . . Her mother’s maiden name was . . . Brunswick, but they changed it to Brown, because nobody could pronounce it, and, I guess, couldn’t spell it. And her name was Anna Maria Brown . . . She married William Thomas Curtis of Brooke, Virginia . . .
My mother's great-grandmother's name was Mary Margaret Hartman... and she came from Hessen, Germany, where she married my great-great-grandfather, Nicholas Hartman... And they settled in Middletown, Maryland, where they had a farm... And they in turn had my great-grandmother, Mary Catherine Hartman... and [she] married Anthony Brustardt, and she became Mary Catherine Brown... My great-grandfather was from Ohio, and they married in Frederick and went to Martinsburg, West Virginia, where there were hosier mills...

Mary Catherine went to work in the hosier mills. And they had a slew of kids. And one day my... great-grandfather died... That left my great-grandmother with no support, and she and many of her children came... [to] Ellicott City--but at that time it was called Gray's Mill... Then there was no work... [and] they moved to Stone Hill. And my grandmother, Anna Maria... met my grandfather, William Thomas Curtis... My whole family comes from Stone Hill...

My Aunt Kate... went to work in the mills, Mt. Vernon Mill, when she was five years old... This is my mother's aunt... She married a man named Ed Armiger, who played the flute, in... the mill band... She was my grandmother... [Anna Maria] Curtis's sister... She stuck her finger in one of the machines... and... is missing the tip of that finger...

It was she who told me all these things--because the rest of the kids weren't interested, but for some reason, I was... Her husband... worked in the mill... She lived at 3006 Keswick Road. Our family lived at 3014.

And I remember, I was in his--my Uncle Ed's--house, and he came up the walk, the back yard, and he said to my aunt, "Kate, they've let me go." Which meant that he was too old to work, I guess. He worked in the machine shop... And, of course, they were--they didn't know what to do, because there was no social security, and they had no money, and so she rented out her rooms. And that's how they ended their days, renting the rooms in this little six-room house on Keswick Road... [In her last years] she was arthritic and badly crippled, and she sat around saying her rosary--probably for my soul...

My whole family lived [in] one block of Keswick Road... My Uncle Emerson Curtis, he lived at 3004. My Aunt and Uncle Armiger... lived at 3006... I was born at 3014... My Uncle Tom Curtis, he lived up near the corner, near Way's store. And my grandfather and grandmother Curtis, and the rest of the family, after they moved from Stone Hill, they just moved around next to Way's store, which is the end of 3000 block of Keswick Road...

My Grandfather Curtis... William Thomas Curtis from Brooke, Virginia... [His children were] Emerson Anthony... May Beulah Curtis... [and] Lide Bell Curtis... My Grandfather Curtis was a staunch Southerner... And he named his [second] son Thomas Johnith Stonewall Jackson Curtis. Now, he couldn't spell Johnathan, so it's Jonathan... born 1892. Then we have Iva Estella Curtis. She became a nurse... Catherine Brown Curtis, born 1899; and this was the youngest kid: Margaret Ellen... She was born in 1901. Now all these people worked in the mill, with the exception of... my two uncles... My grandfather was a little contractor, so my Uncle Tom became a plasterer, and my Uncle Emerson became a bricklayer...

Tom Curtis married... Blanche. She was my aunt... He was killed... when I was about one year old... He had just bought a new car... They couldn't plaster that day, because it was... cold... And he took his fellow plasterers for a spin in his new car, which ended in a ditch. He was killed on the spot. And he left three children, and the widow, who was Blanche Baseman, who is Virginia Baseman Wiles's aunt...

My "uncle" Charlie Armacos... had a farm in Upperco... There wasn't anywhere for these kids to go... There was one girl, Ada, and two boys: Donald, and Junior, named after his father... Blanche stayed on after Uncle Tom had died. So, [Ada] and I were reared together, more or less--till the age of maybe eight. Then her mother died... And Ada was sent out to Uncle Charlie's farm...
Uncle Charlie was a character... Charles Armacost... Uncle Charlie married Annie Baseman... He really wasn't any relation to me, but we always knew him. We went there, and he was our "uncle."...

The Armacost on Stone Hill, that was Jim Armacost... He was a very old man when I knew him. But he originally came from Stone Hill, and... when he married he moved directly across from my parents on Keswick Road... They had two children, James and Catherine. Catherine is still living... They were fellow Catholics... During those days, we were a minority. Like the Jews... They didn't have a church. There was a wealthy Irishman—and the house still exists—where St. Thomas Aquinas is. And they would hold mass there... way [before my time]... I was sent to St. Thomas...

My mother did their laundry... Jim Armacost had the only library, I'm sure, in the whole of Hampden... On the library wall there was a big, framed poem of "Anabelle Lee."... And when I would go across the street to pick up the laundry or to deliver it, I was always ushered into this middle room... [the] library, which fascinated me as a kid...

James McDonald married to Brigid Meehan, both of Ireland... had my grandfather, who liked a good drink. That was Michael McDonald. He was born 1843, and he died in 1923, the year I was born... I think they came over during... the potato famine... And they settled in Williamsport... He came to Maryland to work in the mill, Mt. Vernon Mill, where he met my grandmother, Isabelle... And they had one child, who was my dad... John Thomas McDonald... born in '85. And he married my mother... Catherine L. B. Curtis... They in turn had four children... Beulah... Anna Margaret... John Thomas... and Yours Truly... And I was born... [in] 1923...

Aunt Kate is the one who filled my ears... as a child... It must have been a very simple life, I guess. They would sing. Somebody would play the piano... It's so strange, because they made pennies, I imagine, and yet they were nicely dressed, and they had pianos...

I knew the Hammonds... The barber... was very good to my father, I understand. See, I was only six when he died. So I really never knew him. He was just a face... The barber... would come down and shave him... After Pop died—I often think now... what a dreadful, horrible existence [my mother] must have had... My father was only forty-four or forty-five when he died...

My father was a stone cutter... He went to the Maryland Institute... because he didn't want to work in the mill... He became a stone cutter, or stone mason... When you chip stone, [it makes] a lot of dust... [and] through the years, it collected, and he came down, as they said, with TB...

I was six months old when he had to go to the country... They had to leave everything. But luckily, my mother had, against my father's wishes... bought a house on Keswick Road, where I was born. And he hated it. And he said, "I'll never have anything to do with it. I don't want to live on Keswick Road. I want to live on Stone Hill, where I was reared." I guess he felt like I do. I always preferred Stone Hill. Matter of fact, before I moved here I looked for a house on Stone Hill...

So, Pop and Mom, and the four kids, including Yours Truly, plus my Grandmother Mick [went] to this tiny cabin. The roof leaked. There was nothing. It was deep country...

My mother was... a real fireball, but underneath she was very, very diffident... We were frightened to death of her. She was a real despot... My father was just the opposite... One day my two sisters started a fight. And one of them knocked the other one through... the cellar door. And they both knew they'd catch Hell when Mom came home, so they begged him, "Don't tell her, don't tell her!" So, my father got out his hammer and nails, and he repaired the door. My mother never noticed it until years later—and it was badly repaired!
Anyway, my father must have been a gentle man, because whenever the two girls were corrected, my mother insisted that he do it. Well, he was incapacitated. He was lying in bed ill.

And one day they had a fight or something. And she said, "Give her a beating!" This was Bootie, who was the older of the two girls. And she went in to his bedroom.

Incidentally, he was isolated. We never saw him--very, very rarely... So, he rolled up the newspaper, and he said, "Now, when I hit the side of the bed, you scream."--which she did. And my mother never knew that he... didn't give her a spanking...

We went to that farm out in Elysia--which, incidentally, didn't do him any good. We finally came home. And he was somewhat better. And the doctor said... "If you go back to your profession... you'll die." Well, he must have loved it... So, he died... He went back. And... his illness lasted five years. He was a young man...

My father died, and [my sister] Bootie had to quit school--my grandfather was going to send her to... Mount Saint Agnes... I think it broke her heart... And she came home, got a job, and helped to support--me. And my other sister--we couldn't afford a Catholic school.

My mother was a cleaning woman and a laundress. She did all the people in the neighborhood--Stone Hill or Keswick Road. I don't know where they got the money. Because it was Depression. There was no money to be had...

My Uncle Emerson was... mean... Uncle Emerson did Joe Buell's fireplace. And I was down on the Hill one day... and here's Old Joe... So, he said, "Come on over." And he showed me through his house. And I said, "That looks good."--"Well, I didn't want it."--"Well, who did the brickwork?"--"Your uncle did it. And I wanted it this way, and he did it this [other] way."... Uncle Emerson... was an ace... But... Joe, he lost and Uncle Emerson won... [The fireplaces in Stone Hill houses] were bricked up, and they had beautiful stoves. They were cylindrical... [and] black, I guess iron and nickel plate... They were lovely. Every house--that's how they heated. My Uncle Emerson Curtis opened all the houses on Stone Hill... There were two teachers living... right behind our house... They were the first to have my uncle open the fireplaces... They lived in Joe Jones's house [704 Bay Street]... The first thing they did was take the porch off, because they felt that it detracted from [the esthetics]...

My Aunt Beulah... Curtis MacNamee--she had married John MacNamee of Washington, D.C., and he was a bricklayer, also, and he was as Irish as Paddie's pig... My Aunt Iva had come from Addison to tend my Aunt Beulah... After Billy [McNamee] was born, his mother died immediately. And Catherine [Curtis] became Billy's mother. Now this is what Catherine tells me...

And she said she slept in the middle room on Keswick Road next to Way's store, [in] my... grandfather Curtis's house. And this... baby was so small--he weighted about five pounds. He would have fitted into a cigar box.

So [Ada] and Catherine and Billy were lying there, and he... had a bottle. And his mother had just died. And Catherine looked up. And she saw her sister, Beulah, Billy's mother, who had died, standing at the foot of the bed, in the middle room on Keswick Road. And she smiled--Beulah smiled--when she saw Billy. And then... he dropped the nipple--or the bottle... and she turned to place it in his mouth again. And when she looked back, she was gone... That's a great story... Catherine has told [it to] me one million times!

I have a cousin, James Litzinger. His father... my uncle Charlie Litzinger built most of Hampden. Cousin Jim told me that "Any house you see that's got stucco on it, my father built!" Jim is at Keswick now. He's ninety-three years old... My Grandmother Brown had a
sister named Elizabeth. My Grandfather Curtis married Anna Maria Brown, and Charles Litzinger married Elizabeth Brown. That's how my mother and Jim are first cousins.

My Grandfather Curtis was a Baptist. He would call the priest Father Ramrod—this is all from my mother; I don't remember it. When any of the children had to be baptized or christened, or whatever, they had to be sneak ed out of the house and that's how there was a mix-up; that's the reason my grandmother had two children with the same name, Catherine—either that or she didn't have much imagination. But my grandfather was very much against Catholics. And unfortunately he must have married a zealous Catholic.

Whenever the kids were born, they had to be spirited out of the house. My mother, whose name was Lyde Bell didn't have a saint's name. So, when she went to Saint Thomas with this kid, I guess the priest said, "Well, what do you want?" And she probably said—maybe she had a "thing" for Catherine; it was in her family all those years. So that's how my Aunt Catherine, whom you met, and my mother both have the same name—much to the dismay of my Aunt Catherine! She swore that it was wrong. She wanted me to change the tombstone!

[Mother] was a little girl... she was born in 1891, and she said her father, William—Will, he was called—Will Curtis, was down in the basement [of the Keswick Road houses] laying brick. And she would bring him his lunch in a pail. He probably did the brickwork for the privies too.

You see, each house had a privy—where I almost lost my life, once. Somehow, I opened the door—what a horrible death! and they found me hanging down from the opening! I could have drowned! My sister caught me... I was actually hanging from the seat—over this abyss. And my sister still... [says], "You are a devil, and you almost lost your life in a dreadful manner!"

Ellen always said that my mother was the cutest thing on Stone Hill, and the most beautiful child was Aunt Beulah—and she was. Beautiful. Breathtaking. And my mother had the best build, she had the cutest figure... And one day she bought herself a pair of shoes with heels...

So she came traipsing down the back alley—Keswick Road—3000 block. And she came around, walking toward her house. My grandfather [Curtis], being a Methodist was dreadfully strict! So he met my mother... at the gate with a hatchet, and that was the end of the heels! He chopped them off! He would have no daughter of his wearing high heels...

My mother's sister, my Aunt Beulah... at one time had some sort of sickness which required shaving her head. She had the most beautiful chestnut hair. And I guess my grandparents had what they called a switch made. They would take the hair and dip it in tar... these magnificent tresses. My mother had weak hair. So my mother—and I remember her wearing my Aunt Beulah's hair years and years later...

My mother was born in... the Baseman house [718 Bay Street]. And directly across the alley was my grandparents, the McDonalds. They had one son, John. And... as the story goes, as she told me many, many times, he would sit at his window, she would sit at her window. And that's how they met; they fell in love, and they married. And they actually lived there their whole lives.

When my mother married my father, they had the front two rooms with kitchen privileges... next door to Joe Buell, on that corner house [719 Bay]. That's where my sisters were born. Whoever owned the house lived upstairs... Jack and I—my brother—were born on Keswick Road, 3014...
[Concerning] the Big House . . . I came home one day, here's my mother at the ironing board, making fifty cents to wash and iron a dozen shirts in order to put us through school . . . I was always interested, even as a kid, in architecture, always. I was building St. Peter's in Rome in the back yard with clothes pins and mud when I was seven years old.

And I came home from school and said, "Mom! Baker's house is for sale, and they only want two thousand dollars for it! And here's my mother doing washing and ironing, fifty cents a dozen. I don't know if she hit me or not. But we finally did make it. God knows how . . . [We] were products of the Depression. But we really never knew. . . We weren't aware. There was always enough to eat.

Every Saturday there would be--the fruit man would come down--with the wagon. And, as my mother said, he was "sweet" on my Aunt Ellen. And she would go out, and probably flick her eyelashes, and we got bananas at half price. And that was our treat. Once a week, mother would bake a cake . . . and Ellen would go out and get the bananas . . . from the Arab. He was a black man.

That's another thing. You never saw a black person on . . . Keswick Road. They always come down the alley--the rag-bone man and the vegetable and fruits [salesman] . . . That's another thing. I don't know how it happened, but when I was a little kid, a family moved in directly across from 3014 Keswick Road. They had a servant, a black--in those days, it was a "colored girl." And the people rose up, like the Russian Revolution. And they set fire to the house, and the next day they were gone. And she was a servant. What do you think of that? Now this is all from my Aunt Kate . . . and my mother and my grandmother . . .

Aunt Kate Armiger . . . said that on Sunday they would all dress up in their finery, and there was a bridge . . . by . . . Clipper [Mill] that goes over into Druid Hill Park . . . and [the park] was enclosed at that time with an iron fence. And someone had broken a couple of struts out. And they would take a lunch and picnic--they'd walk over that little bridge which goes over Jones Falls . . . over the tracks, through the hole, and up. That's where they would picnic . . .

My Aunt Jo was an old maid . . . And she was a wonderful lady . . . Aunt Jo is my Aunt Kate's sister . . . [She came] with the corner cupboard--and the clock. I'll show you the clock. I have it downstairs! . . . Aunt Josephine Louise Brown . . . She died in 1932.

Well, she made the best kites . . . these beautiful creations, box kites, and the regular kites. She and I used to go up on the hill in front of your house and fly them . . . She was very talented. She made these little baskets . . . She would take a peach pit and she'd make a little basket out of it--or a bean. I still have some! . . .

I remember when the Johnson family lived [at 726 Bay Street] across the alley from you. . . It had the largest stair--a very steep stair. And I used to get my hair cut in--I think that was one of the few houses on Stone Hill that had a basement. And . . . I paid fifteen cents to have my hair cut . . .

I also remember . . . Fred and John. And the youngest child was named Millard. And when my father died in '29 . . . the Johnson family lived right across the alley [in 702 Bay Street], and I remember my mother telling me that Ms. Johnson was a great help to her when my father died . . . [We lived at] 3014 Keswick Road . . .

I don't remember the Johnson family actually living there [at 702 Bay Street]. When I was a kid it was owned by the Phoebus family . . . My mother said that Mr. Phoebus, who was a contractor, he installed the first cellar, or basement, on Stone Hill . . . He decided he wanted a cellar . . . so he dug it. And unfortunately, he struck a spring.

41 The Big House.
And I remember going over, as a kid, and looking down this side staircase that led into his new cellar. And it had flooded. Anyway, Mr. Phoebus had to install a pump, which ran all the time, and, of course, the alley was always...gushing out. And I think we used to play in the water—or in the mud...That's the story of Mr. Phoebus's house.

Ms. Jones worked her whole life in the mill. And Mr. Jones—he was known as Joe—he liked his booze...Mrs. Jones...bought 704 [Bay Street], and then... later on, 719 Bay Street. And... I practically lived there. My whole family—we were very, very friendly—the McDonalds and the Joneses.

And for years my mother's closest friend was Ms. Jones's sister. Her name was Leona...There were three sisters. And they were orphaned—put into an orphanage. There was Theresa, who was Ms. Jones, and Leona, who was my mother's best friend. And there was Mary. They were a Catholic family...I remember my mother telling me this...They were reared in this orphanage. And they were treated so badly, that they couldn't take the Catholic Church any more...

Well anyway, Ms. Jones...bought these two properties, and she was doing the wash one day—and this I remember—because it was the first time I had ever seen, that I could remember, a dead person. And she was doing the wash [with] wash tub and wash board. And she died; she had a stroke. And that meant that Mr. Jones inherited the properties—which he promptly drank away.

And I remember my mother...and Lonie [Leona] would go over to Joe's, and he would be lying in the kitchen—on the kitchen floor—with all of his buddies, and they had to step over to get to upstairs so that Lonie could get her sister's possessions...The house would be freezing cold, because they had drunk all the property away...And it necessitated his selling the house at...719. It had to be auctioned off...

Mom would come home and she'd say he would be lying in the side yard, and he would be cursing the rosebushes. And he would be saying, "Damn, bloom you! Damn!"...Lonie was aghast, because she had married a preacher. And, well, that's another story—because we used to go to meetings.

Ms. Jones today is buried at Woodlawn, next to her sister Lonie, and poor old Joe is in Potter's Field, wherever that is!...And my mother always said, "What a pity! What a shame! that that happened to Joe—even though he was the town drunk."...He looked like W. C. Fields...And I remember him well...

In those days, we all went barefoot in summer—no such thing as shoes—except for Mass every Sunday, which I hated. And [my older brother] Jack was running around Stone Hill, and he cut his foot badly...and my mother wasn't home. And...my grandparents were living with us at 3014, my grandparents Curtis...And I remember my mother saying...my grandparents, they didn't do anything about it. So...he went back to 704 and saw Ms. Jones. And Ms. Jones cleaned it and bound it...That shows you how close...how friendly we were...

[The Joneses] had a boarder...I guess to make ends meet. She was an old maid. Her name was Ida Jones [but was no relation]...She, too, worked in the mill...During the crash of 1929, she lost her money...She had it on...36th Street. It wasn't Provident Bank, because Provident Bank didn't fail. Because my mother had my father's insurance, after he had died—something like five hundred bucks [in that bank].

But Ms. Ide...wasn't so lucky...So she didn't have a pension. There was no social security—it was during the Crash. And she had very little money...And she came to live with Ms. Jones—and Joe.

She was a very old lady...In my house we had ordinary furniture—upholstered things. But Ms. Ide had this wonderful collection of antiques, which she sold...whenever necessary. And she sold my mother a beautiful mid-Victorian table—with a marble top. As a matter of fact it's in my sister Bootie's house today, because my mother gave it to my sister...

Anyway, speaking of Joe, he would get drunk. And Ms. Jones and Ms. Ide would go upstairs. And those houses, they have three bedrooms, at least her house did. There was a
big, long bedroom across the front of the house, and then there was the middle bedroom with one window, and I think the the back bedroom had one window. Wonderful! It was very like Wuthering Heights. ... They were intimate little rooms...

If they knew that Joe was coming home "tankered," they would flee upstairs and lock themselves in Ms. Jones's bedroom, which was the front bedroom. So ... one evening, I guess, Ms. Ide ... didn't make it up the stairs! ... And to the end of her days ... Ms. Ide would tell us the story of how badly she was treated by Joe. They were frightened to death of him...

When Ms. Jones died, Miss Ide had nowhere to go, and she couldn't stay there. So, she came around to Keswick Road to Mr. and Ms. Smith's house--they let out rooms. That was the only three-story house on Keswick Road. And she lived on the second floor. And she died there...

Ms. Ide ... was a little lady, all bent over, but she had this marvellous collection of antiques. I was just a kid, but ... I recognized them for what they were. And she would sell them off. I can still see Ms. Jones's living room. I can tell you the placement of every piece of furniture. Her furniture was cane: cane backs, cane sides... You felt that it was superior.

I remember over the sofa there was an engraving, a huge engraving of Rosa Bonheur's. ... "The Horse Fair," I think. But that engraving fascinated me. I'm talking about when I was eight years old. I practically lived in that house...

There was no liquor allowed above North Avenue, for some reason. That must have been a boundary... They lived at 711 Field Street, my ... McDonald grandparents. Of course, my Curtis grandparents lived at 718 [Bay Street]. My grandfather Mick was a typical Irishman. He loved--he loved to drink... I happen to have his little whiskey jug that he carried with him...

Anyway, my sister said that ... Grandpa Mick ... would come home by this trolley that was pulled by horses... And that was before there were sidewalks. And my grandmother would wait ... because she knew that if she weren't there, he would go on down ... to North Avenue, where he could get booze. And that meant that she wouldn't have probably any money for food...

So she would wait for him... Those horse-drawn cars had a bar--when you got on them, I guess you pulled yourself up. Well Grandpa Mick, he wouldn't let go. And the damn streetcar would sit there until my grandmother probably darted out and had to drag him off... He was probably already drunk...

I wish I had known my grandfather--my Irish grandfather--but he died the year I was born, in 1923.

My sister also told me a story about ... my Irish grandparents. Those houses have very thick walls on Stone Hill. And he had put a mirror in the kitchen window ... [and] he used it to shave. And there was a dreadful storm. And my grandmother had a vegetable garden and a very small orchard--peach trees, apple trees. And outside the kitchen window was a peach tree.

And it was lightning, and the whole mess. And my grandmother said, "Mick... you better stop..." He probably told her to get lost or drop dead or something, and he didn't stop. So, lightning did strike. It struck the peach tree. And until that time she would preserve all the fruit. That tree never bore fruit after it was struck...

[Bootie] and my sister Annie would go around after Mass every Sunday, and she said he was a very tiny man--matter of fact, I have his crutches, which he made down in the mill... He had a bad leg. And these crutches were used ... long after he died, by my Aunt Kate, and my grandmother...

Anyway, every Sunday they would go over ... and they would comb his hair. Well... he was totally bald, except that he had a white fringe. And both of my sisters would spend much time, probably styling his hair...

[Bootie] also told me another story about this fabulous grandfather of mine. Each Christmas, he and ... his buddies ... would go from house to house on Stone Hill. And
each house would set a table. And my sister described the table exactly... And from what she said, they tried to outdo each other... After they finished the Hill, they were all intoxicated, all drunk, stoned!

Each one had a Christmas garden and Christmas tree, and they tried to outdo each other... And my grandfather was drunk, and he leaned over to look at the tree... And he knocked the tree over. And... he fell into the garden. Then he rolled over. Well, of course, it was a complete disaster... I think he was ushered out of the house very quickly...

My sister... said that my Grandmom Mick was a great storyteller... She worked the cottonfields. She was from the Carolinas. And she, for some reason she came up... and she married—it was the second marriage for both of them. And that’s the reason my father—the sun rose and set on my father, because he was the only boy.

He had many, many step-sisters from my grandmother’s first marriage. And Bootie, and Annie both, said they would sit in the parlor on Field Street, and... our grandmother would tell them all these tales, these horror tales. And they would be afraid to go home to Keswick Road...

Well, one of [the tales:] In the Field, in those days, at the corner of the alley, Keswick Road’s alley and Singer Avenue there was a graveyard, which belonged to the company. And my grandmother said a young girl was buried alive, and later on she was—for some reason, they realized that she wasn’t dead—like Robert E. Lee’s... mother... Anyway... the grave was opened, and this girl, her hair had grown... and her face was scratched...

My sister went to live with [Grandfather Curtis] because of my father's illness—my mother couldn't afford to keep us all together. And she said one day he came home—my Grandfather Curtis built Tilden Drive—and he threw some handles and some wood on the table, and he said that they had excavated that day, for the cellars, I guess, the basements of Tilden Drive. And they had discovered all these bits and pieces of coffins...

Another thing about the house on Stone Hill... They had... whitewash. And they had two colors... blue and yellow. And my grandmother said each spring the whole house would be painted, because they couldn't keep wallpaper on the wall, because in the winter when the fires were built—the plaster was applied right to the stone—and, of course, it created moisture, and she said the wallpaper would fall off...

It was whitewash, and they tinted it, and they mixed it up in the washtubs... Every winter the walls would sweat, and the water would run down and ruin the finish... And they would cover the floors with these grass mats, which were tacked down... That was their summer hookup, I guess...

In those days, my father worked, and made a terrific salary... Ten dollars a day! He was a stone cutter, a mason, down under the North Avenue bridge... We must have been riding high... He went to the Maryland Institute when it was down at the fishmarket... My father wasn't an alcoholic, but he—he loved to drink... I guess you'd call him a happy drunk...

My sister Annie said that she remembers how they went... to St. Thomas Aquinas. That was a must in those days... She said the sisters in those days were mean. And even in my day—I remember when I was—had my first Holy Communion...

My sisters took Vernon Paul, their little brother... for his first Holy Communion. And I remember vividly after I had received of the— it was called the Host—which, incidentally, when that was put on your tongue, you would go to Hell if it touched the... roof of your mouth—used to scare the Hell out of me! It was very difficult to hold that thing on your tongue without—until it evaporated, without it sticking to the roof of your mouth.

Anyway, I remember coming down Roland Avenue, near 37th Street, and my sister Bootie said to my sister Annie, "If we push him, if we shove him out in the street, and he's
killed, he'll go straight to Heaven!" Because I had just received the Host! But I remember that so clearly. I was only thirteen...

My sister was my keeper, poor soul--my sister Annie--because my mother was working... She had to come home from school and take care of this brat. And I had a very bad habit of running out into the middle of the street and lying down, and the cars would go up on the curb, and she'd come home in tears, and then, of course, I'd get a beating--not a spanking, but a beating. And... it was so bad... she never ratted on me after that.

But I did some pretty rotten things... There was a grocery store for years at the corner of Keswick Road and 33rd Street, right next door to my Grandfather Curtis's apartment house. And my mother must have sent her there to shop. And... she was apparently in those days "sweet" on this kid--this guy--and I did a very, very bad thing... [My mother] told me this. I, of course, don't remember it. But he was bending over getting something and I...

I think I told you about when Pat Aylsworth used to take me to school. We would go down and around your back alley, between Field and Bay. And I would look up, and there was this old lady, and she was known as "Old Lady Hood." Because Jack's mother, Jack and Milton McCauley's mother was a Hood... And I went to school with Jack McCauley... And that was Jack McCauley's grandmother...

Bootie said she remembered Hammond, but she also remembered... the guy who... either worked in Hammond's barber shop, or--I know that later on he owned it... His name was Paul. And he would come down once a week from 33rd Street to 3014 and shave my father, who was bedridden with TB...

Later on, I remember Paul. Now this is years later... I was in his shop, getting my hair trimmed... and Milton McCauley drove up. Of course, he was... grown and working. And he had a--in those days it was called a roadster. He had this brilliant red roadster...

He had a great shock of white hair... He no longer lived on Stone Hill... But he would come back home to visit on the weekends. And he would go to Paul's--the barber shop--to have his hair cut. And I remember being in the chair when this--classy looking guy came in... He would park in front of this tinkey little barber shop...

Those nuns were the meanest--both my sisters, it's a wonder they remained Catholic after they grew up... There was a system. There was the ruler and a rubber band. All the nuns carried catechism, and if you did anything... bad: "Hold out your hand!" And they'd give you a whack!

I said, do you remember any... and she said, "Yes. I remember two. One was mean, and the other one was an angel. The mean one was Sister Genarose... The other sister was Sister Adelaide, who was a saint." I barely remember her. She died when she was an ancient lady, and she taught me, and she taught Bootie, and my sister Annie...

The rubber band... During Mass... it would go snap. That meant you had to genuflect. Snap! That's when you... had to stand up... Everything! And if you didn't, they carried this ruler! And they'd--"Hold out your hand!"... In those days... [the school] was in the school yard--a small building. And during my time it was razed, and they built that--the huge school on Roland and 37th...

When Pop died, we couldn't afford [to continue]... My sister [Bootie] went to Mt. Washington, and my sister Annie had to quit and go to Public School 55. And, of course, I did too... Bootie said, when she went to Mt. Washington, she attended Sacred Heart, and she said the nuns were so kind and gentle...

I often think today--of course, I am, and I always will be--because it was nailed down: Once a Catholic, always a Catholic, regardless... There was a priest, Father McGraw. He had the map of Ireland. He had pink skin, white hair--a beautiful man!

He would get on a high altar, and we would slink down, because he knew us--he knew every one of us. And when we would go to confession, if we had done something--well, as I
grew older, he knew me so well, that I... wouldn't go to confession at St. Thomas. I'd go over to St. Phillipps and James... And the priests at St. Phillipps and James, they didn't know me...

There was a priest--I have his picture. My mother... kept this priest's picture. Supposedly, my mother said, he was the prettiest man she had ever seen. Well, he happened to be a priest. And there was a lady in the parish--from Stone Hill--who, as my mother, in the vernacular of the Hill, said, she was "running after him"... He was a good looking guy, and he had to be sent away...

My mother, all those years--she was eighty-five when she died--and she filled my ears, over and over... I do remember--and I appreciate it now. Because it--I think back, what a wretched life this woman had. I had no idea...

My brother-in-law lived at 702 [Pacific Street] as a boy... Then the next house [710 Pacific Street] was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick. They were very friendly with my family, the McDonalds... and the reason for our being friendly is they were fellow Catholics... They had many children; I knew two of them... John and Angela...

I remember spending a lot of time at 710 Pacific Street. And I remember old... Mr. Fitzpatrick, who had a library... And I remember Mr. Fitzpatrick sitting by the window in the dining room, which was the library. And he wore a red... fez, always in the house...

Angela Fitzpatrick and [Aunt] Ellen Curtis were very, very friendly. And I remember Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who had a very Irish face. When I think of an Irish face, I think of something that resembles a cured apple, because their skin--like my skin is getting to be--it's creased, and it's a nice look...

Mr. Fitzpatrick... was a spare man, tiny, with this blooming wife... She was a big, big, lusty type of woman. And my sisters and my Aunt Ellen, they were like that... My aunt Ellen, if she were alive--and she died just last year, I think--she could really fill your ear, because they were always in each other's houses...

I don't think I ever heard John raise his voice. He talked--he was so quiet. He never married. I think he worked for the city. And they moved from Stone Hill to across from the Baltimore Museum of Art... They weren't mill people, for some reason...

Old Lady Shane... lived at... 710 Bay Street... I knew her as an old, old lady, because I used to play with her grandson... Elwood Streeter... Old Lady Shane, who lived right across the road from Ms. Jones... was a tall woman. And she was--she had black hair, parted in the middle, and she was--had a dark complexion...

I know the Evertses and the Curtises, my grandparents, were very, very close. And I think there again it was because of religion. Because they were so few...

I was in my Aunt Kate's house. She lived at 3006... Keswick Road... And we were all in the kitchen. And my Uncle Ed came up from the mill, and he climbed that hill... There were steps, but there was nothing--no concrete. And he came in the back gate of 3006 Keswick Road, and I remember so clearly my aunt asking him what's wrong...

He said, "Kate, they've let me go."... I think it broke him. He sort of died after they said, "Out!"...

Until that time my uncle had night work. And my aunt was afraid to stay in the house. So, I was sent down every night to--this was during the summer vacation--and she and I would sleep together in this great iron bed. It was white enamel. It was a monster. And that's where she told me many tales, before I went to sleep.

42 From Chestnut Avenue up to the end of Bay Street.
My mother would send me down. I was a little kid. And she would be alone. Because my Aunt Jo had died. That was her sister, who was an old maid. . . . Anyway, my Uncle Ed, he just, well, he went down hill, because there was no money. . . . The only way to make a living was to rent out rooms. . . . My uncle and aunt moved downstairs, and they rented. . . .

Then Uncle Ed had a stroke. . . . [The house] had a blind room, middle room, and that's where their bedroom was. And my mother—Aunt Kate was crippled, badly crippled with arthritis—so she and I would go down the alley whenever he had to be bathed or changed. . . . And he died of a stroke. . . . He was such an active man. . . .

My Aunt Kate would complain bitterly, because . . . I guess I'd torment her. . . . And Uncle Ed would always take up for me; he'd say, "Oh, Kate, leave the boy alone!" . . . And she'd come hallowing up the alley, reporting.

In the living room she had a clock. It was a cat. And the pendulum was its tail. And it hung between those two front-room windows. Well, it fascinated me. I'd stare at it. And what did I do eventually? . . . [I pushed the tail.] And the damn tail fell off. . . . In between the wall and the baseboard there was a crack. . . . It was minute. . . . And the damned tail fell in there. Well, of course, she prized that cat clock. . . . And she wondered—wondered until the day she died what happened to the tail of that clock.

And I remember my uncle—he was a very kind man—he worked his whole life, and I guess the work was slow, and he was old—and they chucked him. Strangely enough, many years later it happened to his great nephew—me. . . . I was regional director for the Hecht Company. . . . And we were bought out. And the same thing happened. Only [what was done to] my Uncle Ed—they couldn't do it today; they couldn't do it to me—but it was done subtly. And I was chucked. . . . In those days, they just said, "We don't need you. Split!" . . .

Aunt Kate, Uncle Ed Armiger's wife, made the best cake. I still can taste it. . . . Apparently Aunt Kate and Uncle Ed were somewhat affluent, because they ate better than we did. We had cabbage and potatoes and . . . I once said to my mother, "I was reared on large sandwiches." Well, I thought she would . . . haul off and knock me down. . . . "You were never given large sandwiches." Well, I knew it, but I told it to her to antagonize her.

My mother was very proud, because we were so poor, and we never—and most of that area, they were on Welfare—but not Bell McDonald. She got out, and she raised kids on her own.

Anyway, I would be invited sometimes for dinner—or we called it supper—it was breakfast, dinner and supper. . . . There were no such things as—in Hampden—as luncheons. . . . And she made the best cake, and, so often—this is my mother telling me this, because I was a kid—she would say, "Ed, if he keeps on eating, you'll have to go to the store and buy more bread." . . .

She was the most marvelous cook. I've never forgotten the pastries. She made banana cream pie, and the most marvelous—it was called hot milk cake. . . . It sitteth next to the gods, where I was concerned. And dessert time came around, and she gave each one of us a piece of cake.

Well, the . . . piece was so thin that you could read through it. And naturally, being a kid like . . . Oliver Twist, I said, "More cake please!"—which was the wrong thing to say. And she would say, "Well, I have to keep that for Ed's lunch." So, apparently she had enough money to make one cake a week. . . . And in all probability, I would take . . . this lunch down to the machine shop. And that's the story of the cake.

Well, when I was a little boy, I was lying in bed, and I saw this pattern reflected on the wall of my bedroom. . . . and I stuck my head out the window—it must have been hot as the devil—and very clearly, this tremendous cross was on fire. And all these people, these—with hoods on . . . and it was the KKK. It was more or less right in front of Marston's . . . front yard. . . . I was fascinated. . . . I guess they were preaching. It was very noisy.
I don't remember my mother saying anything about it... We talked--in the family--we talked about [it], because we were Catholic, and at that time the KKK hated... the Jew, the Catholic, and the Black...

Ms. Jones's sister Leona... had a sister Mary, who remained in the church... And at the corner of 34th and Elm--or Hickory--there... was a great lot, right behind Pleasant Place... Lonie had... a daughter by adoption, and that daughter had three children. And I always--we played together. We were the same age.

I remember of a summer's eve, we would get dressed up... and we would up to attend a... meeting. And I remember vividly, they would lie on the ground and they would roll... Lonie deserted the church--hated it--and she married a Holy Roller minister named Sherman, and he was from the South...

And here we were this minority, R.C.--Roman Catholic... The preacher, I guess you'd call him, was up front gesticulating wildly, and screaming, and I loved it, and my mother did. ... A good show, a wonderful show. And that was our connection with the Holy Rollers, because Lonie had married one. She later divorced--or rather--no--he ran away with another woman--in those days, which was a, well, you couldn't do anything worse...

When Bobbie's mother, who was a beautiful woman--I remember; I was in Ms. Jones's living room--the front room. And Marian, who was the beautiful daughter, she married a man named Dick Stump. And she had two children by him, Margaret and Theresa. And they were Protestant.

Then they divorced. And she married a gentleman named O'Brien. Of course, he was Roman Catholic. They had one son, Jack, or John, John O'Brien... All the children then were transferred to St. Thomas Aquinas... It was so funny, because it was rather circuitous--they had gotten out of the church, and now they were all--of course, in the eyes of the church, the woman had never been married...

My brother-in-law [was] William Herman Buckler... [His father] divorced... and he married... Ms. Dell. And they all went together to live in this first house [at 702 Pacific Street]... It was my brother-in-law, Bill, who told me about the ghost. And he was frightened to death. ... He was susceptible, I guess! ... That's a three-story house, I believe. And he said they would lie in bed on the second floor, and they'd hear--chains rattling... They were barely youngsters, and it scared the hell out of them.

Anyway, Gordon and Mr. Buckler and Bill, my brother-in-law, decided to open an ice business... And Bill Buckler came up the walk of the back yard--and in those days you put [up] a sign--twenty-five-cent piece [of ice]... My sister was getting ready to go to work... That was my sister Annie... She was sitting at the table having her breakfast or a cup of coffee before going to work... Bill told me often... He would take me around, and so forth. I liked him.... He said he looked at Annie... and he said, "That's for me!"

So, the courtship began, and my mother didn't want them to marry. First of all, he was a Protestant... [and] He was the ice man. Even though we were poor--and this is the funniest thing of all--we were dirt poor, and yet today I--I realize there was a class [barrier]... It's amazing... Well, there was no getting around it. And... eventually he was sent up to St. Thomas Aquinas for instruction. In those days you had to sign your life away if you were a heretic and you were going to marry a Roman Catholic...

When they--Gordon and he would deliver ice... Bill told me that they always had to enter [this one] house--two rooms deep on Singer Avenue--from the rear. And guess what was in the kitchen! They were Arabs... It was their barn, but it was their kitchen. And he said the whole family would be lying down... and they... would have to step over to get to the ice box... The damned horse would--he would be stabled in the kitchen--in hot weather; and they also had chickens...
The candidates were Al Smith and Herbert Hoover. Now, Al Smith was a Roman Catholic. And Herbert Hoover—I think he was a Quaker.

And the people—family next door . . . were so helpful to the McDonalds. Because Mr. Justice, he—he was a real—he was a saint. He'd do anything for my family. And—but they still—one day Ms. Justice told my [mother] over the back yard fence, "Well, I hope that none of my children ever marries a Catholic." And I used to say, "Well, Mom, what'd you—what did you say?" She said, "I didn't say nothing, but I felt a lot. And I said to myself, well I wouldn't want any of my family to marry a Justice." .

Well, anyway, they decorated the whole house at 3016 . . . the whole facade of the house with electric lights—red, white, and blue—with this huge portrait of Herbie. My family didn't think it was very nice. Because we were a minority. . . We weren't religious. None of us were religious.

We went to Mass—I was sent to Mass, and I hated it, and I hooked every time. . . . I was caught every time . . . by my mother, who would meet me, and she always knew. I had a very good friend—he was killed in the war—the Second World War—his name was Francis—probably Xavier—Sisselberger. They were another Catholic family. And he and I used to hook . . . Mass.

And we would spend the money, which consisted of a nickel, and we'd spend it on a "goodie." And I don't know how my mother ever found out. But she'd be waiting at Singer Avenue . . . and she'd give me a wailing; she'd beat the tar out of me all the way down.

My aunts and uncles and so forth . . . we weren't liked because of our religion. That's hard to believe. This was in the twenties and thirties . . . Anyway, Al Smith lost, because, really, most people say, because of his religion. And there was this terrible fear about the Pope—taking over the country. And these people believed it. It was incredible . . . My relatives, all of them with the exception of my Uncle Emerson Curtis, who despised Catholics. . . And they were always at fisticuffs about religion.

When the time came for my grandfather Curtis, who lived across from . . . the Micks, when the time came for him to die, he said he wanted a priest. And they said, Why? And he said, Well, he's not sure what's up there, so he wants to go where the rest of the family is. So he converted to Catholicism on his deathbed. And there are some members of the family—they said, "Well, he was coerced into doing it. They must have held a hammer over his head"—which wasn't true . . .

[Ms.] Leitner . . . I remember, we used to torment the hell out of her, that poor soul. She was elderly, and she had an orchard in that big—where Marguerite and Vernon Marston still live. . . She had an orchard. . . She had pears, apples, peaches, and so forth, which she tended.

She had a high hedge around, and we would steal in and swipe her produce. And she'd come out, and she'd give us holy hell. And she always wore a bonnet. And my Aunt Kate wore the same bonnet. It must have been the fashion of the day . . . They made them themselves.

I remember . . . my grandfather bought a new car, because he was somewhat affluent. Because he and my uncle Charlie Litzinger went into business together . . . I've forgotten the car, but it was so—it was so grand, because it had vases with flowers—artificial flowers in it, and curtains, that you could pull in the back.

And he would park . . . right at the corner of the alley and right near her property. And she always fought . . . [saying] that that portion of the road was hers . . . "You shouldn't park there. That belongs to me." .

I remember vividly . . . every evening . . . [the lamplighter] would come around and turn the . . . wick. . . There was one . . . down on the corner at Smith's, right across from Inge's.

43 i.e. Herbert Hoover.
right on the very corner... They were spaced like today, and that's--they gave a marvelous
light. It was yellow... And I remember it during the summer. It was so nice, because we
would play... under it.

This Orem lived directly across the street from my grandparents... on Bay Street... Ms. Orem...
had a green thumb, and of course my grandmother Curtis, she didn't. So one
day she went somewhere... and she bought all these artificial flowers. And she stuck them
all in front of the house. And Ms. Orem was very, very impressed, until she found out that
they were fake!

My Uncle Emerson... was a very handsome man... [A man] lived in the
neighborhood, and he--he propositioned my Uncle Emerson. And on my Uncle Emerson's
deathbed, which took place... in Cedarcroft... for no reason at all, he told me the story of
[this man]... He laughed, and he said, "I fooled him." So, he didn't succumb...

But that was the first case I ever heard of anybody being effeminate... [When I was
younger] my mother told me, "Don't you go near [that man]," who at that time must have been
an older man... Why should [Uncle Emerson] suddenly bring that up and tell me, after all
those years?... I was never close to him...

Nellie Mules... married... my Cousin Tony, Anthony Litzinger... [This was] Uncle
Charlie's son... named after Anthony Brown, who came from Ohio and settled in West
Virginia... Cousin Tony [and Uncle Jim] were brothers... And Tony, he for years had a--
had a saloon. That's how he raised his kids... Where Frazier's is...

[Nellie's] brother, who was a plasterer, married a beautiful woman--this is my mother
[speaking]--and I vaguely remember they had a girl--a daughter--who wasn't all--she was
retarded.

I remember her clearly, because when I would go down to Dalton's store, which was
practically adjacent to this house, she always stood hung over this pie-shaped fence44 at the
gate, and she would laugh... Blond girl. And you really wouldn't know anything was wrong
with her, except that she was grown up... and she would giggle... I was in that house... I
know that it was a tiny house, and then there--they built an extension...

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Rob Ott

Several families that lived on Stone Hill moved there from Brick Hill. Rob Ott's family
was one that stayed on Brick Hill, whereas he himself purchased a house on Crittenden Place
overlooking both the mill and Brick Hill.

Rob had no close connection with Stone Hill, but his siblings worked in the mill, and the
conditions he grew up in were similar to those on the Hill.

I was born in West Baltimore the 25th of April, 1923... the other side of Druid Hill
Park. We came to 3122 Darby Street on Brick Hill in 1924. My parents rented it from the mill,
but my father worked at the Gas and Electric [Co.]. I had three older brothers... and an older
sister... All of them started working at the mill while they were young...
Old Frank Wilson was the watchman at the mill. Two guys broke in one night and hit him on the skull. It was probably the only robbery they ever had.

There was a room eighteen feet square at this north end of the mill on the ground floor. It was four feet deep in cotton, and we’d break in and wrestle and fight. The chimney, which is still there, was filled with bats, and they’d start flying around.

On Mill Road were enormous trees in those days, about ten to fifteen feet apart. Below the trees was a ledge, and then another drop. It was great for sledding. We used to use barrel staves for skis. One boy, Bill Spangler, went down, crashed at the bottom—a stave went into his stomach and ribs. Then the mill put up the fence [along Mill Road].

About 1935 the hurricane came through. It tore a section of the mill roof off, which ended up on Falls Road. It took house roofs off, too. Merle Treschman lived on Elm Avenue. In the middle of the hurricane he climbed one of the trees on the edge of the bank. Lightning struck, and he crashed down with the tree and was killed.

Just this side of the trees was a three-foot wide walkway... Wall Lane... About 1935, two young twins on Harley Davidson... motorbikes came around the lane and tried to make the sharp turn into the mill. They were whooping and hollering and going so fast, their bikes skidded. They hit their heads on the road and were both killed. I've never run a motorcycle after that...

We had a ball diamond down there below Crittenton Home. We'd bat up hill. There were pick-up games every day—always had a bunch of people from Paine Street. Home plate was at the lowest part... by the mill entrance... And I mean there were nuts! The girls at the home would watch. If someone hit a home run through the hedge, the girls would take the ball so we'd have to spend some time chasing them...

Every Fourth of July... the married men would play the single men. The older men would have a party—hot dogs with all the birch beer you could drink... The men drank real beer. There was a boys' game, a girls' game, and so on...

Over on the west side there was a horseshoe pit. Ralph Wilson—he was about eight years older than me—went on to the state championship tournaments. That was a great thing in those days. Every neighborhood had horseshoe pits. Up where the post office is now and the Democratic Club, there were double pits... [Ralph] was killed during the war...

No matter what the sport, baseball, football, horseshoes—each neighborhood would challenge. When we'd have a big discrepancy during a game, we'd stone each other home... Once I got hit in the middle of the back by a rock. I couldn't breathe for about two minutes... Thought I was going to die...

Every Saturday we'd go up the Avenue to the movies—at the Hampden and the Ideal. First we'd go to Murphy's and get candy. And then go to see... the "oaters"... as we called the Westerns... (The horses ate the oats.)... The best horsemen were Ken Meynard, Bob Steele—a little guy who could lick them all—Gene Autry... Hoop Gibson... We'd go to the first one for fifteen cents, come out, and go in to the next one for another fifteen. Afterwards, we'd come home and act out what we'd seen.

Once we came out, and on the other side of Crittenton was a woods. The others tied me to a tree, set a fire, just like in the movies, and ran away. It was a long time before I got free. My new clothes were on fire. My hair was singed. When I got home, I got in trouble! Several movies had cave scenes, so we dug a big cave over there—and they say what's on television doesn't affect you!...

That little building over there, Tainton Research, was a barn in the early twenties.45 Then it was an airplane factory. They would pull the fuselage out on Fallscliff Road. They made monoplanes and biplanes, and took them to Curtis Wright field to be assembled...

45 The barn mentioned by Edna Collins.
Once, when I was about nine, a pilot came and flew over the factory. The plane crashed into a tree, and the pilot was killed. The landing gear got caught in the treetops... In them days they didn't care how low you flew. All of us kids went up there. He was still in the plane. I believe he broke his neck. The Fire Department tried to get him out with ropes and ladders... 

Tainton Research [was] sitting here on top of the hill. Then there was the woods going down towards Falls Road. And right down at the bottom of Falls Road there was a big iron-structured bridge that went across the Falls into the Benson coal yard... We used to go down there and rack coal... My brothers would fill these burlap bags up with coal, and then we'd drag them up that hill. And I can remember my brothers pulling it—they were carrying it, but I'm little—I'm behind pushing... That's how we kept warm...

Everybody who was big enough would get... burlap bags from the mill, and steal coal at night. (The bales of cotton that came to the mill were wrapped in burlap.)... When the guard came, he shot at us with salt in his shotgun, which would sting something awful. Usually the guard would turn his back on us, unless his superior was there...

The number 25 and number 10 streetcars had a trestle... from where the monument is at 33rd and Keswick, over the valley to Remington Street, about a hundred feet high. There was no platform at either end, and there were pipes to keep people off. I used to take my bicycle across. It was just a "backout"... which means a dare... The older boys did it first. So then they torment you...

Many times I was on there when a trolley came... There were horizontal rails all the way, at a height of about two and four feet... You'd lean back against the rails and have about six inches between you and the trolley...

The bicycle—you'd... twist the handlebars so it wouldn't get hit. I didn't turn it once, and the trolley snapped the bar off. The motormen would swear at you, ring that damn bell, tell you the police would be waiting for you at the other end... There were No Trespassing signs at either end.

[Crittenton Place:] The upper half was begun about 1927. Construction stopped in 1929 because of the Depression... The houses sold for twenty-seven hundred dollars with ground rent. About 1933 the lower end was finally built. All the foundations were dug at the beginning. We used to play in the foundations when going to School 55.

I always knew I wanted to live here. I told myself, someday I'm going to live on top of this hill. In 1951, I finally made it. The house cost me six thousand dollars then. Two things I used to dream about, growing up: living here and working on the railroad. I made them both...

It was three of us [digging out cellars]. My brother Walt, he was eighteen months older than I. He was killed in the war. We lost a lot of boys on the Hill46 in the war...

The first cellar we dug out... by hand... down on Brick Hill... was our own house...

Under the parlor—that was dug out. But under the dining room was not; the kitchen was not. So we needed two rooms... I was about ten years old. And my older brothers, We started digging... We dug those two rooms out. Plus another one... And then I figured, Well, that's a way to make money...

A guy across the alley, on Elm Avenue, said, "I'd like to have my cellar dug out."... We knocked out a hole in the front of his house... One day we'd dig, and one day we'd take a wheelbarrow and we'd carry the dirt. And the hill, where the woods is, going down to Falls Road, is right there... So [we'd] dump it over the hill.

46 i.e. Brick Hill.
Some of this dirt turned into rock. We had fourteen-pound mauls, we had six-foot long, big crow bars—somebody would bring them to us from the railroad and different places they worked. So we’d work in there sometimes fourteen and sixteen hours a day ... for thirty bucks ... for the whole job. That was a million dollars to us. My Old Man says, "It’s good for you. Builds you up. You learn how to earn a little money." It’d take us sometimes as long as three months to dig out one cellar ...

The first house we dug, we run into a well ... and the whole damned place flooded with water. He said, "Well, I’m going to build a concrete wall around where the water’s coming up." He wanted twelve inches of concrete poured on each wall—that’s the front, the back and the two side walls—for three rooms ...

So here comes this big concrete truck. We fill our buckets, we run up and we throw it up over top of the wall. And after a while, you couldn’t hardly pick them buckets up. So finally the concrete ... in that one wall probably got two-thirds of the way full. Up go the two-by-fours, the whole damned bottom of the forms come sliding out, and there’s concrete everywhere over that floor ... But we finally made it ...

Then the next-door neighbor wanted his dug out ... And you talk about blisters! My God! Our hands were just puffed up with blisters. Well, it was some old-timer there, used to come around with an old cane. He must have been seventy-five, eighty years old. Pat McCann he was called—Pat McCann. So he says, "Son, let me tell you about those blisters. You do what I tell you ... and you won’t have no trouble with them blisters any more." He said, "At night when you’re in the bathroom—don’t tell your parents or nothing ... urinate in your hands, and rub it in." He said, "You do that two or three nights, and you won’t have no trouble." Well ... I thought he was pulling my leg. But I said, "My hands hurt so bad, I’d do it." Well, you urinate on your hands—you talk about hollering! It was like pouring Sloan’s Linament or something on your hands. But anyhow, in three days them damn things got hard as rocks. I never had no more trouble.

We must have dug out six cellars down on that hill ... [Finally,] it just got in the way of school studies ... We wanted to go out and play ball. ... It was tough, but we had a ball. We had a lot of people coming give us a hard time all the time—the girls. They’d holler down the cellar window at us ...

I think we were the first house on the Hill that started painting ... the outside of the house, the bricks. Ours was a three-story house—down here on Brick Hill, Darby Street. We’d paint it red, put three and four coats of paint on it. And then we’d paint the woodwork all white and the sills white. And the house really looked nice. It really stood out. It was lead, oh yeah. We made our own paint. I had an older brother that worked in some paint outfit. He had four or five different chemicals that we had put in these five-gallon buckets, and we’d stir it, and we’d make our own paint.

We made our own little wooden [scaffolds] ... We’d hook them out the window. Take a board, maybe four or five foot long, and ... we’d anchor it in the window, and we could set out on the edge—or stand on it, and reach up high and get the cornice. ... And it would be beautiful! I know I did it three times before I moved out of there ...

We made our own soap. We made a lot of stuff. During the wintertime ... we made a big loom. It was about eight foot high ... and probably ten or twelve foot long. My brothers would bring all different colored cords from the mill. We’d weave all winter long. We’d make bedspreads ... pillowcases, anything ... I don’t know where the wood come from, whether it came from the mill—probably did ...

Charley Spicer showed us how to do it. ... How to make the frame, showed us how to weave. ... It fascinated me. I think we still have that one big bedspread. ... It was a beautiful thing, but the trouble was, it was too heavy. ... You put it on that bed and it’d weigh you down. So I think it’s still in a trunk down [at] my sister’s house. ... It give us something to do in the wintertime ...
The lower end of Chestnut Avenue, from Mill Road down to Falls Road—that was called the Shell Road in the old days. And they made it by bringing in oyster shells. They crushed oyster shells, and the trucks would dump that—oyster shells—down there, and then they had a steam roller come over and they’d mash it all in. Of course, then in later years they asphalted. They messed it up!

That was a great sleigh riding place for us—from the top of the hill—right here at 33rd Street and Chestnut Avenue. We’d start there with our sleighs, and down in the middle of Shell Road we’d take dirt, we’d build a big ramp . . . about two foot high, maybe six foot wide . . . and as we sleigh rode down . . . we’d hit that ramp, we’d go up in the air—gee, that was great!

[The milkman:] I remember Chris . . . Christopher . . . He used to work in . . . Carroll’s grocery store. And he practically ran that place . . . I remember him more from the grocery store than I do from delivering milk.

We had a Bond bakery. Bond bakery used to bring bread and leave it on the porch—and cakes . . . You never heard of thieves in them days. Everything—all houses were open. Nothing was locked. Everybody was in the same boat, usually. Everybody was poor . . .

But I think Christopher had pretty good money . . . He delivered that damn milk probably 3 o’clock in the morning, or 2 o’clock in the morning until 6 or 7, and then he went to work in that grocery store.

I remember Carroll’s so well, because when I went into the service—you used to . . . buy food on tick; they called it, Put it on the cuff. So, I owed a grocery bill of fifty dollars. I went into the service. Well, my wife didn’t have no money. She was living in an apartment with a young baby. He sent me a bill over in France—to pay a fifty-dollar grocery bill. I never forgave him for that! . . . Chris. That sucker! . . . He had to wait two years for me to get out of the service to get it.

Our house on Brick Hill was the first house that had indoor plumbing . . . My uncle was a plumber, so he come down and put it in for us.

We always used to sleep in the kitchen in wintertime—that great big egg stove in the kitchen . . . And it was about twelve- or fourteen-inch legs on it, up off the floor. And we would crawl back up underneath that thing . . . and sleep under there.

Take baths—we had the big galvanized steel tubs . . . They’d lock the kitchen door, supposedly . . . [My sister] would take hers first . . . Bud would take his, and then Walt would take his, and I’d be the last one—in that same water! . . . And sometimes there was only two towels between all of us . . . By the time I got my bath, the towel was soaking wet.

I know one time, it was in the summertime, and my sister was in the kitchen taking her bath, and I brought a friend in—she didn’t lock that back door . . . You talk about screaming and hollering! . . . This was Rose.

You know, in them days, everybody was in the same boat. And you didn’t realize . . . anything. . . When we got that bathroom in that house, we thought we were really rich . . . We had hot, running water then! God! That was like—oh Lord!

I remember most of the people down there used kerosene lamps . . . We must have been rich down there. Because I can remember going into my buddies’ houses down there across the street on Elm Avenue, and they had kerosene . . . We had . . . electric lights and gas . . . as far back as I can remember. . . My father was an electrician . . . My uncles were plumbers. So we were very fortunate . . .

I was in the mills from child up . . . taking lunches down to my brothers . . . Frank Wilson was the watchman at night . . . The Wilson boys and me, we’d go down there at night on the middle trick . . . He’d be taking us through, and he’d be punching the clock . . . He’d let us take the key and let us turn the key in the lock.
We'd get in them there big wagons where they toted the cord and the rope. We'd get in those wagons, and a couple of them would push us, and we'd run from one end of them halls to the other... Up and down the elevators!

I never had no problem to go in. My sister Mamie run those big looms... and I went in there a couple of times to take her something. And I'd stand back there and watch all them women run them looms, trying to keep them spools filled up. When they get full, take them off, put empty ones on. It fascinated me to watch them... Hundreds of women. Hundreds of the looms. Every floor had looms on them. They'd be: CLICK CLACK, CLICK CLACK, CLICK CLACK. CLICKETY CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK, all night long! God!

They had a lot of people working down there. Cotton in the air. All they breathed was... cotton dust... It ain't no wonder a lot of them had TB and stuff... I remember in the hot summertime there were some big floor fans, but they were just to keep the employees cool. That just made things worse as far as the dust was concerned...

My mother worked in the mill when she was ten years old... I think she was just a gofer... She got married when she was only fourteen or fifteen years old...

B. Carlton Sater

I heard about Carlton Sater as a result of my photographic exhibit at the Hampden public library in 1988. June (Howard) Hicks, who had lived in Stone Hill in the 1940s, and who worked at the Wesley Home in Baltimore where Carlton Sater now lives, came to the exhibit and told me about him.

Carlton never lived in Stone Hill himself, but as the census of 1900 shows, his grandfather, John E. Cornelius, lived in the Big House on Pacific Avenue, and he spent a lot of time there as a child.

My grandfather [my mother's father]... was a machinist at the Poole engineering company... He left there and he went down as a section hand in the mills... Two or three of his daughters worked in the mill at that time... And after he died in 1902, why about two or three years later they had to vacate...

The stone building at the foot of Chestnut Avenue... was the Mt. Vernon store on one level. And the Mt. Vernon M. E. Methodist church was on the other floor...

And then... David Henry Carroll, who was the proprietor of those mills... built that Mt. Vernon church on 33rd Street... And then my mother was a... Sunday School teacher in the old church down there at Oyster Shell Road, as we called it, and she marched up with all the Sunday School into the new building when it was finished...

I was born at the [north] corner of Singer Avenue and... Keswick Road... There was a store there... On the south side was a dry goods store. People named Shiswold lived in there... devout Catholics...

There were two stores there... Sater had the one store--my father and my mother... It was a grocery store...

[Grandfather Cornelius] was a section hand... They repaired the looms when they broke down... They didn't have any strikes in those days... Most of the people were poor people,
and they were just thankful if they had a job. And then there were low wages and long hours.

The Big House, in those days, was a wonderful house. It took in two houses... On the first floor there was a long, narrow kitchen, and you go out and there was a pump on the porch.

And Grandmother, she had a sleigh, she had a cow, she had a horse, and a lot of chickens. And as small as I was, I used to have to clean the chicken coop once a week. See, after my grandfather died, she still lived there a few more years... And then she lived up on Chestnut Avenue... But I used to clean out that chicken coop for ten cents. I thought I was a millionaire when I got ten cents... They had a stable there... Right in the rear of the house...

In fact, my wife was born on Bay Street, 703 Bay Street... She always liked Stone Hill.

[My father was] Elisha Bradford Sater... [My mother was] Ida May Cornelius... She had a number of sisters and one brother... [My wife's name was] Minnie Lavinia Warner [daughter of] George Warner... I never saw his family. They were all from Hampden... [My wife's birth in Stone Hill] must be on account of the Knapps [of 719 Bay Street]... [They] were some relation of the family...

My grandmother [Cornelius] had that horse sleigh, and she'd drive that horse sleigh out through Druid Hill Park... She was a wonderful woman... She lived to be, I think it was ninety-four years old... She fell and broke her hip. In those days... they used to put sandbags on either side of her legs. She lived like that for four years. And one of her daughters... nursed her... They put a sandbag here and a sandbag here so her legs wouldn't move...

And she was witty! You'd say, "How you feel, Grandmother?" And she'd say, "With my fingers!"... It was a hard job of nursing. You'd have to take a draw sheet, they called it... Somebody get on this side of the bed and lift her up and put her on the bed pan... Somebody'd get on the other side and they'd pull it tight... They didn't have any nursing homes or things like that. Everybody looked after their own family... Everybody thought the world of her. She was a grand old lady. She died on 631 west 33rd Street...

I was a plumber steam fitter, and then I went into the post office, worked thirty-five years in the post office... [My mother] worked [in the mill] a short while, but when the children came along, she had to leave the mill... In fact, my wife worked in the mill for a short while, too--just as soon as she got a permit... summertime, you know [and did] tying in...

Charlie Johnson... was real tall. And he'd paint cellars. He'd go all around Hampden... and clean cellars out... Most places them days had whitewashed walls... Then they had another one in that family, Andy... Everybody in Hampden knew about Charlie Johnson... because he would do all that kind of work... He was supposed to be a character, see?... Andy was different... He had children... Charlie really lived on Stone Hill...

Over on Brick Hill at one time they had one pump of water for the whole block. See, it was horseshoe shape. And right in the center there, on the outside was this pump... And then later on, they managed to get water in the house... After they had that, the plumber would come along and say, "I'm going to shut your water off. It'll be off for three or four hours." Oh, they'd have a fit! After all that inconvenience, and water bringing in there...

On the Fourth of July, we'd always go out to Druid Hill Park on a picnic... And the Hood... the one that had the huckstering... He'd put seats and all on the side of his truck. And he took us all out in Druid Hill Park. Of course, the others would march out from Sunday School with the band...
And they'd stay there all day long, because there wasn't anything going on anywhere else. There wasn't any automobiles. There was Dr. Shelley. He was the only one that had a Stanley Steamer automobile. He'd drive around the park. And Milton Davis of Mt. Vernon church. He had a car. So people stayed put all day long. Then after automobiles came into existence they'd all leave there. They wouldn't stay there until dark...

We'd go out to Druid Hill Park every Sunday. All the stores would be closed. You couldn't buy anything. You'd go out to Druid Hill Park to the mansion house and you could buy peanuts and candy to feed to the animals... We went to Sunday School first--church. But in the afternoon we always went out there in the park...

That lower end of Keswick Road--or Cedar Avenue, as we called it--that was all on the caller's route for railroaders who were down at the Mt. Vernon yards. They were all railroaders mostly down there. Because when I was a lettercarrier then, they got a... railroad magazine come out. I used to hate to haul--almost every house got one of those great big railroad magazines...

I remember Jimmy the crab man... a colored fellow. He was tall, and he had a black patch over one of his eyes. He was blind in one eye. He had two baskets. At a certain time of the year, he had oysters. And then sometimes he'd have crab cakes...

He'd go down on 36th Street... and you'd buy these crab cakes from him. And then he'd come down the alleys, selling the oysters... On 36th and Roland, that's where he'd mostly be... Right there where the bookstore is there... He did a pretty good business... He'd come down the alleys with... hard crabs--for twenty-five cents a dozen...

The... graveyard... down there by Singer Avenue... there were only about three or four graves in there... Nobody seemed to know much about it--who was buried there... [The gravestones:] were gone long before I came along.

William F. Weaver

William F. "Pete" Weaver lives today with his wife, Daisy, in a bungalow he built in the 1950s in what used to be the Cow Field at the north end of Stone Hill. He is shown in the accompanying photograph standing on his land, much of which he has turned into a parking lot. In the background can be seen the roof of the upper mill.

Pete Weaver never worked at the mill, and never lived in any of the stone houses on the Hill, but his grandfather lived in the Big House and worked in the mill, and his uncles, and aunt worked in the mill and told him stories about earlier times. An only child, he spent his childhood on Keswick Road before moving to the country.

I only saw my father after he passed away and he was laid out... even though I promised my mother I would have nothing to do with him... I understand he was born here in Baltimore.

The whole family--the Weaver family--was well known and had very good names... They were prominent people... [and] pretty well to do. [Father] was an engineer on the B. & O. Railroad...

My grandmother died in 1916--on my mother's side... I was approximately... six or seven years old [then]... [I was born] on Cedar Avenue... [the] thirty-four hundred block... [Grandmother] was buried by the order of [the] D. A. R... [with] white horses and the flags, and everything else... [in] St. Mary's cemetery on Roland Avenue...
My grandmother's parents was from Western Maryland... [named] Ault... Conrad Ault... [Grandmother married] William T. Murphy... He was born in Ireland, I understand, and they... came here during the potato famine and settled in Sykesville... He made the wooden cogwheels which they used on the waterworks in those days to run the machinery... He started at Sykesville, and then he went to Alberta [Maryland], and they would take him wherever there was a breakdown... and finally he settled here in Mt. Vernon Mills... He died in 1904...

My grandmother [Murphy], she had six [children]:... My mother was born here in Baltimore... I think [it was] down here on Pacific Street... They all lived together... in the Big House...

I understand [Mother] had to go to work at eleven years old... [She told me] how hard it was; how...something about finger tips on bobbins... would get sore... Mother when she was younger--little--was what they called a bobbin girl... Aunt Lott... was a weaver... I used to hear them talk... because in those days, we weren't allowed down in there...

You didn't play in the alleys... [because of] the "oi yea" man. [They'd cry] "Here comes the oi yea man!"... He was a man [that] had a dump cart... with barrels on it... And they'd come along and they'd dip and clean the outhouse out and put it in this barrel... I don't know where around here they took it to dump it... They were white [men]...

When I was a kid, you never--the only outside person of what you thought was white, or American, would be the Italian guy with his banana cart... That's where my nickname come from, "Pete." They called him Banana Pete. And I used to love bananas, and he would always give me a banana when he'd come up Cedar Avenue... I'd run to meet him.

Because things weren't like they are today. Orange--you only seen an orange on Christmas. And... very seldom you got a banana. And I was crazy of them. And I couldn't say banana, plain. I would say nana, nana... "Nana man's coming!"... So my grandmother... started calling me Pete... Nobody knows me hardly by William F. Weaver...

My mother could read and she could write... I was with my grandmother... [Mother] had only one child... [After the separation] my mother fended for herself in the mill, and then she went with Mr. and Mrs. Wolf, worked in the store, and then she'd come up to see me and then get back down there some way or other...

Those times--they weren't [as] easy as they've got it today... The families helped each other out. They shared... On Sundays... if one had something and they figured the other one didn't, they'd bring it down, bring it to the house...

It'd be an uncle or aunt... My uncle Cliff... worked for the Police Department, and, naturally, he had an income. And my Aunt Mary... [whom] he was married to was my mother's sister. She baked bread all the time... If she'd made bread and she figured my grandmother hadn't made any, she'd sent a couple loaves of bread down...

[Grandmother] would bake pies and bake bread... [Her] range on Cedar Avenue... had a hot water tank on the side, and then it had a warming thing at the top... If she wanted warm bread, they'd put it up there... Food was different... You didn't waste it...

The Elmer Hood down in the stone houses, every Christmas [he] used to get chewing gum and little stuff and dress like a Santa Claus and come up over here and walk around through Hampden here and give this to the kids... The Hoods were what they would call "hard-working people," but tough... just like the pioneers of this country. People don't think of how tough the pioneers had to be... These young ones [today] has forgotten what has been made for them to enjoy...

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47 i.e. the O. E. A. man.
This Elmer Hood on Cedar Avenue ... my uncle and my mother and my aunts too... would go up there to visit. ... He made his living by taking these square pieces of wax, and putting muslim around them, and you tied them up, and he put them in a basket and went around to sell them. And he made--he took care of his family. ... I didn't do much of anything, because children was seen and not heard. But I would wrap some of those things...

[Wax pieces to] rub on the bottom of a flat iron. That's what the old people did to keep them from sticking ... when they ironed. ... My uncle and they'd be talking ... for instance [about] dresses. ... People made their own things. ... I wore plenty--many a pair of pants that was made over from my uncle's ... even went out dressed up with them. ... Most every house would have a flat iron. ... They heated the irons on the stoves...

My Aunt Mary, she baked on a certain day... And those days she baked... I'd go ... down her house and get my bread and butter. She always had it ready for me. ... You never forget those things!...

[My uncle] lived down on Pacific Street. And where Stieff's is now ... was a big rock ... And he used to tell me when he was a young boy ... they'd ... get up on this big rock and at the top of it they could see down the valley ... and they used to bring the ships up to where the ... Street Car Museum [is]. ... The Clipper Ships ... and that's where they fit them for the sails. ... He says you could hear these men working on the boat down there and hear them singing, and they come up that valley...

The Elmer Hood I was telling you about ... he was a bachelor ... worked for the mill. ... He used to go to my mother's--my stepfather's--home and visit. And the mill was getting one of those turns of going-to-sell-everything out, because business was bad, and all. And they were selling these houses to the [employees], and ... he bought several of them up ... and then the mill bought them back from him. ...

And I was a young fellow, and he was over at my mother's, and he said to me, he said, "Petie ... let me talk you into going into one of them houses over there. " ... I said, "No, I'm too young for that right now." ... They sold one time only for seven hundred and fifty dollars. ...

When I was young ... [the KKK] burned a cross on this hill right out here. ... The Ku Klux Klan was mainly--they had trouble with men drinking and wife-beating, and the rumors was, they was going to straighten them out ... I remember the excitement of this cross. And they kept us all in...

And we used to have fear of gypsies around here too, following the railroads. ... They used to camp over here in Wyman Park ... down in the bottom there. The Indians used to camp there, too. ... I just don't know how many. ... There's caves under that Gilman Terrace--goes up to the Northern District [police station]. ...

I saw the gypsies' camp. ... They used to walk around here. ... We'd all be scared of them. ... People were frightened of them. ... People would say, "Don't you hang your clothes out at night, or they'll be stolen off the line." ... That happened right in this block in the last forty years. ... Come down there one night and cleaned every line off that people had clothes hanging out. ...

[The graveyard] on Tilden Drive ... was like a country cemetery. ... That was the Woods's cemetery. ... And again it was said around here, that if any mill worker couldn't afford a cemetery lot, they would see him, and he'd let them bury whoever had died--in that cemetery. ... The first three or four houses [on Tilden Drive] is where the area was. ... Singer

48 Charles Woods, overseer of the mill.
Avenue one time was only a lane . . . in to the houses that was in there, because the mill had built them houses for workers, same as Brick Hill.

On Chestnut Avenue here, those bigger houses, they were mill houses for boarders. See, all mills and places years ago used to bring in their workers, but they had boarding houses where they lived.

There was an elderly man over to Guardian Angel Church . . . found out I lived over here and--the thing was always circulating around, "Oh you're the man that built in the cemetery," see. There's some of the people . . . had the idea that this whole hill was a cemetery. And when I built here, they wanted to know why that crazy man's building in the cemetery.

So, they were kidding--talking about it. And he told us that was standing there, that when they moved the cemetery out, they took a casket out of there with a young girl in, and he had knew her when she died. And said that when they took it out, and the casket come apart, she was same as the day she was buried. . . But they were supposed to have moved all the bodies out of there. Now, where they moved them, I do not know.

[School] 55 . . . I had two teachers up there, because I did not start in kindergarten. . . I started in the first grade and . . . I skipped the second. . . It was always . . . talked about me going from the first to the fourth grade in a couple years. . . But then I only went to the sixth grade, because then I had to go to work.

[Later] I got a job in construction work with C. K. Wells. I worked in Homeland, Roland Park, Ruxton, Guilford . . . And then I tried a little stinch in business myself . . . when I built this house . . . I had the misfortune of running [into]--just plain crooks, two of them, two groups . . . So then I went to work out . . . Before I retired . . . I ran the company for him.
The foregoing began primarily as a photographic enterprise. The neighborhood to which I had moved presented a clearly defined, manageable subject with both human and environmental appeal for black-and-white photography. I talked with the people to get to know them better and to build up their trust in me to the point where they would let me photograph them. But the stories kept demanding more attention. And this was in keeping with my personal interests.

I was a child during the thirties, but I remember people selling apples outside the school I attended, and I remember cold, hungry persons coming to the door to ask for food. Over the years events in my life and in the lives of others close to me have made me wonder how people survive. More broadly, I have had an intense interest in the varieties of human experience.

My first interviews were casual and unsystematic. In time, however, I compiled an extensive list of questions related to a few broad subjects: ancestors and parents; birth and childhood, school years, life in the home and on the Hill, and employment. As much as possible, I let the other person control the conversation, especially during the first session. I wanted them to tell me all about what interested them, for my interest was in their life as they viewed it.

In later sessions I could ask questions that I had about what they had already told me, and about what they had not told me. If people had little to say initially, I turned at once to questions that popped into my head as a result of the list I had drawn up.

The product of all this was about seventy hours of taped conversations and a large body of unrecorded information. In editing the recorded material I have restricted five areas: profanity, triviality, repetitiousness, falsehood, and the personally embarrassing.

There was so little profanity in the speech of the people I recorded, that I have reproduced it unchanged, trusting that the sensitive reader will not be too offended by this brush with reality.

As to trivia, I hesitated to exclude it, on two grounds. It is often important in defining the character of the speaker, and one person’s trivia is another person’s chief interest.

Repetitions within an individual’s narrative often occurred in separate recording sessions. Here, as with repetitions in narratives by different persons, I generally reproduced the material if I found the subject interesting or significant, and if the person provided unique information or gave a different perspective on familiar information.

The subject of reliability of information is more complex. Whereas I have attempted to verify the spellings of all names cited here, I have not sought to determine the correctness of family information given by my narrators, and in many cases I have not verified details they have given me about community events.

In fact, in most cases where I know certain information to be questionable or false I have reported it without comment if it is contradicted by the statements of others. I present these questionable or false statements because in addition to what subjects people discuss, the things they say about these subjects reveal their character.

There are limits to this. I have found it unnecessary to repeat more than a few silly remarks or braggadocio. And some statements were so mistaken that I did not record them.

When, for instance, Mary Ellen Colleran stated that the Stone Hill houses were warm in the winter and cool in the summer, anyone who has lived there knows different. Maybe she meant the reverse of what she said. Or take Carlton Sater’s claim that employees were brought...
up from the South during the thirties. Everyone else I spoke to agreed that this migration did not occur until the forties.

The most difficult subject for me has been information that might cause offense or embarrassment. I rarely solicited information about other living persons—I felt I could talk with them myself. And I sought to avoid gossip—unflattering comments about others. But the limits I set on what I would report went well beyond this.

Over the years, in speaking with many more persons than those presented here, I learned much that I felt might bring back very painful memories. Not all of the old days were good. Among the specific incidents I have passed over are a homicide and the suicides—for instance, the woman who took her life, and that of her parrot, by means of the gas stove in the kitchen, and was buried with the parrot. There were at least three other suicides by gassing.

There were family scandals, rape, and rancor arising from disagreements over inheritance. There were petty rivalries and animosities among neighbors—property line disputes, discontent over the placement of garages, jealousies about receiving favored treatment from the mill's repair crew, and so forth. Most of this I have mentioned obliquely, or not at all. Much of it was learned in unrecorded conversations.

One subject that I am particularly interested in, I have recorded rather fully: alcoholism. It is clear that there was extensive use and abuse of alcohol, and that in those days as today it caused great harm. Because of the seriousness of the subject, I have generally avoided repeating the ostensibly humorous tales of drunkards.

A special subject is that of language. Even if we speak slowly and carefully, it doesn't always come out perfect. Nevertheless, some people are very sensitive about the "incorrectness" of their speech.

My own conviction is that since none of us can speak perfectly, no one should be embarrassed by his or her speech. Because speech is such an important part of a person, I have reproduced all language just as it is to be found on the tapes—with four exceptions.

I have shown a written transcript to only one couple included here. After one spouse objected to the language, I rewrote it to make it "correct." The second exception is my hesitancy to attempt to reproduce Baltimore dialect. When in these pages you read about a pavement (i.e. sidewalk), you must hear the speaker saying "payment." A quarry is called a "query"—or even an "aquarium." Words ending in "ing" are pronounced "ink," as in "anything" and "everything." And so forth.

The third exception involves contractions used in speech but not in formal writing, such as "hadda" for what is already colloquial: "had of"; or "usta" for "used to," and other constructions of the kind.

Fourth, and finally, I gave myself freedom with respect to interjective phrases such as "you know," or "see," or "like." In general, I did not record them, though sometimes for the flavor of the speech, I did. At no time did I use ellipses to show that these words had been excised from the taped conversation. (With this exception, ellipses have been used wherever I left out my own words or any statements from my narrator that appear on the tape—excluding grunts, but including even a simple "OK").

One further place where I might have made an exception but did not, is in verb forms. To the best of my ability I recorded whether a person said sit, sat or set; run or ran; talk or talked; etc. Often I was unable to determine whether a contraction was present—was it "he come" or "he'd come"?—and in such cases I was guided by the narrator's usual speech, and where that was not helpful, I chose the form I thought was most likely.

I have undoubtedly made mistakes, but the result is as close to actual speech as I could make it.

In another regard I have stuck to the original recording without exception. In transcribing the remarks of my narrators, I have presented each tape in the order in which it was recorded, and the contents of each tape in the original order also. Consequently, a subject which appears at
different places on separate tapes, and which I could have merged had I used a different procedure, appears in different places here.

My chief interest in putting this book together has been the individual persons who have been so gracious as to tell me about their lives and the life of the community. To present them as fully as possible, I have photographed not just them, but also their personal spaces. (In the case of some who have moved away, I had them return to the place where they once lived, so that I might show more of Stone Hill.)

Within the guidelines stated, I have sought to present whatever I found to be expressive of the character of each person—though, as in all of life, the reader must often look between the lines. If Stone Hill, and especially the chronologic history of the Hill suffers thereby, so be it. Taking all the stories together, I find something much more important shining through: the flavor of life in this place during a certain time.

With each person I usually put off photographing until the last—either following a recording session, or on a separate visit. In almost every instance I told people ahead of time when I was going to take photographs, and I let them choose their apparel. On the other hand, I was the one who decided whether to photograph in Stone Hill or not, and at just what location in the home (or outside). With the first couple I photographed, the Beards, I used a medium-format camera. The frontispiece was copied with a 35 mm. camera. All other photographs were taken with a 4 X 5 Wista field camera.