Oral History Interview

with

Eric Marlow

August 18, 1997

by Laetitia Combrinck

For the George Washington University Oral History Program

COMBRINCK**:** This is an oral interview on life in Foggy Bottom made with Eric Marlow, a resident, and Laetitia Combrinck. It was made on August the 18th, 1997. Good morning, Eric.

MARLOW: Good morning, Laetitia. How are you?

COMBRINCK: I'm very well, thank you. I would be very pleased to hear what your reflections are on having lived in Foggy Bottom as a child.

MARLOW: Okay. I have very bittersweet memories, I think, of living in Foggy Bottom. What sticks out in my mind most is how geographically and physically the whole environment was segregated. But I think in spite of that, it was very diverse culture and all the people just seemed to come together as one, I mean, despite the physical separation, particularly on the street that I lived. I lived at 2211 F Street, and one whole side of the street was black, but across the street the families were either white or Hispanic. My grandmother, for instance, worked for the people directly across the street from ourselves, who were Hispanic. But most of the families on the side of my street, at least all the mothers that I knew, did some type of labor, some type of work, for the people directly across the street from them.

It was very unusual in that my grandmother would take me every place that she went. So when she went across the street in the morning to cook breakfast for that family, she took me with them, and, of course, I ate breakfast with them. I also went to school with them. I went to Grant School. And at lunch time, if we weren't prepared a lunch and they went home for lunch, of course, my grandmother was there cooking lunch for them, so I came home and ate lunch with them. Sometimes after school I'd come back to their home and probably have supper as well. Most of the times I'd spend the night there. The mother of that family became my godmother, as a matter of fact.

COMBRINCK**:** How interesting. What year was this or what was the time period?

MARLOW: It feels like it might have been '54, from '54 to maybe '58. That sticks out in my mind. I was born in '51, so I think I probably started elementary school maybe about five or six or something like that.

MARLOW: August 18, 1997

COMBRINCK: And when did your parents move to this area?

MARLOW: My grandmother came to Foggy Bottom I think in the forties, probably early fifties. My mother was born at, what was it, Columbia Women's Hospital. I was, too, as well. That's what I think it was, the forties. Of course, she had come to the States, my grandmother had, from Venezuela in like the early thirties and then came directly to Washington. I don't know what it was about this area that . . . I think it just attracted a lot of people from a lot of different places. I mean, geographically then it was a beautiful place, you know, to be.

COMBRINCK: In what way was it beautiful?

MARLOW: It was near the water. It was near the water. Where the Watergate is now, families that lived in Foggy Bottom used to picnic on the banks of the river and sometimes spend the whole night, like in the summer nights, on the banks of the river. It was just someplace to meet and congregate. It was just very attractive to be . . . . I always felt like we were living like near a seaport, even though that wasn't the case, of course. But just being near the river, that was, it was consoling.

COMBRINCK: Can you reconstruct the scene of the block on which your house stood?

MARLOW: Let's see.

COMBRINCK: Now there is the Smith Center. It stands there.

MARLOW: Where the Smith Center is now, we were right on the corner of 22nd and F. Let's see. There were maybe about six row houses all together. The block is very small. Everything is very . . . now that I go back and look at it, everything is just like very minuscule, very tiny. And right across the street from those six houses, like I said, were the better houses. On my side of the street were row houses. I think the houses across the street were row houses as well, but they were all like one-family. One family lived in most of them on the block that I was. For instance, my grandmother and I and my mother lived on the top floor of one building. There was another family on the second floor and another family on the ground floor. That was the same for the houses all along that block. But across the street were single families, one family to each home.

COMBRINCK: What about the stores in your area?

MARLOW: The stores. The stores. I have bittersweet memories about the stores, too. For instance, Leo's, which is like right across the street from Grant Elementary School, which is now the School Without Walls . . . it was called Leo's because that was the name of the proprietor. Now it's D.C., no, wait, GW Deli, and it's owned by his sons. I remember my mother used to send me to that store to get milk or bread or most often cigarettes or whatever. A lot of times when I went into the store, I didn't go in there with this purpose in mind, but I'd steal candy from them. And I knew he knew that I was doing it. One time he just decided to approach me about it and told me he was going to tell my mother. That's all he had to do to stop it. I didn't do it from then on because the community was just that closely knit, just that tight. Well, I knew my mother would give me more hell than Mr. Leo would.

COMBRINCK: Now, Grant School at that time was a junior high, wasn't it?

MARLOW: It was an elementary school. It went from kindergarten to sixth grade.

COMBRINCK: How interesting.

MARLOW: And there was about, I think there were sixty people in my graduating class. I mean, we assemblied in the hall. That's how small it was. The good thing about being at Grant School was that whoever was president at the time would come and visit. I remember the Kennedys coming to visit. I remember . . . who was before Kennedy? I'm at a loss now.

COMBRINCK: Eisenhower.

MARLOW: Eisenhower. I remember Mamie Eisenhower coming to visit. I remember, even people that were coming to visit the White House oftentimes would come and visit Grant School. I remember the astronaut. I remember Ford coming to visit. It seemed like it was like a school that, even because it was across the street from George Washington University, it got a lot of attention, a lot of media attention, just because it was in the vicinity, so close to the White House.

COMBRINCK: How were the students involved when these visitors came?

MARLOW: Oh, we were elated. I mean, I knew who these people were.

COMBRINCK: How were you involved? Were you pulled out into assembly?

MARLOW: Yes. We were brought into assembly because, like I was always recognized for some sort of graphic talent like in the arts or whatever. I'd prepare, like a poster or a portrait of the person that was coming. That was a big thing for me. I got very swell-headed behind that. That made me a star.

I remember Halloweens in particular because after we would go to the neighborhood houses collecting candy, then we would come over to the university and go to the dorms. The students wouldn't give us candy; they'd give us money. They'd drop money in our bags. We always thought that was great. That was fantastic.

COMBRINCK: So I assume there were many children in the area when you were living here.

MARLOW: Oh, it seems like there were hordes.

COMBRINCK: The children now, there are just so few.

MARLOW: I know. I notice that working here at the university now. But they were just everywhere. There was a recreation center even that there were so many children. I don't know if it was a subsidiary of Grant School, but I think it was its own recreation center. It was called Gallanger (??). Whenever there were any kind of competitions between area recreation centers, you know, we would go and play. Like there would be baseball competitions, making model boats

and we'd take them down to the Reflection Pool and have races between other recreation centers. Yes.

COMBRINCK: Where was it located?

MARLOW: Right next to Grant School. It was on the same block. As a matter of fact, when you came out for recess from Grant School you'd just go right to the little rec center and get . . . .

COMBRINCK: On G Street or F Street?

MARLOW: Between both, because you'd enter the playground, the recreation center, Gallanger, from F, and it went right straight through to G.

COMBRINCK: What about other primary schools in the area? Can you recollect any in the area?

MARLOW**:** Francis. I remember Francis Junior High School. I remember another elementary school called Stevens. The only reason I really remember that . . . .

COMBRINCK**:** Stevens on 21st Street?

MARLOW**:** Stevens on 21st. And there's one other one, and I can't remember the name of it.

COMBRINCK**:** Batona (??) School?

MARLOW: Maybe. The principal then, I remember his last name was, as we called him, Mr. Jackson. I don't think we ever even knew he had a first name. He was the principal of all three schools.

COMBRINCK: Which schools were those?

MARLOW: Grant School, Stevens, and the other one that I can't think of the name of, because they were so small. I mean, there were only sixty students in my graduating class. I think on the whole there was maybe about five hundred students in the whole school. So he was the principal. I don't think it was any big task for him to be principal of two more elementary schools in the area. And I think they were all small like that.

COMBRINCK: Can you recollect any of the stores on 22nd Street and possibly 23rd?

MARLOW: On 22nd. I remember a haberdashery on 22nd. The only reason I remember it [is] because they had a fire escape on the side of the building. We'd all go jump on it and play on it and swing on it, which was probably very dangerous then but it was one of the heights. [Laughter]. It was really something to do. I remember right next to Grant School on G Street there was a laundromat. The reason I remember that is because the daughter was a schoolmate. A lot of times after school we'd just go over to her house, and her father operated this laundry. They had this steam press machine, and she'd entertain us with showing us how he did shirts. [Laughter]. That sounds silly, but it was really entertaining.

COMBRINCK: Well, I like watching that, too. Do you remember the firehouse? Any activities connected with a firehouse on G Street?

MARLOW: I don't particularly remember any activities other than the firemen then were very congenial. I mean, then, to see a fireman, I mean, it was like a big thing. It was like seeing a soldier or somebody, because they had a uniform on. Anybody that came into this neighborhood that had a uniform on was somebody of note, you know, that people just looked up to. I remember they were very friendly, very friendly. They, too, like if they saw you doing something that they knew you weren't supposed to be doing, wouldn't bat an eye before thinking about going to your house and telling your mother.

COMBRINCK: What about the connection with the police in the area? Did you run into police often?

MARLOW: There was one policeman that came to Grant School often to give chalk talks. I don't remember his name, but I honestly believe it was Officer Friendly. I mean, it was just that kind of, there was never any, I don't remember any call or need for a policeman to come. I don't ever remember seeing a policeman brandishing a gun or making an arrest. It seemed like if there was any kind of dispute, it seemed like the community seemed to just resolve things by itself without any need of a policeman. Like I said, the only time I ever saw a policeman was when this officer came to the school and gave a chalk talk to the students.

COMBRINCK: What is a chalk talk?

MARLOW: Well, he would set an easel up in front of the class. By this time it was like in an assembly. Like I said, there was only six hundred students and we would just assemble in the hall. He set an easel up, and he'd start a drawing that was a simple circle and starting to tell a story about safety. But by the time he like ended, finished the story, the circle had become a clown or a dog or something. Then at the end he'd rip it off the easel and everybody would be raising their hands because he'd present it to you. I never got one, but he would present it to you. Chalk talks. It was something that happened maybe like once a month. I mean, we looked forward to seeing him come. And that's the only other times that I really saw a policeman in the area.

COMBRINCK: Can you remark on attitudes between the generations? How did the younger folks regard the older folks in regards to respect, discipline?

MARLOW: I remember this woman that lived, she lived on F Street. It wasn't directly across the street from me. It was going down towards the Treasury, towards that area. And she had this house that sat up on this hill, and it was very steep. It was covered with grass. At that time, we used to take cardboard boxes and look for hills to slide down. And it was almost as if, I think we expected her when she saw us do it to come out and chase us away. But after a while, once she saw us doing this, she'd be in the window looking at us. A couple of times she'd come out with treats and give it to us. I mean, this was really unusual.

Like I said, everyone was kind of like looking out for one another. It was really idyllic. I don't think I'll ever see anything in Washington, or probably any other city that I go to live, like

that again. Just that kind of caring. Like I said, geographically it was segregated. But in people's minds, I mean, there was no, I didn't know. I didn't know that I was different or wasn't made to feel different than other people.

COMBRINCK: Repeat please where you said you played or slid down the hillside. That was 23rd Street?

MARLOW: Yes, that was, no, that was F Street.

COMBRINCK: F and what?

MARLOW: 2211, probably 23rd. Yes. The 2300 block of that. She was right on the corner, too, so I'm sure it was 23rd Street, 23rd and F.

COMBRINCK: This is before the Columbia Plaza apartments were built?

MARLOW**:** Yes.

COMBRINCK: Can you reconstruct your recollection of that area?

MARLOW: Physically I don't remember it as much because I don't think I knew too many kids to visit that lived up in that area, so I very rarely went that far up. However, going in the other direction towards the Watergate, I remember a hotel, a huge hotel on the corner. Like I inferred, the area was very . . . like that hotel that we were just told to stay away from. [Laughter]. All sorts of shady things went on there.

COMBRINCK: Was this on F Street?

MARLOW: This was on, yes, it was on F Street.

COMBRINCK: F and 23rd?

MARLOW: I was 2211, so it was at the other end of the block.

COMBRINCK: Which is the Allen Lee Hotel.

MARLOW: Yes.

COMBRINCK: It still stands.

MARLOW: Yes. It still stands.

COMBRINCK: So it did not have a good reputation at that time?

MARLOW: No. It didn't have a good reputation at all. It was a place that if, I'm sure, women were looking for their husbands they could find them there. [Laughter]. Honestly, that's the truth.

COMBRINCK: Were there any other hotels in that area? In the area where the Watergate is now or Virginia Avenue?

MARLOW: There was, on Virginia Avenue there was what they would call a beer garden that I remember. I don't remember too many other hotels. That was the main one. That was the hotel, I guess, for the area. And I think since most of the people in the area lived there, I mean, lived in the area, it was probably visited by . . . gee, I'm really sabotaging something here, but it was probably visited by more people that worked in the State Department [Laughter] or patronized by tourists or people that were just coming into the city. Like I said, it was like . . . .

COMBRINCK: Which one is this?

MARLOW: This was the Lee.

COMBRINCK: Allen Lee.

MARLOW: Allen Lee. It was a place of ill repute.

COMBRINCK: Do you think the facilities were better in those times than they are now?

MARLOW: The hotel itself?

COMBRINCK: The facilities.

MARLOW: Oh, from standing outside, I mean, it was a grand place. I mean, it was no way , I mean, it didn't look seedy or anything. It was a beautiful building. Standing outside, like I said, it . . . .

COMBRINCK: And inside? Did you ever . . . .

MARLOW: No. Well, the chances that I got to run up to the door and see if I could peep inside. They kept a doorman there. I mean, it was very . . . .

COMBRINCK: There was a doorman?

MARLOW: Yes. It was [unclear]. And any, of course, he recognized that we were neighborhood kids and he'd shoo us away. But it was very grandiose. I noticed that, what do you call those things that hang on the wall, those kind of lights? Scoles? Scones? Do you know what I'm talking about? [Sconces]

COMBRINCK: No.

MARLOW: They sort of sit out from the wall. You mostly see them in like grand hotels and grand places. I just remember from peeping outside and looking outside that this place was kind of ritzy.

COMBRINCK: That's amazing.

MARLOW**:** Yes.

COMBRINCK: Compared to what it looks like now.

MARLOW: Right. Exactly.

COMBRINCK: What about restaurants in the area? Were there any in your neighborhood?

MARLOW: I don't remember any. Or rather, I don't remember going to any restaurants. There were so many, like I said, because it was so communal, I mean, we had so many choices of whose house we were going to go over and have dinner that evening. I don't think we ever entertained the thought of going to a restaurant.

COMBRINCK: Do you remember your area as still being without streetlights or electricity?

MARLOW: No. I don't remember that. I do remember a trolley , what do you call it, a track that ran before . . . .

COMBRINCK: Yes. Trolley tracks on F Street.

MARLOW: Right. Before buses.

COMBRINCK**:** So they were still running in your . . . when you were a child?

MARLOW: Yes. But, no, I don't remember, I don't recall any utilities being any less than what they are now.

COMBRINCK: And what do you remember of the activities and the presence of George Washington University in the area?

MARLOW: Like I said, like particularly on Halloween, it was always a thrill to go over to the campus and trick-or-treat there. Of course, when we were just walking around or playing, I mean, we'd just come over here. The students would just like welcome us. Like we said earlier, there are not too many children in this neighborhood now, but then it was just lots. I think GW recognized that. I think they even tried to include us. They used to have parades, Homecoming parades. They would manage to somehow get the students at Grant School to ride on the float. I remember we would all assemble on the front steps just to watch them go by when they had different activities. They seemed to have a lot of student activities that involved the neighborhood then. Now it's a little more . . . . Well, there's a great polarization now between GW, I think, and the community.

COMBRINCK: Oh, yes. There's tension because the community feels, regards GW as an intruder.

MARLOW: As an intruder. But then, to me, it was like more one. Everything, it seemed like just for the radius from here to Washington Circle was just one, a oneness. I've felt that. I've never felt that in any . . . and I've lived all over Washington. I'm living in Suitland [Maryland] now, but I've

lived all over Washington. Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest. I've never experienced that any other place but here in Foggy Bottom, this kind of oneness.

COMBRINCK: What were the circumstances that caused your parents to or your family to leave the area?

MARLOW: This is ironic. It was GW, in fact. I think after a while they systematically moved all of the black families out of GW. Gee, I get a bad taste in my mouth when I said that. But I feel that that's what happened, because even after I moved away and I would still come back to visit my white friends, they were still living in their houses intact, but all of the houses that my black friends, when I came back to visit my white friends, they were still living in all their houses. Their houses were still intact. But all of my black friends' houses had been torn down. I imagine it was paving the way for the Smith Center and parking lots and what have you, dorms.

COMBRINCK: Did your parents own the house that you were living in?

MARLOW**:** No. I always thought we did. I was under the impression. As a matter of fact, I thought my grandmother owned the whole house that the three families were living in and they were all giving her rent, because I never wanted for anything. I just thought we were all filthy rich.

COMBRINCK: So wealth didn't bother you. You were happy with what you had.

MARLOW**:** Because, like I said, my grandmother worked for the people across the street, anything that they had, I had too or would share. I never wanted for too much. Even the clothes that the people that she was working for, the clothes that the children wore, I inherited, I guess. I wore them, and it was never . . . to me, they were new. They were something that I didn't have the day before, and they were nice quality. I guess I was spoiled in that sense.

One of the women that one of my grandmother's friends worked for, she was paying for her son to take classes at the Corcoran School of Art. Somehow her son just lost interest in it. My grandmother, the woman asked my grandmother if I would, in fact, step in and take the classes, and I just jumped at the chance. But I didn't know that until later on. I just assumed that my grandmother was paying for these art classes at the Corcoran. Now that I think about it, I was very fortunate in that.

So, no, I never knew, I didn't know poverty. It just never figured. I didn't know poverty. I didn't know racism. I didn't know. I guess I was very naïve. I didn't know too much about what was going on because everybody just . . . there was a lot of reinforcement between the people, much more than I see now, like I say, even in any part of the city.

COMBRINCK: When did this start changing? When did you feel . . . .

MARLOW: I can actually, I can almost say maybe '58. I don't know why. Something just figures, and I can't really say what it is. But I just noticed, like when we moved away and then I moved into a totally black environment. I had problems then because kids were coming up and asking me why I spoke the way I spoke, and I never thought there was any difference in my dialect

of speech. But after having to be around them more I did notice a difference. I did notice a colloquial kind of something that was just like indigenous really to not just blacks but just areas of the city. Then when I would come back and think that things were the same, like with my friends, there was an air. There was something that was happening.

It was, oh, what can I say? I think the advent of civil rights was bringing on a lot of thoughts that I just never entertained before. Because I had never experienced any kind of forthright, up front racism, I was naïve to it and I didn't know it. Moving into a black neighborhood and just experiencing the not having and not being fortunate; just to be living in this area you are close to a lot of things that I think the whole city would just like to be close to. Anyway, I realized how fortunate I was to be here like in a mixed neighborhood. I think I brought a lot of animosity back to me, back to this neighborhood when I moved back. Well, not when I moved back but when I came back to visit my friends.

COMBRINCK: In what way did you bring back animosity?

MARLOW: Well, because, like I was ostracized in the new neighborhood that I moved into. I was blaming these kids that I had left for it. I wanted them to feel, I guess, some of the pain and the anguish I was experiencing.

COMBRINCK: And you referred to these friends as your "white friends." Do their houses still stand?

MARLOW: A lot of them do, but . . . .

COMBRINCK: Like where?

MARLOW**:** A lot of the fraternity houses. Most of the fraternity houses.

COMBRINCK**:** On G Street?

MARLOW**:** Yes, particularly G.

COMBRINCK: Those were family homes then?

MARLOW: Yes. Right. I've been all through them . . . .

COMBRINCK**:** G and 22nd.

MARLOW: Running and playing. And 22nd, particularly on F Street.

COMBRINCK**:** But those were bought. The fraternity houses were either bought by GW or by the fraternities.

MARLOW: Yes. Right. Well, they're not residential anymore. They're all like office buildings for the campus. Somehow I just figured that probably the white families that were left here just probably got better deals.

COMBRINCK: What about the church communities in this area? Were you affiliated with any of them?

MARLOW**:** St. Stephen's, which is now on Pennsylvania Avenue, I remember being near here or closer.

COMBRINCK: Did you attend St. Stephen's?

MARLOW: Well, I did because my grandmother, having come from South America, was like devout Catholic, very orthodox Catholic. I just remember crosses just being all over the house. Anyway, so she wanted to, because it was a Catholic church, she wanted to attend St. Stephen's. We always had to sit up in the balcony. But I realize now it's something that we had to do. At first I thought it was an honor to sit up in the balcony because I thought the view was great.

COMBRINCK**:** There was segregation.

MARLOW: There was. Like I said, there was a lot of segregation, to me, that was left over from a period before I was a child and I was born. I think things were just starting to change when I was coming along. I think I was fortunate enough to experience that. But that kind of segregation was still . . . it was de facto. There was no law. There was no sign on the church that said, "Black folks must go and sit up in the balcony." It was just something that was just understood, and I just took it for granted. I never really saw it as segregation. I thought it was an honor to be up there in the balcony. Silly me. [Laughter].

COMBRINCK: You have a very healthy attitude.

MARLOW: Oh, well, you know. I guess. Like I said, I have a lot of bittersweet memories about the neighborhood. A lot of them were fostered or given reality to when I left and saw the rest of the world.

COMBRINCK: What about the other churches like St. Mary's Episcopal opposite your home?

MARLOW: I remember St. Mary's. I remember one of my classmates who was black; his name was Charles Miller, Jr. His father was a preacher at St. Mary's. He, Charles Miller, Sr., of course. They lived in a house which was right next to the church. I guess that was par for the course then. If you were the preacher there, that your house would be . . . .

COMBRINCK: Maybe they had a parsonage.

MARLOW: I'm sure. Well, even like when it wasn't Sunday, we'd go over to his house and run through the church. Every place was just someplace to play basically, and that's all I remember. I

remember . . . like I said, I have bittersweet memories about it. But as time goes by, I really now still only remember a lot of the good things.

COMBRINCK: Do you remember whether St. Mary's congregation was mostly black or was it mixed?

MARLOW: I remember it being mixed, mixed much more so than the Catholic church that my grandmother chose to go to.

COMBRINCK: Do you remember anything of the other church on G Street, the Concordia Church. Concordia was the German church.

MARLOW: Is that . . . .

COMBRINCK: That's one of the oldest.

MARLOW: What street is that now?

COMBRINCK**:** G and 20th.

MARLOW: G and 20th. No. I have no recollection of that. I don't remember.

COMBRINCK: And then the Presbyterian church on H Street?

MARLOW: No. I don't remember that one either.

COMBRINCK: And then there was a Baptist church on . . . .

MARLOW: There were a lot of churches in this area. [Laughter].

COMBRINCK: E and 22nd Street.

MARLOW: I remember one further going towards Washington Circle on 23rd .

COMBRINCK: That's St. Paul's.

MARLOW: Which is now some type . . . . They have aerobics classes in there. Do you know which one I'm referring to?

COMBRINCK: That's St. Stephen's.

MARLOW: St. Stephen's. Okay. You mean that was St. Stephen's.

COMBRINCK: No.

MARLOW: St. Stephen's is on . . . .

COMBRINCK: On Pennsylvania.

MARLOW: On Pennsylvania. This is like you're going up 23rd before you get to Pennsylvania Avenue, before you get to the hospital.

COMBRINCK: That's St. Mary's.

MARLOW: That was St. Mary's.

COMBRINCK: Oh, excuse me. You've remembered this one, Liberty Baptist.

MARLOW: Liberty Baptist. Okay. That sounds familiar.

COMBRINCK: Excuse me.

MARLOW: That's okay.

COMBRINCK: So you remember that, and that was a church.

MARLOW**:** I remember that. Right. And I think I remember, I also remember a student, a classmate, whose father also preached in that church. They also lived right next door to the church.

COMBRINCK: And the congregation of that church?

MARLOW**:** That was mostly black.

COMBRINCK: That church still exists. The congregation relocated somewhere else.

MARLOW: Yes. That's something typical of Washington, too. I mean, for the congregation just to get so large that they'll go someplace else.

COMBRINCK: Now the reason was that GW bought that building.

MARLOW**:** Well, I'm not surprised. [Laughter].

COMBRINCK: Do you recall what the area looked like where the medical school is now and the parking lot opposite it?

MARLOW: I remember one main parking lot, and that was the one that was where the Smith Center is now. The only reason, I think, I really remember that is because the one gentleman that was operating it , I used to bring him jars of ice water for exchange of fifty cents a day. That was big money. I looked forward to that every day. I knew there were a lot of parking lots around the area because this was before like they started making huge buildings of parking lots or going underground. Most of them were maybe like a half a city block. I mean, there were just parking lots everywhere, for the State Department, for, even in that picture that we looked at, that aerial

shot, you can see different congregations of just different cars. Parking has always been a problem around here. It still is.

COMBRINCK: So what areas do you think are still the same in Foggy Bottom as when you remember as a child?

MARLOW: Grant School. Grant School. I liked that the most. And G Street, basically where Leo's Deli is. To me, I could stand at the end of the block and just recollect, I mean, reminisce and just still feel some of the character of what I remember what the area was like. Everything else to me looks totally . . . I mean, you can just tell that there's been a change. Everything is so new looking now.

For instance, where the . . . what hall is that across the street from us where the academic center is? The houses along there . . . I remember when my grandmother and I used to walk up to Pennsylvania Avenue to do our shopping, those people in those residential homes had chickens in their yards. I mean, this is like mid-fifties. That was even bizarre to me then because I always thought that was so rural. I just never expect to see people with chickens in their yards.

I think G Street has retained most of its flavor and character of what the area is like. Of course, Georgetown. I remember a lot of black families living in homes in Georgetown. It's ironic to me now that I live in Suitland. I was born in this area, but I really couldn't afford to get a room in this area. [Laughter].

COMBRINCK: Do you recall any contact with the area called Snow's Court off 25th Street?

MARLOW: No. What is that?

COMBRINCK: Snow's Court. It was supposed to be an area of alley dwellings.

MARLOW: You know, that's not unusual because an alley in Northwest is not the same as an alley in any other part of the city. What I've noticed here is that most people's entrances to their condos could be construed as an alley. Alleys here are quite charming compared to other alleys.

COMBRINCK: Snow's Court was converted into very nice expensive houses.

MARLOW: Right. That makes a lot of sense to me, probably with cobblestone streets as well.

COMBRINCK: What do you recall of the District government at the time that you were living here?

MARLOW: The only thing I recall about that is if like we were outside playing on the street, all of a sudden at five o'clock, maybe quarter to five, all of these suits and the attaché cases and stockings and high heels would just come. It would be like a great rush would just come through. I guess they were going to all of those parking lots I was talking about to get into their cars to go home. I never, it never occurred to me then that that was actually the State Department. But now

that I think about it I'm sure that's what that was. I'm sure that was all of the commerce on K Street and everything just on its way home.

COMBRINCK: Were there still residences left on K Street when you were a child?

MARLOW: I don't remember. I don't remember. K Street was like Madison Avenue, I guess, if I can make any kind of comparison.

COMBRINCK: So it would be a business area when you were . . . .

MARLOW: Oh, yes. Definitely. Very much so.

COMBRINCK: Did you hear any criticism from the adults about how the city was run?

MARLOW: No.

COMBRINCK: There was no mayor at that point.

MARLOW: No. Not really. There was no . . . . I don't remember any type of flux. I don't remember any type of discrepancies about . . . or anybody worried really about how things were being run or how they were going to be run or what changes were taking place.

But like I said, it's, the one time that I actually should have paid more attention to what was happening in terms of segregation and integration was when my buddies, my white friends, decided that I should accompany them after school to this one church for after-school activities. The woman that was in charge there turned me away and then turned to my friends like to scold them, to tell them that they knew better than to bring me there. But still, I just brushed it off. I was too young to realize what was really going on.

COMBRINCK: How old were you then?

MARLOW: Maybe about seven. I thought maybe I just wore the wrong color that day, so to speak. [Laughter]. But that's all I really recollect of that. I don't remember anything else so crucial and that was causing any kind of damage emotionally.

COMBRINCK: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MARLOW: Only that I've missed this area. I wish, I would love to be able to come back here and buy a dorm. [Laughter]. Just to be able to go back down to the banks of the Watergate and reminisce.

COMBRINCK: Can you pinpoint any longtime residents that you knew were living here?

MARLOW: I wish I could.

COMBRINCK: Who are now somewhere else?

MARLOW: I wish I could. I'm sure most of the little old ladies that I was giving hell are probably long gone now. I wish I could. Sorry I can't. I don't remember anyone. I think I remember Leo's sons because we look like to be about the same age now.

COMBRINCK: Do they live in this area?

MARLOW: No. And I don't know whether they did when their father was operating the store, but I thought that they might have because the man was there like every day. Every single day I remember that store . . . .

COMBRINCK: Was it the same type of store as in your childhood?

MARLOW: Oh, and more. I mean, it was, like now it's like a deli sort of, but then it was like a deli, groceries . . . .

COMBRINCK: Oh, groceries as well.

MARLOW: Yes. Groceries, household items.

COMBRINCK: Did you shop at any grocery store in this area as a child?

MARLOW: Yes. The Circle Grocery up on Pennsylvania Avenue near Washington Circle, like I told you before. And the Circle Theater. Everything had a Circle name to it. There was a Circle Barbershop, Circle Liquors, Circle everything.

COMBRINCK: Did you go to the Circle Theater?

MARLOW: Oh, yes. I lived in the Circle Theater most of the time. It was only $2.00, two bucks. I'd go there sometimes just to see the same picture that I saw the day before just to go there. [Laughter]. It was a grand theater, a great theater. It was one of the largest theaters that I remember in Washington, next to something downtown on F Street that was called the Metropolitan.

COMBRINCK: You mentioned that, to go back, you mentioned that you felt that the black residents were systematically being moved away. What makes you say that?

MARLOW: Only because when I came back to visit the area, all of the houses where my white friends lived, they were still in them and the houses were still standing.

COMBRINCK: Did you imply that the black residents were given assistance in moving or were actually relocated? Did GW find housing for them?

MARLOW: No. But I think that they were probably given some . . . I would like to think, anyway, that they were probably given some sort of option. But most of the families here were like renting. I'm pretty sure that most of the white families were paying mortgage to buy, eventually buy the houses. Only, GW probably stepped in and made them an offer that they couldn't refuse at the

time, because everybody was running out to the suburbs. If you could afford it, that was the place to go. The only place, I think, we could afford was still someplace else in the city, and it just happened to be Northeast, Southeast, which was a growing contingency of black families, who I think . . . .

*(End of Tape, 1, Side 1)*

*(Tape 1, Side 2)*

COMBRINCK: Do you still have any contact with some of your childhood friends that you had here, both white and black friends?

MARLOW: Occasionally I see some of my black friends. I see, and this is really sad because I've forgotten a lot of their names. I see them working. I've seen a woman now who's driving a bus. I've seen a guy that I used to go to school with who's a policeman.

COMBRINCK**:** Here in D.C.?

MARLOW: Here in D.C. But those are just my black friends. The white ones, I have no idea what happened to them. Sometimes I think I do see them on K Street as a suit. But I have no idea what happened to them. I'm really not one to be involved like with reunions as such. Sometimes I do entertain a thought of trying to get in touch with them, the ones whose names I remember anyway, just to see if they're still in the area. Not too many people seem to stay in D.C. long. I guess after they get, after you've done a couple of years in the government, I guess you just move on.

COMBRINCK: Do you have any photographs of your childhood here?

MARLOW: None. None. I think the ones that I did have my mother disseminated between her friends, because she was in most of them, and the ones of my grandmother. No, I don't. But I bet a lot of people that I went to school with and played with and palled around with have pictures with me in them, because I remember we were always taking photographs.

COMBRINCK: Have you entertained the thought of possibly writing down your recollections, writing some maybe autobiography someday?

MARLOW: I don't know. Maybe if I thought people would be interested I probably would. I'd never thought about it.

COMBRINCK: Or writing an article on life in Foggy Bottom?

MARLOW: Life in Foggy Bottom . . . there's a thought. No. I've never thought about that.

COMBRINCK: Or even making illustrations of your recollections?

MARLOW: Illustrations would be nice. That's something I'd like. What I'd like is to try to capture as much of what's left in this area now before it goes through some other drastic change where I don't recognize it at all.

COMBRINCK: You mean make sketches of the buildings?

MARLOW: Yes. At least the buildings that are left, the ones that I remember, even the facades of the building at 2000 Penn, because I remember I had a lot of friends that lived in those houses. That would be a good idea, a good idea.

COMBRINCK: Well, Eric, if there's nothing more that you would like to add.

MARLOW: No. Only that I miss the area and I would really love to live here again. Just working here now, the irony is just too much for me. [Laughter].

COMBRINCK: Well, I really appreciate your recollections, and thank you very much.

MARLOW: Thank you.

COMBRINCK: This is the end of the interview with Eric Marlow, now an employee of the Gelman Library.

*(End of Interview)*

MARLOW: August 18, 1997

**NOTE: I HAVEN'T MADE ANY ADJUSTMENTS N THE PAGE NUMBERS, BECAUSE I WASN'T SURE IF THE INDEX WILL BE RETAINED, SINCE IT'S NOT CONSISTENT WITH THE FORMAT OF THE OTHER ORAL HISTORIES.**

INDEX

2000 Penn 42
20th Street 29
21st Street 9
22nd Street 4, 10, 25, 29
23rd Street 10, 14, 15, 29, 30
25th Street 34

Allen Lee Hotel 15, 16, 18

Circle Barbershop 38
Circle Grocery 38
Circle Liquors 38
Circle Theater 38, 39
Columbia Plaza 14
Columbia Women's Hospital 3
Concordia Church 28
Corcoran School of Art 22

E Street 29
Eisenhower, Mamie 6

F Street 1, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 19, 25, 39
Francis Junior High School 9

G Street 8, 9, 10, 11, 25, 28, 29, 33
Gallanger Recreation Center 8, 9
George Washington University 6, 7, 19, 20, 21, 25, 31, 39, 40
  fraternity houses 25
  Gelman Library 43
  Smith Center 4, 21, 32
Georgetown 33
Grant Elementary School 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 20, 33
GW Deli *See* Leo's Deli

H Street 29

K Street 35, 41
Kennedy, Jacqueline 6
Kennedy, John F. 6

Leo's Deli 5, 33, 38
Liberty Baptist Church 30, 31

Metropolitan Theater 39
Miller, Charles, Jr. 27

Miller, Charles, Sr. 27

Pennsylvania Avenue 26, 30, 33, 38

School Without Walls *See* Grant Elementary School
Snow's Court 34
St. Mary's Episcopal Church 27, 28, 30
St. Paul's Church 29
St. Stephen's Church 26, 30
Stevens Elementary School 9, 10
Suitland, Maryland 20, 33

U.S. Department of State 16, 32, 35

Venezuela 3
Virginia Avenue 16

Washington Circle 20, 29, 38
Watergate Complex 3, 14, 16, 37
White House 6