

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY CARNEGIE

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Mohammad Athar: This begins an interview with Nancy Carnegie on June 6, 2016, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. This is a phone interview being conducted by Mohammad Athar. To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

Nancy Carnegie: I was born in December 1943.

MA: 1943. Where were you born?

NC: I was born in Montclair.

MA: In Montclair.

NC: New Jersey.

MA: Okay. I wanted to ask you a little bit about your family history, starting on your father's side.

NC: My father is George Robert Davison, D-A-V-I-S-O-N.

MA: Was he living in the United States or did he immigrate?

NC: No, he was born in New Jersey.

MA: He was born in New Jersey. What about your mother?

NC: My mother was Amelia Fredrica Simindinger.

MA: Was she also born in the United States?

NC: Yes, she was born in New Jersey.

MA: She was also born in the United States. Why don't you talk a little bit about some of your early childhood memories and where you grew up.

NC: Well, I grew up on the estate of Mr. Russell. It was called Rockledge Estate. It was one of the three estates on the ridge between Montclair and Verona. Mr. Turnbull owned a big estate on the other side of Mr. Russell, and Kip's Castle was on the other side of Rockledge. So, Rockledge was right in the middle. My father was the caretaker of the estate. He had a vegetable garden. He raised chickens and turkeys. He took care of the grounds and houses, and I grew up there. That was my childhood. I played with Freddie Ingram, whose parents were the caretakers for Kip's Castle at the time, and that's how I knew and was aware of and played in Kip's Castle.

MA: So these three estates you mentioned, were they in close proximity? Were they a certain distance away?

NC: No, they were side by side by side.

MA: Okay. I heard that from where the estates are situated, you have a good view of New York City from there.

NC: Oh, absolutely. But the house that I grew up in was the gatehouse for the Russell Estate. So, we were on the Verona side of the hill, and we had no view at all. We were in the woods. [laughter] All three houses had a view of the New York skyline, but our house did not.

MA: You lived on the Rockledge Estate where your father was the caretaker of that estate.

NC: Correct.

MA: For that estate, were you living in a servant's quarters or a different part of the estate?

NC: The house was what they called the gate house, and it was a four-car garage. The apartment over the garage was the chauffeur's, and we lived in the other side of the house.

MA: Did you have any siblings?

NC: I had two sisters, one who was ten years older than I was, and a sister that was four years younger than I was.

MA: Why don't we get into some of your time at Kip's Castle. You went to the castle throughout your childhood, is that correct?

NC: Yes. Whenever I was allowed to go up and play, I could go up and play in the castle. Well, in sections of the castle.

MA: What did the castle look like, maybe your first impressions of it and what you remember in that early time?

NC: Well, it looked like a castle you would see in Europe. The story at that time was that had been brought back from Europe piece by piece by the owner, and as a kid, that's what I believed. Obviously, I don't believe it's the true story, but that's what we were told as children. It had the big turrets. It had the portico over the driveway. It had a servants' quarter. It had a huge basement. Lots of grounds, and flowers, and shrubs. There was a huge garage, four cars, with quarters above that for the chauffer.

MA: The surrounding property, that was mostly gardens, shrubs, things of that nature?

NC: No, there were lots of rhododendrons. There were flowerbeds all along the backside. The side that was closest to the driveway, between the garage and the castle itself was just lawn. There was a big rock formation there, and I believe that's still there. Trees, there were gardens to the right and to the left of the building itself.

MA: From what I have seen there was also a small cottage towards the back of the property. Was that there? Do you remember?

NC: I don't remember a cottage. All I remember is the very large place for cars and, at some point, horses I guess. I don't believe there were stalls, but it was a big garage. It was not a small cottage.

MA: You mentioned before that you would play with Fred in the castle.

NC: Yes.

MA: Which areas of the castle were open to you?

NC: We usually played in the basement. We were not allowed in the owner's living quarters. So, when I went in, we would be in the kitchen with his mom and dad or their rooms, the living room or dining room, but we were very seldom allowed into the main part of the castle.

MA: So Fred's family, they worked for the owners of the castle?

NC: Right.

MA: What did they do in the castle?

NC: Who? Fred's parents?

MA: Yes.

NC: I believe they were caretakers. I'm not sure if she cooked for the family. I believe they were just some sort of caretaker for the property. I don't remember the owners being there all the time, so there needed to be someone there to take care of the place. She they may have cleaned. I'm not quite sure of her duties.

MA: Who were the owners at this time?

NC: As far as I know, Mr. and Mrs. Munoz. I don't even know how to spell Munoz. They also had a home on Highland Avenue below the castle.

MA: You said you spent most of your time in the basement of the house.

NC: Absolutely.

MA: Maybe describe the basement and what you did there.

NC: Oh, yes. We had a room we used to go to, and there was this very large, old RCA Victor phonograph with the big tulip horn, and we would crank that phonograph and we would play music. That was just like our club room. Then there was this wonderful, high-backed wicker

wheelchair, and we would have an absolute ball just pushing each other around in it or chasing each other with it. Basically, that's what we were doing, just having fun as kids. I was less than ten years old. I think the last time I was in there I might have been ten or eleven years old.

MA: How many rooms were in the basement?

NC: I remember there was the room we had. There was the main portion, and that had coal bins in it. I believe the heating unit was in the center and that was converted to gas at some point. There may have been one or two other storage rooms. I'm not sure. We were not allowed into everything.

MA: What about other areas of the castle besides the basement? Were you familiar with those areas?

NC: Well, I know when you go up--we would enter through I guess what they would consider the servant's entrance. So you went up a big flight of steps and then down this long corridor that had a high wall, but was still open above that space. It was covered. You'd go in that door, and to the left was the kitchen and dining room where Fred and his parents lived, and then to the right of that was their sitting room. I remember going into the main part of the first floor. The furniture in the main living room of the owners was dark--dark wood, heavy wood. My impressions were dark and heavy, and that's about it. The staircase was gorgeous, but again, it was dark and heavy. I never really got beyond that point. Again, I was a kid and I wasn't part of the owners.

MA: Did you ever have contact with the owners? Did you ever see them or even talk to them?

NC: If I did, it was not something I remember. Again, I was a child under ten, so they wouldn't look for me.

MA: Do you remember any of the other people that worked there besides the Ingram family?

NC: I don't remember anybody who worked there, but I know there was a lady who lived there for a number of years, and I've since learned her name was Mrs. Redman. I believe the first lady I spoke with about the castle said that she may have been a relation to the Muñozes, but I'm not sure what the relationship was.

MA: Did you ever stay at the castle at any point in time?

NC: No, I never stayed at the castle.

MA: Do you remember any visitors that would come by?

NC: No. Again, my contact with it was very brief.

MA: Were you ever invited to the castle, say, for an event or a party?

NC: Not for a party, but I remember my parents going and visiting Fred's parents, but not with the owners, no.

MA: You stopped visiting the castle around ten or eleven years old.

NC: Yes, Mr. Russell had passed away, and another owner had taken over. Fred was a couple years older than I was, so we were getting to the age where we didn't really "play" together anymore like children. We were getting to be interested in other things.

MA: Were you still living at the Rockledge Estate?

NC: We were. We didn't move away from the Rockledge Estate until 1962. That was after Mr. Russell had passed away and the new owner had taken over.

MA: Tell me about your early school, where you went to school and what subjects interested you.

NC: Well, I went to Edgemont School, and it was just a normal kindergarten through sixth grade. We had to take all of the normal spelling, English, math, science, history classes. We would go ice skating on Edgemont Pond. When I got to walk home from school, it was all uphill because Edgemont was way down on Valley Road. The best way to walk up was to walk up the hundred plus steps from Highland Avenue up into the backyard of the Turnbull Estate and down across the Turnbull Estate to my home.

MA: Wow. How long was this walk?

NC: How long? I probably took about a half an hour to walk it, from the school to home.

MA: Wow.

NC: It was all uphill. [laughter] It was uphill. I don't even know if those steps still exist.

MA: Did you have a favorite subject while you were going to school?

NC: No, I didn't have a favorite subject. I was always good in English. Math was my least favorite subject.

MA: After you lost your association with Fred somewhat, where did you branch out to? Did you make different friends and go to different places?

NC: I didn't quite understand the time period you just asked me about.

MA: Sorry.

NC: When we moved?

MA: Around the same period, when you were, say, twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old.

NC: Okay. Then we moved down to Essex Avenue, which was down across from the high school football field. We didn't have many friends at the estate because it was so far away from everything. We didn't have neighbors. Fred was about my only neighbor. [laughter] I had a choice of one. [laughter]

MA: Where did you go to high school?

NC: I went to high school at Montclair, Montclair High School.

MA: What was going to high school like at this time?

NC: Well, it was a time when they were building all the big additions, and George Inness [Junior High] was still not part of the high school. It was a separate middle school across the way. I had gone to Hillside. Hillside School was the middle school. It was seven, eight and ninth grades. So I went from Edgemont to Hillside to Montclair High School. Montclair, at the time, was only ten, eleven, and twelve grades.

MA: The middle school would be from sixth to ninth?

NC: No. The middle school was seven to nine.

MA: Seven to nine.

NC: Yes. Edgemont was kindergarten to sixth. Hillside was seven to nine. High school was ten to twelve.

MA: At this time, was Montclair a relatively small town? Was it growing?

NC: It was growing. Again, you don't pay attention to that when you're a child. It had a very distinct high rent district, expensive homes. Up along Upper Mountain and Highland Avenue were all of the big, very expensive homes. Then down at the other end of town, I believe they had the black, the poor neighborhoods. The nice thing that Hillside was that even though you went to a separate middle school, we all got back together again at high school. So, all of the middle schools fed back into the high school.

MA: Was the town very diverse? Was there a certain group of people that were the majority?

NC: No, it was diverse. I don't remember. My yearbook is full of black people, as well as white students. I don't remember many Asians. We were mostly white and black, but we all got along. I don't remember any serious race riots or anything like that.

MA: The schools were not segregated.

NC: No, they were not segregated.

MA: They were not segregated. The teachers in the schools, were they also diverse?

NC: That's an interesting question. I don't remember any black teachers. That doesn't mean there may not have been, but in the schools I attended, I do not remember having a black teacher.

MA: During this time in high school, did you have a job or did you partake in any activities with the high school?

NC: I did modern dance, and then I had a part-time job at Madison's in the book department. That was Madison's on Bloomfield Avenue, and they were a stationary, books, gifts and cards, a multi-purpose store, and I worked there part time.

MA: Does that store still exist today?

NC: That's a very good question. I have not been back in Montclair since my mother passed away in 1995, and I cannot remember.

MA: Okay. So when you were in high school, what did you see yourself doing once you graduated?

NC: When I graduated, I went to Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School, which is also in Montclair. That's a secretarial school. When I graduated from there, I worked at NBC in New York City. That was one of my dreams.

MA: Coming out of high school, you knew you wanted to go into that field.

NC: Yes. Well actually, no. I wanted to be something else, but my father said, "You're going to learn to be a secretary, and then you can be whatever else you want."

MA: Your father pushed you to go to secretarial school.

NC: Yes, he was paying for it. That is why I went. [laughter] He wouldn't pay for my other activity.

MA: Was religion very important to you and your family?

NC: Yes. My father was a sextant at the Congregationalist Church in Verona, and I was in the children's choir. I was not baptized in that church, but I attended that church all of my Sunday School life through twelfth grade. I helped to teach Sunday School after that, and then I was married there.

MA: What year did you graduate high school?

NC: 1962. I'm old.

MA: This is also the time when the Vietnam War is starting to take place

NC: Yes.

MA: Did that affect you, your family or anyone you knew?

NC: Not anyone in my family, no. I knew a couple of the young men who were killed in my class, yes.

MA: Did you see other people in your town getting drafted or going off to the war?

NC: No, not really. None of my close friends were drafted, nor did they go off to the wars that I'm aware of anyway. I know one young man was going to West Point. He'd been accepted into West Point. So I'm assuming, at some point when he graduated, he went.

MA: Did you follow the war on the news?

NC: I did to a point, but I was also at secretarial school with homework and duties. I met my husband at that point who was in the Navy, so my focus was not necessarily on the war. I was not a participant in the anti-war movements or anything like that.

MA: Why don't we talk about when you met your husband and how you met him?

NC: Well, he was a blind date. [laughter] I met him while attending Katharine Gibbs, and we were married about two and a half years after that. We lived in West Orange after that. So that was my last real contact with Montclair, except my parents lived there.

MA: You said your husband was in the Navy.

NC: He was for four years, yes.

MA: For four years.

NC: Yes, he was discharged in 1964.

MA: Did he serve overseas?

NC: No, he was in the submarine service out of Groton, Connecticut.

MA: You mentioned before the job you got at NBC in New York.

NC: Yes.

MA: How did you get that job?

NC: Well, one of the things you had to do when you were in secretarial school was arrange to interview a prospective employer. I chose NBC and arranged to interview them as a prospective employee. When I graduated, I called and they said, "Yes, we have a job. Come on in."

MA: Where did you start at NBC?

NC: I started as the secretary to the vice-president of radio sales.

MA: Radio sales.

NC: At Rockefeller Center in New York City. I lived with my parents, and they were still in Montclair, so that was just a matter of a bus ride away.

MA: What were your duties as the secretary to the vice-president of radio sales?

NC: Mostly just the correspondence. I also worked for the salesmen in preparing sales proposals for advertisers. Mostly secretarial duties, typing, filing, steno. You wouldn't know what steno is, the short-hand. Now they have Dictaphones. It used to be short-hand.

MA: When you were with NBC in this early period, was it mostly doing radio work or were they starting to switch to television?

NC: Well, actually they broadcast several shows from NBC studios at Rockefeller Plaza. A lot of the secretaries in my unit, if we weren't real busy, we were allowed to go down to the soundstage and watch them either rehearse or tape--not tape, but usually rehearse some of the shows that they broadcast.

MA: What were some of these shows that you were able to watch?

NC: Well, we saw *Hee Haw*. I can't remember the other ones. They used to have some of the popular groups on, such as The Animals, Freddie and the Dreamers, any of the pop bands and singers of the time. They would have them come in, and we'd get to meet some of them sometimes, and then we'd watch them perform. It was cool.

MA: I'm curious about the people you met.

NC: I remember meeting Freddie and the Dreamers. Also, I was in the elevator with The Animals. That was a group. [laughter]

MA: Where did you go after this job with NBC as a secretary?

NC: Alright. Well, I got married while I was still working there, and my husband had a different job and we didn't seem to ever be in the same place at the same time. So I quit NBC and worked for Celanese Plastics in Newark, New Jersey. A little closer to home.

MA: Were you still living in East Orange at this time?

NC: We lived in East Orange for a little while, but while I was working for Celanese, we moved to Parsippany, New Jersey. It was a longer bus ride. My stories about that were the race riots in Newark, New Jersey in 1968. [Editor's Note: The Newark riots lasted from July 12 to July 17, 1967. They began after the police arrested an African-American cab driver and rumors spread that he had been killed in custody. The riots resulted in over two dozen deaths, over seven hundred injuries, fifteen hundred arrests and property damage exceeding ten million dollars.] I got on the bus one morning to go to work, and got off the bus. There was hardly anyone around. I had no idea what was going on. I went into the building, and they said, no, you couldn't come in. The building was closed because of the riots. They suggested I get out of town very quickly. So I walked back out, and I remember standing in the doorway of the Bell Telephone Building with several other people waiting for any bus to come along so we could leave, and we could hear the gun fire. So that was scary. We didn't go back to work for three days.

MA: You weren't aware that the riots were occurring until you got to Newark to show up for work?

NC: Well, I knew there was unrest and riots in the area. I didn't realize it affected the area I was in because I didn't listen to the news that morning. I simply got up, got dressed, and got on the bus. It wasn't until I got into Newark itself that I realized what had happened.

MA: How long did the riots last? When were you able to go back to work?

NC: We didn't go back to work for three days. I don't know how long the riots lasted, but our building was closed. There was a bank on the first floor, and they didn't want any part of it, so they closed for three days.

MA: Were you aware of some other places, maybe some friends who worked in different buildings, that also closed down because of the riots?

NC: No, I wasn't. Although I figured Bell Telephone was probably shut down too. That was the building next to where we worked. We worked right on Broad Street and Bloomfield Avenue.

MA: You also said you had to wait for the bus to take you out of the city?

NC: Oh, yes. They were on a schedule, and I don't know how long I waited, but it was too long. It felt like years, but there were other people there, so I didn't feel too afraid.

MA: How long did you stay at the job with the plastics company?

NC: I was there about two and a half, three years. Then we bought a home and started a family.

MA: Were you still living in East Orange or did you move to a different town?

NC: We moved to Hopatcong, and I had two kids there. I didn't work for thirteen years.

MA: What were you children's names?

NC: Douglas, Bruce, and Derek. Derek was the last one. Douglas and Bruce were the ones that were born in Hopatcong.

MA: You said you didn't work for some time after.

NC: No. I didn't work for thirteen years. I was very fortunate. We had enough to get by with. Then it wasn't until the little boy, the youngest, went back to school full-time that I was able to get another full-time job.

MA: Where did you start working when you started working again?

NC: When I started, we had moved up to Newton, New Jersey. That's where our last son Derek was born. When he moved up to school, I got a full-time job at Newton High School as a secretary in the main office at the high school.

MA: How long did you keep that job at the high school?

NC: I was there for twenty-one years.

MA: Twenty-one years. Wow.

NC: Yes.

MA: Did you retire as secretary of the high school?

NC: I did. I retired December 31, 2003. We moved to North Carolina, January 3, 2004.

MA: What precipitated the move to North Carolina?

NC: Well, we were both retired, and we wanted to get out of New Jersey. My mother had passed away in 1995. My father in 1990. We just felt it was a good move to get out of New Jersey.

MA: You came to the house where you currently live.

NC: Yes. We moved to Wilmington, North Carolina, and we own a home here. We have been here twelve-and-a-half years now.

MA: How did you get involved with the Kip's Castle oral history project here?

MA: It's funny. I have a cousin who, at the time, lived in New Jersey, and she saw it in the newspaper, and said, "Oh, you lived there, didn't you?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Why don't you call them?" So I did. [laughter] I knew through newspaper articles that another friend, who lived

where I grew up and who sent me articles, that a religious sect had owned the castle for a while, and then it had been remodeled and made into business offices, and then it had been vacant for a while. So, I was interested and very happy that the county finally stepped in and said, "This is something we need to preserve."

MA: It sounds like you were still following the news from that area.

NC: Oh, absolutely. Because it was so unique. My friends all thought I was some sort of, I don't know what, because I lived there. I mean, my bedroom was round, for crying out loud. [laughter]

MA: Have you ever been back or visited the area?

NC: When my Mom was sick, she was in a nursing home in Montclair. I did go and see her, and a couple of times I did go back up to see the estate. It was still owned by the religious order. I went up, not into, but I went up to the castle. There was no place where I could take a picture from, and it looked pretty much, from the outside, as I remembered it--because I felt like I was trespassing and I didn't know if I was supposed to be there, I didn't go too far into the property.

MA: When you went back, did it look different or change?

NC: Well, my father used to have a big garden where there now is a parking lot, which was in back of and beside the garage for the castle. I walked up into the big parking area in front of the garage, and that's about as close as I went to the castle when I walked in. A lot of it's been paved over and made into parking spaces. Those seem to be the biggest things. I didn't go into the back of the property at all.

MA: What was it like to go back to this place where you spent your childhood?

NC: Well, it was sad because the religious order had taken out all of the huge rhododendron bushes that my father had planted and tended and I had loved and played in all my life, and they were gone. They had stripped out the tennis courts and made it a parking lot. They cut down the apple trees, and just a lot of the things that I grew up with weren't there anymore.

MA: Do you happen to know how the castle came into the hands of this religious order?

NC: No, I have no idea.

MA: I think that is the end of my questions. I will give you this opportunity if there's anything you want to talk about. Is there anything I skipped over or something we didn't talk enough about?

NC: Okay. Well, the only thing I thought of was the rose gardens beside the castle, and you said you weren't sure if they were still there. There used to be a little cell. I want to say a cell. If you go behind the rose garden, you go down behind the stone wall, there used to be a door, and there used to be a little space in there. We always used it as the holding place for the bad guy when

we played cowboys and Indians. The bad guy got put in there. I don't even know if that's still there.

MA: With that, I'll conclude the interview.

NC: That will be it, yes.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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