

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA HEDLEY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

MOLLY GRAHAM

HAVRE DE GRACE, MARYLAND

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TRANSCRIPT BY

KINZA HASSAN

Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Laura Hedley. The interview is taking place on March 29, 2017 in Havre de Grace, Maryland, and the interviewer is Molly Graham. We will just start at the very beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born?  
Laura Hedley: Montclair, New Jersey on December 27, 1963 at Saint Vincent's Hospital.

MG: Did you grow up in that area?

LH: Yes.

MG: Well, tell me a little bit first about your family history, starting on your mother's side.

LH: My mother was born in East Orange, lived there for quite a few years, until, I want to say around six or seven years old. Then, they moved into Kip's Castle around that age. [Editor's Note: Kip's Castle, is a 10-acre estate on the ridge of First Mountain, on the border of the Montclair and Verona townships. It contains a 9,000-square-foot mansion that replicates a medieval Norman castle, as well as a 6,000-square-foot two-story carriage house.] Then, she got married. She went to nursing school while she was living there. She got married, I believe at, twenty-two, to my father, Thomas Nash. He was from North Arlington. My grandparents still lived in Kip's Castle for quite a few years after that. My grandfather died there.

MG: Isn't there a Nash connection to Kip's Castle as well?

LH: I don't know.

MG: I felt like that was a name I have seen before.

LH: Really? Well, that was my mother's married name, so I don't know if that helps.

MG: Right. What prompted the family move to Kip's Castle in the first place when your mother was a young girl?

LH: I believe it's because my grandmother was a nurse, a private duty nurse, and she was taking care of Mr. Munoz, not in the castle, around the corner, down the hill from the castle; it was like a back road on Highland Avenue. That's basically why they stayed there. My grandfather was like the caretaker of the grounds while they were living there.

MG: What were your grandparents' names?

LH: Catherine and Frederick Ingram.

MG: So, Fred Ingram, is your uncle and the son of Frederick.

LH: Yes.

MG: Who was living in the castle when your grandmother was taking care of the Munoz family on Highland Avenue?

LH: At that time, I believe it was only my grandparents and my aunt and uncle, for a period of time, that's all that I know lived there. I don't remember anybody else living in there when I was little.

MG: The caretakers stayed in the castle.

LH: Yes.

MG: That is interesting.

LH: Basically, it was kind of strange, because the Muñozes had a house, from what I know, on Highland Avenue--only because I was in the house, so I remember going down there. I'm not sure why, maybe it was easier for them or whatever the cause may be.

MG: Right. I interviewed Connie Hirshon, who is a great niece of Robert Munoz. I think that is where she lived too. I think that is where most of the activity seemed to be or where most of the people seemed to reside.

LH: On Highland Avenue?

MG: Yes.

LH: Yes. Highland Avenue is a nice area as well. So, maybe it was just easier for them to get to. It does seem like it was a little more--the castle, it's up on a hill and maybe that's why the people lived on Highland Avenue instead. I'm not sure.

MG: So, the roles were that your grandmother would take care of Robert Munoz and your grandfather would take care of the grounds?

LH: Yes, but he also worked. He worked at a gas station down in Verona, right on Route 23 there. He worked, and I guess he did both. I wouldn't say both of them were caretakers because she took care of the gardens and the inside of where the big terrarium is; she took care of all that stuff. So, I guess it's a little bit of both. They both did it.

MG: How long did your grandparents work for the Munoz family?

LH: Wow. Well, my mother was born in '39. I'm going to say that they lived in there from the mid-'40s--and then my grandmother didn't leave there until the '70s. So, a long time. My grandfather died in 1969.

MG: Was there not a time period where there were no Muñozes around and the castle was just empty?

LH: Yes. Well, I think that Mr. Munoz died.

MG: I have a timeline that might be useful.

LH: Oh, that might help, because then I can help you a lot more if I knew.

MG: So, the Kip Family was in there until 1926. Then, the Munoz family came in there in 1926. They owned the building until 1975, but for a long period of time, no one really lived there.

LH: Okay. So, my grandmother moved out. She moved out in '75. It's funny how I can just remember that out of nowhere. She was by herself at that point. Yes, she had moved. My mother had moved out, my uncle was gone, and so my grandmother was by herself. She was getting elderly at that point, so she had moved out probably around that exact time. Then, these people came soon after, I remember that. [laughter]

MG: The Rajneesh cult.

LH: Oh, yes.

MG: We will talk about that.

LH: [laughter ] Very interesting.

MG: Well, it is interesting that the house kind of stayed there, occupied only by the groundskeepers and caretakers for such a long time, and that the family didn't sell the castle right away.

LH: No. Then, when my grandmother was there, as time went on, after my grandfather died, other people started living there as well. It's like they broke it up into apartments. Then, my grandmother moved--I remember when I was a kid that we had the first floor. We had this big kitchen, and then, a dining area, and then, over to the side, there was this big family room near where you'd go out to the main entrance. Then, the second floor was where we had bedrooms. I stayed over all the time, so I was always there. My mother's room, my uncle's [room], and my grandparents' room. Then, after my grandfather died, I guess that they started to break this up, my grandmother moved up to, I want to say the second [floor]. It had to be the second floor. I remember the room. Well, she had her own area up there. I'm not sure what she did as far as the kitchen though. Then, I guess they just had people coming in and staying in different areas of [the] downstairs and upstairs, so I'm not sure what floor she was actually on, but I remember that happening.

MG: What happened to the house on Highland Avenue after the Munoz family moved on or passed on?

LH: I don't know. I'm pretty sure that it was sold. That was a nice house too. It was pretty big. It was a Spanish-style house. It had a driveway, at the time, that went--I don't know if anybody ever knew this, but it went up to Kip's Castle from the back, so it was pretty neat because that's how they would get back and forth.

MG: It sounded like one brother was in one house, and another brother was in the other.

LH: Is that so? I didn't know.

MG: I think that is what I remember. Somewhere I have a very complex family tree of the Munoz family.

LH: Yes, I know there's a whole bunch of them, I just don't know where they were [living]. They were never in the castle.

MG: Right.

LH: They were all outside of the castle, [laughter] which is funny.

MG: What stories did your grandmother share about her times with the Munoz family?

LH: Just that they were really, really, nice people. Mr. Munoz used to call me "Bunny." I'm not sure why, but he called me "Bunny." I remember him only because--I mean, I was little, but I remember going there with my grandmother and he would call me "Bunny." I don't know why. Probably [because] he couldn't remember my name. [laughter] She said they were very, very nice.

MG: Do you think that was Robert Munoz, Sr.?

LH: Yes, I think so.

MG: Because he had a brother James Munoz as well.

LH: I'm thinking [it was] Robert.

MG: That is the grandfather of Laurie Blackwell. James would be the father of Connie Hirshon, who lives in Washington, DC.

LH: I remember Robert. I don't know why. That's sticking with me for some reason.

MG: That is who your grandmother took care of?

LH: Yes.

MG: Was his wife, Jimmy Loomis Morris, alive at that time?

LH: I think so, but I'm not sure how long she was. I don't remember her very well at all. I don't remember the wife. Did they have any timeline of her death or no?

MG: I don't have that in front of me, but I knew that there was another Munoz descendent still living there. I want to say Nancy Redman, but I could be wrong.

LH: That sounds familiar. That sounds very familiar, but I'm not sure the correlation of who is who. I just remember there was a Mr. Munoz. That's all we called him because back then you actually called people by "mister." [laughter]

MG: Do you remember if Robert Munoz's wife was still alive?

LH: Don't remember. I never met a woman, but that doesn't mean she wasn't--my grandmother was always going there and taking care of everyone, I want to say, on a daily basis.

MG: Do you remember any other relatives, any sons, daughters, nieces or nephews?

LH: No, none.

MG: I know for a time that some of the grandchildren, Jim and Sandra Morrison, and maybe Mark Morrison, lived there as well, but temporarily.

LH: They lived in the castle?

MG: I think so.

LH: Yes, that sounds familiar. The Morrison's definitely sound familiar. I thought it was Robinson, so I was going to say Robinson. That must be the name of the family that lived in there. They were living in there the same time my grandmother was. I knew there were families in there. As I said, I thought it was Robinsons, but now that you said Morrison, it sounds a lot more familiar. I remember the Morrisons, I remember them being down the hall. I can picture their faces. They weren't very old at the time.

MG: They must have been just a little bit older than you.

LH: Yes, I was going to say, because at that time I was around--it had to be around eleven, twelve, thirteen maybe. So, I remember them not being very--I remember them being young, younger than my mother at that time.

MG: What years do you remember the castle?

LH: Well, I want to say--I would have to be a little bit older. I remember it when I was little, when we did trick-or-treating there, because it was scary, extremely scary, because we went up there late in the day. I'll never forget this; that walkway that's in the front of the castle, it's a

walkway that goes to one door, and I think the door went into a little hallway that the kitchen was to the left [of], but it's not the main doorway that goes into where the garage overpass is. We went up there and my grandmother opened the door in her witch's costume and scared me half to death. I just remember that, and I was little. I must have been about four or five, I want to say around then. Then, I remember all the way up until my grandmother--I remember when my grandmother moved out. My grandmother had a dog prior to moving out, and the dog pulled her along some of the stones, these big jagged stones out in the front, and broke her hip. I remember a lot because I remember going sunbathing up on the outside. We did all the fireworks up on the turret up top, the big one, which was really quite cool. They would always have like friends over [on the] Fourth of July. You could see New York, and you could see all of the fireworks everywhere. It was really cool. It was a long time.

MG: For a little girl, that must have been incredible. I think we all dream of having access to a castle.

LH: Yes, it was. It was really cool, especially going in the front door and you could run around, and there was so much room. I'll never forget my mother always telling--we weren't allowed to do it and I don't know why, but my mother used to be able to go down to the basement and ride her bike with my uncle, and they would ride their bikes all around down there. Apparently, there were areas [with] underground little tunnels and stuff that I never saw, and I'm not sure if they were closed off or what the situation was with them, but my mother had fun down there because it was this humongous basement.

MG: Isn't there a dungeon down there?

LH: Yes, something. Dungeon, there was a dungeon. [laughter] That's what it was. I remember her telling me about that, but we weren't allowed down there. I'm not sure why.

MG: Your mother must have a lot of memories of the building too.

LH: Yes. She did, she really did. She had a lot. She would always talk about it. I think one of the neatest things was she had all her friends come up there. Her friends were always invited over, and they thought it was pretty neat that she was--whenever she went to school, that when she went to have her friends over, they were like, "You live in a castle." It's pretty neat.

MG: Did she ever work at the castle?

LH: No. She went off to nursing school. Then, Saint Joe's in Paterson. So, she really wasn't much--she was back and forth all the time, but she didn't have any work except for the obvious chores that you had to do, but that was it.

MG: Did she know the Munoz family?

LH: Yes, she did.

MG: What does she remember about them?

LH: I don't know. She didn't say too, too much about them, more or less I think because she was young growing up there, and then, became a teenager, and then, entered her twenties. So, she was, I think, more interested in everything else except for the Munoz family, [laughter] to be honest with you.

MG: Did your family stay connected with the castle or the next tenants there?

LH: No.

MG: Was that the end of the connection with the castle when it sold in the 1970s?

LH: Yes. That could be part of the reason my grandmother even moved out, was because they were selling it, because I know it was around the same time frame. That I do remember.

MG: I think the upkeep was very expensive and the Munoz family was no longer living there.

LH: Right. Then, where did it sell to?

MG: Peter Purvis, from 1975 to 1981. Peter Purvis and his wife lived there. It was not a law firm then.

LH: It was a law firm at some point.

MG: It was a law firm later on, in 1984, after the Rajneesh cult was in there. So, Peter Purvis lived there with his wife, and I think he was interested in developing the area. There were some other tenants, someone named John Donnelly, who I think was a detective.

LH: That sounds familiar too.

MG: I have not gotten a hold of him for this project.

LH: That sounds really familiar. He would probably know my family.

MG: Okay.

LH: I bet you any amount of money [on] that one because that sounds familiar.

MG: I think there was some preservation interest, but nothing really developed. Somehow, it went next to Rajneesh's group.

LH: I wonder how that happened.

MG: Peter Steck, who was a tenant there at some point, explained it all to me, but I'm not remembering right now.

LH: That's interesting, because everybody was mad that they were there. I'll never forget that.

MG: Yes, it seemed a little kooky.

LH: Yes.

MG: Were you ever told the history of the castle?

LH: Not too much, no. Just that Mr. Kip built it for his wife. That's really all I know. We were just living there. [laughter] It was neat that we were living there, but nothing more than that.

MG: Did you live in the castle?

LH: I didn't, but I was there all the time because my parents lived right in town, and they both worked full-time. So, I was always staying with my grandparents all the time, at least one, two, three times a month.

MG: Do you have siblings?

LH: I did. He's deceased, my brother.

MG: Oh, I am sorry.

LH: Thanks.

MG: Did you get to grow up together?

LH: Yes. There's pictures of us actually in the castle there, so did. It was pretty neat there. Birthday parties were always there. Any kind of function--Christmas was always there, Easter was there because it was neat. I mean, it was so big and stuff. You had big Christmas trees, and everything was elaborate. It was pretty fancy for us considering we didn't own it. [laughter]

MG: Can you do your best to describe the building? Walking in, what did it look like?

LH: I'll do my best. Okay, well there were two different entrances in the front. There was an entrance in the back too. So, if you pulled up into the front of the building, you could either go where there was an overhead--I don't know what you want to call it--stone overhang, so that you could pull underneath and not get wet. You could go in that way. Then, when you went up the stairs into this big, huge door, wooden door, you walked in, and it was a big--I want to say a big foyer almost. It was quite large and grand. So, you walk in the big [foyer, but] we didn't go in that way hardly ever. I don't remember ever going that way. I just remember going out that way, but if you went in that way, there was a chapel over into the right.

Then, there was a sitting area over with these nice windows near there. I'm not sure which went first. I think the chapel went first, and then, there was an area, and there was a big fireplace in there. So, I remember that room, but then the main [entryway], where we always went in, there was like a walkway and you went up these stairs, and then, there was a long walkway right in the front. When you went in that door, it was like a hallway, and the kitchen was to the left. In my eyes now, it was probably not that big, but it seemed like a big kitchen at the time. [laughter] There was a big pantry in there, but then to the right was a dining room. They didn't have an elevator at the time; the elevator was put in years later. Then, you went around the corner there and there was a family room. It's basically where we had all our family festivities. I remember this area right in there, it was a pantry, big pantry in between. I might be getting my directions all off because I was young. This was when I was really young, so we're talking--my grandfather died '69 and I was born in '63, so I was young when we were down there. Then, that big family area, if you went through there, went back out to that big--it was dark, mahogany wood. In the picture, that's the big room. At the time, it was dark, but apparently, I've heard that it was painted, all that wood was painted, which, to me, would be disastrous if you ask me. That's why my mother never wanted to go back, because she didn't want to see all that wood painted.

Then, you went upstairs and we had a bunch of different bedrooms. One of the bedrooms was a little bedroom that my brother and I would stay in. That was, you went upstairs and it was like right to the left. Then, there were other bedrooms, but I don't remember them that much, probably because they were my grandparents' bedroom. They were down the hall. Then, there was another bedroom that, as we got older, we got to sleep in different bedrooms. That was a long bedroom--once again, it was probably not that long--and that went out into another one of the turrets outside. It was a big area that you could go out and sit outside. My grandmother used to take us out there to sunbathe. I'll never forget that because I always wore an undershirt and she told me to take it off. I said, "But I can't take it off." [laughter] She was like, "You're only seven." [laughter] Anyway, it was fun. So, those are the two areas I remember the most, downstairs, and then, the second floor I remember pretty well. Then, my grandmother, when she moved in just to one area of it, they made a bedroom. I'll show you this. So, this was the first floor down here, and then, I think they moved her up here from what I remember because that's why the elevator was put in.

MG: Your grandmother?

LH: My grandmother just had one big room. I believe it was the third floor because I think everybody else was moving in, into the different areas. I'm not sure what she really did as far as the kitchen, [I] don't remember, but I remember staying there with her as well in that room. Then, she had two other little rooms next to it. I had a blue room--it's funny how you remember colors--that was under the stairs, the stairs that went up to up here, but it was a stair. It was the spookiest stairway, too. It was the spookiest stairway because there was a door at the top of the--it was obviously the third floor. It must've been the third floor. There was this flight of stairs, and then, just at the top, [in] this big wall is this door. Then, that went upstairs to come out that door.

MG: So, there is this mini turret on top of the large turret.

LH: Yes, yes.

MG: That must be the best view in New Jersey.

LH: Oh, yes. Absolutely. You get everything. This is as good as going up to Eagle Rock. I mean, it's even better because it was higher up. So, it's pretty neat.

MG: What could you see from up there?

LH: New York. I mean, you could see New York perfectly. Pretty much, I think that's all we really looked at because it was just so neat, the skyline. It was very tree covered there. It's funny, being outside, I remember camping. We were camping in the rose garden once. That was neat too. So, it was really neat stuff we did up there. What else? There was something else I did. I used to pick all the vegetables in the garden with my grandmother because they had all kinds of stuff. So, I guess she basically took care of all the gardens and stuff. As far as inside, that's pretty much what I remember.

MG: What were the conditions like inside?

LH: Great. The only thing that was old were the bathrooms. I just remember them being really old, but everything else, it was always well kept, painted. This is just from my perceiving it back then, everything looked neat. The only thing, it was just old, like, the kitchen sink was old, but then again, this is a long time ago, [laughter] forty, fifty years ago. I guess it was right for the timeframe.

MG: When was the last time you were in the castle?

LH: The day my grandmother moved out and that was in the '70s.

MG: What would it be like to go back?

LH: I'd love to see it. I'd love to see the size of the rooms, just to see if my perception is so off, and then, just to remember what was where and take pictures of what I have, to see where it was in the castle.

MG: I have seen a couple of these pictures before that are aerial shots of the castle. Do you know how these pictures were taken?

LH: No. They were aerial shots, I know that. That one, with the snow, that was given to my grandparents. I'm not sure who gave it to them, but it was a gift. So, I don't know that much more than that.

MG: What was the relationship between your grandmother and Robert Munoz? Were they close?

LH: Yes, very, because she took care of him all the time. She got along with him very well, too. My grandmother was very strict Catholic. I'm guessing some of that was because they--I know that [the Muñozes] were as well, so they probably had some connection, religious connection of sorts. Apparently, she worked for them for years and years. I guess that was a good connection, a good relationship.

MG: Did your grandfather have a close relationship with the Muñozes?

LH: Not as much. He was very, very quiet. Very shy, quiet man. He worked pretty much all the time down at the gas station, so I'm thinking when he got home, he'd just do whatever he could around the yard, the grounds. I do believe at the time there was a groundskeeper, but I'm not sure if there was somebody else that came as well, [doing] what my grandparents did. I'm pretty sure that there was somebody that had to come up there to mow it because there were a lot of grounds. So, I don't remember them. So, no, he didn't really have too much of a connection to the Muñozes.

MG: Then, I know at some point, your uncle Fred, their son, took over as a groundskeeper as well.

LH: I think he was doing yard stuff up there for quite a few years. He was in Vietnam, so I'm not sure what timeframe he was there. Obviously, he probably did it when he was young, before Vietnam, and then, I'm not sure what, as far as afterwards. I know he came back there, but I'm not sure what he did.

MG: Did your uncle and mother live in the castle?

LH: Yes.

MG: Maybe I already asked you this, but did they share any other stories about life there?

LH: Yes, the bicycling in the basement was a big one. He was always pulling tricks on her a lot up there, scaring her, using her tweezers to pull a mouse out of one of those closets. That was on the second floor too. I remember that. Then, they threw the mouse down the toilet there. Just silly stuff like that, but they had fun. They had a lot of fun living there, growing up there. They essentially grew up there because they were both young. In the '40s--my mother was born in '39, so they moved and she was only in East Orange for a couple of years before they moved into the castle. Then, my mother lived there until she got married. She lived there over twenty, thirty years almost. So, that's a long time.

MG: Yes, that is amazing. What else was the castle used for? Did people come visit?

LH: Parties. Just parties because they'd always go up to there and see the fireworks.

MG: Who were the parties hosted by?

LH: My family. I don't want to say big, elaborate parties, but just parties like Fourth of July festivities, holidays, Christmas. I remember a lot of my family being up there, both sides, my father's side and my mother's side for things like that. There was no grandeur about it. Nothing else was used there. They didn't rent it out or anything, because at that time, it was just family-oriented.

MG: How did people in Montclair feel about the castle?

LH: People in the town at that time, not as much when I was little, but when I went to high school, everybody found it completely fascinating that my grandmother lived there and that my mother grew up there. [laughter] Everybody was always trying to sneak up to Kip's Castle because they had all these different stories that there were ghosts up there. They were always trying to sneak up the back road, but then the chain was across the thing, so they couldn't get out. There were always stories. They wanted to go up there and drink or party and hang out on the grounds. They were always getting chased off. [laughter] I'm not sure who did all the chasing off, because there's an apartment above the garage as well, that I do remember, and I'm pretty sure the Muñozes had a driver. I have a picture here too. I'm pretty sure his name was (Burt?). I don't know if I'm getting that right or not. (Burt?) was really a nice gentleman. I'm pretty sure (Burt?) lived upstairs from--here's (Burt?) and that's me. This is the garage across from the castle and above upstairs was an apartment. I'm not sure what's there now. It probably could be used as storage.

MG: Is that your mother in the picture?

LH: That is my mom's friend. This is my mother and this is in front of the castle. As you could see the neat, ornate--everything about it's really neat. I'm not saying it correctly, but you know what I mean. [laughter]

MG: It really seems like a Cinderella story.

LH: Yes, it's really neat. Then, this was the kitchen that I was just describing before that was a really seemed immense to me. I'm not sure what it looks like now. One of the sad things is I remember being about seven years old, standing in that kitchen, when my grandfather died because my grandfather died upstairs, and my father coming down telling me in that kitchen that my grandfather had died. Isn't it funny how you remember such things? But it was in that kitchen that I found that out. What else was there? This is the terrarium in the back. If you notice, these were all built-ins, which was really cool because you could just go in there and do gardening. So, my grandmother would always take us out there, but it was inside, so [it would] keep it nice and warm and stuff. That was a really fun room because we were always in there just planting stuff or pulling stuff out and cleaning the plants up. So, it was really kind of cool. Neat stuff like that is some of the stuff we would always do back there. Can you excuse me for one second?

MG: Yes.

[Tape Paused]

MG: Where does the Nash name come from? Which side of the family?

LH: That is my mother's married name. That is my maiden name.

MG: Because one of the names that came up for the Kip's Castle Oral History Project was Nancy Ingram Nash.

LH: That's my mother.

MG: She was on the list of people that Essex County wanted us to interview.

LH: She's deceased.

MG: When did she pass away?

LH: 2003.

MG: Oh, I'm sorry.

LH: Yes, she was young. She was only sixty-three. She got cancer and everything went kapooey on her. I'm just getting [information] from what she basically shared with me over the years.

MG: I saw her name in several articles talking about the castle and what it was like.

LH: *The Montclair Times*, she was in that. It's just funny, when I read that article, whoever took the interview definitely changed the wording because I'm like, "My mother wouldn't say stuff like that." [laughter] Anyway, she did a couple of interviews with [a] couple different things I think, at the time.

MG: How did your family feel when the castle sold to Peter Purvis?

LH: I didn't think that it bothered them as much as when the--I'm not going to say that cult's name right.

MG: Rajneesh?

LH: Rajneesh. When they moved in, it was a different story. Everybody was really upset about that.

MG: Tell me about that.

LH: Well, first of all, they were all over Montclair. You could tell because they had orange uniforms, I want to say because I don't know what else you would call them, with beads. They were all over Montclair. They were in the stores and they were everywhere. [I] don't know what their cause was, heard different things, but it could be just rumors. Apparently, from people that--I don't know how they found out that they [the Rajneesh cult] were doing things to the castle, that they took out the stain glass windows, that they painted all the wood white. I remember this because I remember our family going, "Oh, my gosh," because it was beautiful in there. They were selling stuff from inside the castle, just basically destroying the history of it and the beauty of the inside of it. It wasn't sitting well with anybody, not that you could do anything. I mean, it was a cult so, we were just hoping that they would move on and eventually they did. It took quite a few years though.

MG: I forget what happened. Shree Rajneesh went to Oregon at some point and poisoned some people. [Editor's Note: Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was an Indian guru and leader of the Rajneesh religious movement. In 1984, Rajneesh and his followers were responsible for a bioterror attack in Wasco County, Oregon, deliberately poisoning the salad bars at local restaurants with salmonella.]

LH: Yes, it looked like they would do something like that. They were scary looking. That's why nobody really got in their way. They were very interesting and not so interesting, I guess at the same time. [laughter]

MG: Do you think some of that teenage activity of sneaking up there, increased or decreased during that time?

LH: Probably increased immensely. There was always teenage interest, always. I mean, there probably still is. It's just one of those things that everybody--I mean, I was always there, so it didn't make a difference, except when I was a teenager because everybody was gone by that point. I remember all of my life, people always talking to me--even, I think, my mother's era, the kids always wanted to go up there and they were totally inquisitive of what was it about. I mean, how often do you see a castle stuck in the middle of New Jersey on the hill in between two towns? So, it was interesting how people perceived it.

MG: I also heard that Rajneesh drove around in a big Rolls-Royce.

LH: Don't know that, but they were always at the A&P in Montclair though, always. [laughter] I worked there, so I remember them always coming in. I guess he was very wealthy, but he was in control of--I do remember that they would always have--when the women would go out, the men would have to go with them. I do remember that because I remember them at the A&P, and there were always men almost following the women around; it was really weird. It was creepy weird. So, I was so glad when they got out of that whole Montclair area.

MG: Was it clear when they came and when they left?

LH: Oh, yes. [laughter] Because everybody knew when they left, so they were saying, "Good riddance." When they came, it was obvious because they were so different from everybody else. It was really a strange time.

MG: Were people in the town getting wrapped up in the cult activity? Did anyone join the cult?

LH: No, nobody. I think if anything, they just wanted them out, which is a good thing.

MG: Yes, they were there for three years, from 1981 to 1984. By that point, had you graduated high school?

LH: Yes, '82. Yes, but I was still working there and I was still living in Montclair, same area my whole life, so they were still around. I remember when they left too. [laughter] It's funny how you can really remember those things. They packed up and were gone, it was a big cheer session. It's funny.

MG: Were you aware then when it was bought by the law firm?

LH: Yes. We didn't know too much about it, just that it was, and everybody was happy that it was. At least, it was going to somebody's hands. Everybody was always fearful, in my family at least, that it was just going to end up as nothing, it was just going to be torn down. We had heard--you never know who you hear it from this time--they were going to tear it down and build condos up there. That was a rumor that was going around too. So, when the law firm was in there, at least it felt like it was still being kind of managed and maintained. Then, from what I do remember, he was going to rent it out to do weddings and other events. I know that because my one friend, my mother's friend's daughter, wanted to get married there, but it was too expensive, so she didn't. That's how I knew that they were starting to do events there. Then, I don't know much more than that after that. I got married, so I kind of moved out of the area.

MG: Can I ask if you have children?

LH: I have a daughter.

MG: Have you told her about the castle?

LH: Yes, I'll take her up there as soon as I can. If they ever let me in, I'm going to take her up there. Yes, she really wants to see it. It's really neat. It's a neat place. Plus, when you go in with somebody that has grown up there, it's neat to say, "Well, this was here." At least, I'm thinking it was neat, but who knows, she'll probably be like, "All right, Mom, enough." [laughter] But to take pictures up and show what's what, would be really neat to see the whole thing in a totally new--I don't know, my mother never wanted to go back. She didn't want to go back. She didn't want to see it. I don't think she wanted to go back after the Rajneesh [cult] were there--I hope I'm saying that right--because she didn't want to see what they had done to it. She didn't want to see the changes. She wanted to keep the image of what she had throughout her

childhood of the castle, of the way it was. So, she didn't really have any desire to go back. Me, on the other hand, because I didn't grow up there per se, but I was there my whole childhood, I always wanted to go back to see it. I just haven't had the opportunity because the cult was there, then the law firm, and then, I moved. So, I haven't been able to, until recently. So, hopefully I'll get a chance to get in there someday.

MG: Well, why not develop it into condos? Why is this an important place to preserve?

LH: Because it's so old and it's one of those relics that you really want to--it should be restored back to its original, and people should enjoy it. It's neat. It's a castle. I mean, how many castles do you have in this country alone? I mean, look at all of Europe, they have castles everywhere, and they keep them. Use it for weddings and everything you could possibly think of, any kind of event. It's really a neat place. It should be restored and maintained, whatever it is right now.

MG: I am so glad this history is being documented because it has been such an interesting history of the people who have gone through there.

LH: Yes, it's a neat place and it should be enjoyed by people. It shouldn't be torn down whatsoever. Plus, it's so old. It's been around since the 1800's, so it should stay. You can see it. You can see it when you get off the Garden State Parkway on Watchung Avenue. You can look up the hill and there it is, and you can see it from different areas. I mean, that's how I always remember it because every time I do go up there, that's how I see it, and I'm like, "Oh."  
[laughter]

MG: And there are enough condos in New Jersey.

LH: Yes, we have enough. [laughter]

MG: It sounds like your family history goes back quite a bit in that area.

LH: Yes, we're all from Montclair pretty much, at least my mother's [side]. Well, I guess it was Orange, and my father's side was in North Arlington, but, yes, all relatively from Montclair. I mean, I grew up in Montclair, went to all the Montclair schools. I went to Montclair High School, graduated from there, and Montclair State. It was Montclair State at the time, now it's Montclair University. My mother worked at all the hospitals there. She worked at St. Vincent's [Hospital] and Mountainside [Hospital]. That's all family-oriented. My uncle's still in Cedar Grove, so he's close by. He's actually right down the road from the castle, which is funny.

MG: Is your uncle still married?

LH: Yes, Carol.

MG: Does Carol have memories of the castle? Was she involved in there?

LH: Yes, she was. They got married and there was a lot of stuff still there. My grandparents were still--was my grandfather still alive? To be honest, I'm not sure if they got married after my grandfather died or before. I'm pretty sure after, but I'm not positive on that. Yes, I'm sure she has some memories too, [but] not as many as my mother would because, as I said, my uncle went to Vietnam, so he was gone for a while. When he came back, they started to date, so they weren't around as much as my mother used to be with my grandmother still living there.

MG: What happened to all the furnishings inside Kip's Castle when it was sold in the '70s?

LH: Some of it, we still have, I have. I have a secretary that was in there, which is really neat. It's one of the secretaries that everybody has [laughter] because they're one those pieces of furniture. My uncle has a beautiful piece of furniture, which is actually in one of these pictures. The couches of course and all that stuff was just probably useless at that point, but there was a lot of decent furniture that my grandmother had that was passed on. A lot of it, my uncle has. Really good furniture from there. I have a couple pieces, but not a lot.

MG: Would they have been original Munoz furnishings?

LH: I believe so, because they were there. I know one piece of furniture, which was this gorgeous chest and it's right here and you see it in the background here. It's that brown piece of furniture. I believe that was theirs. It's almost got a Spanish appeal to it, if you can see that. I don't think there's anything else. I'm not sure about the long tables. They had all these really beautiful tables that were in the front. That's the front room as you go in. I'm not sure what happened to them. If anything, they might have been left there, and then, who knows what they did with them after the fact. So, I think that's the only thing of furniture I have.

MG: What went into the decision to sell the property to the Rajneesh group?

LH: Don't know that information. I'm just thinking that they didn't have any other buyers at the time. Probably nobody could afford it, and they probably could. I'm not even sure how much it was up for sale at that time. It was probably perfect for a cult. [laughter] There were plenty of rooms to house people. There were a lot of a lot of rooms. I think it's twenty-six rooms.

MG: It is a very big castle.

LH: Yes, yes. So, they had plenty [of] room. Oddly enough, they had big rooms down on the first floor, so if they had cult meetings or whatever, they had the room--scary enough. So, it probably fit for them. If he was rich enough, obviously as they said, it was affordable to him.

MG: Were you aware when the county bought it, I think in 2007?

LH: I was. I was only because I look at the website and I just keep tabs on what's going on with it. I was happy for that. I just hope it stays there, because at least the county will maintain it or hopefully have events there. I know that I've seen some stuff where they've done some outdoor festivals or flower things and stuff I think I've seen. So, I just haven't had the chance to get up

there, but I'm definitely going to try and get up there for something, whenever they have something open.

MG: When you contacted the office to schedule a visit, was that the first time you had heard about this oral history project?

LH: Yes. Actually, I was quite surprised. I had called to see if I could get in and bring my daughter and two of my friends that still live in New Jersey. I just wanted to do a day trip up. I spoke to a Laurie, I believe it was. Initially, I was told that we could only see the first floor, and it wasn't even open at the time. I think that it was still closed for the winter months, because this was last spring. I said, "Well, when it opens, I would like to be able to come up and take a look, or bring some friends." Then, I said, "Well, I'm just going to throw this out there." I said, "My family grew up there." With that, she told me that they were interested in any kind of stories that they could get from people and took my name and number and went on from there. So, it's pretty neat. The whole thing is neat. I hope it continues. It's worth the talk. People are really fascinated. Even my boss, when I told him that I was having this [interview] today, he was like, "Cool. That's really neat." I mean, it is. It's history stuff. You got to maintain that, you got to keep it going.

MG: Not many people have memories of living in a castle.

LH: Oh, absolutely. I'd love to hear the other people's stories too.

MG: I think you would be especially interested in Laurie and Robert Blackwell's oral history interviews. They did a lot of family history and spent the last few years digging into the research. If they release those, I would be happy to send you a copy.

LH: Did they remember the Ingrams at all?

MG: I can't remember. I will have to look in their transcript.

LH: Yes, I'd love to know if they had--probably not. Maybe my mother and my uncle.

MG: They might be of a generation removed because Signono Munoz's three children dispersed.

LH: Right, right. So, yes, I would love to see what their memories are and hear about it.

MG: Signono Munoz had two children, James, Robert, and then, a woman.

LH: Yes, was there a female sister?

MG: Yes. Isabel Munoz Coons Foster.

LH: That sounds about right. I do remember that. So, did my grandmother watch the oldest, [Signono Munoz]. I'm not sure. I'm thinking it was Robert though, because [Signono] would be too old I think, to be honest with you. I don't know.

MG: I think it was Robert Munoz, Sr.

LH: I think so because the father of him would probably wasn't going to be around that long for my grandmother to take care of him for quite a few years because she took care of this gentleman for quite a while.

MG: I'll double check Laurie's interview because she talks a lot about who is who and it is hard to keep track of everybody.

LH: Really? It's so big, yes. I would like to know. That'd be interesting to hear.

MG: What else do you remember about growing up in Montclair?

LH: Just that it was a really nice town. Everybody always got along. It was a really good town to grow up in. I mean, it was beautiful, it was pretty. You had your different areas. You had your really expensive houses. I was [in] more of a middle-class area, but we lived in Upper Montclair, right where all the stores were. It was a really nice town--really, really nice town. I mean, if anything I could say about Montclair is that everybody that I'm Facebook friends with and high school people that I'm still friends with, we still say Montclair was the best town to grow up in. It really was. I was lucky because I had that behind me as well, the castle. So, it was really neat to have that story to tell people. People really didn't believe it. A lot of times, they were like, "Yes, sure, your mom grew up there." I'm like, "She did, she really did." So, pulling pictures out was fun too because even showing my husband, I'm like, "This was this room and this was this room." Of course, he probably just lost interest in two seconds, but it's fun talking about it anyways. [laughter] That's been on my wall for years now, so I thought it was a cool picture.

MG: Yes. It sounds like Kip's Castle has a really significant part in your life and in your memories.

LH: Oh, yes. Especially because of my grandparents. They were my mother's parents, and I was very, very close to them. My grandmother ended up living with us at the end of her life. So, it was neat because I got to, unfortunately in a sad sort of way, be part of both my grandparents' deaths. One was in the castle. I mean, not many people say my grandfather died there. So, it's sad, but it's kind of meaningful in the same way. It's where my mother was raised primarily, and my uncle as well. So, it's really kind of cool stuff. I mean, these are young girls that are in that kitchen having some kind of Girl Scouts thing. So, [my mother] did all her young, youthful things [in there] all the way through to nursing school. It's neat.

MG: Did your grandfather die unexpectedly or was he sick?

LH: He had lung cancer. He smoked cigars for years, so I'm sure that had something to do with it. He was young, too; he was only sixty-nine. So, it was rough on them because I don't think they expected him to go, but at least he died at their home. Back then, it was a lot different because you pretty much did that anyways.

MG: Has Montclair changed a lot since you grew up?

LH: Yes. Yes, not in a bad way, but it's gotten a lot more commercialized, I think. It used to be more of a homey kind of town. It was more quaint. Now, it seems a lot more commercialized, but not in a really bad way. I mean, just somewhat. You can just tell a little bit of a difference, but that's just times changing. It's pretty. It's extremely expensive. It wasn't like that. It was never like that. We would always shop all up on Valley Road, and then, go down to Bloomfield Avenue, and it was easy to shop everywhere. Now, it's a little more on the expensive side, from what I gather.

MG: Well, tell me a little bit about how your life unfolded after high school and how you got down here to Maryland?

LH: I went to school up there in Montclair, and then, I met my husband [on the] Jersey Shore, Belmar. Then, ended up living down in Toms River, New Jersey up until seven years ago. Then, my husband got transferred down here for the Fort Monmouth closing in New Jersey. So, we ended up having to come down here [to] Maryland. It's nice. I miss New Jersey though. [laughter] I really miss New Jersey. I miss the food. I miss just everything. It's definitely different down here.

MG: Well, I hope you get a chance to go up and visit.

LH: I want to see the castle if I can. Put in some words for me. [laughter]

MG: I certainly will.

LH: Yes, I would love to see it.

MG: I am not sure if it just was going under some renovations and that is why it was closed to the public.

LH: What is upstairs? Do you know if it's just offices? She said something about [there] being offices upstairs.

MG: We had a tour when this project started. It was to introduce us to the castle and the history. I also have a big book of Kip's Castle history.

LH: I would love to see it.

MG: I will see if I can scan parts of it. It's a very thick book.

LH: Really?

MG: Yes.

LH: If you can pull out some excerpts, it'd be great I would love to see it.

MG: I will.

LH: I would love to see it.

MG: We had a tour of all three floors. I remember narrow staircases, but it did seem like there were more offices now. That probably changed during when the law firm occupied the building.

LH: Yes, which is okay. I mean, that's what they had to make of them. They weren't going to keep them bedrooms at the time; they don't need them, but if I saw the offices, I would know exactly what room is what room, especially the one under the stairs. I guess it had to be the third floor. I'm just getting my floors mixed up, but there were the stairs that went all the way up, and then, in the back underneath there--oh, that was another cool thing. There was a bedroom there, and that was one of my bedrooms when I stayed there. The room was on a strange angle, and then, at the bottom, like from here down, were these little closets in the walls, but we never went in them because they were never used; we didn't need that much storage. They were always so creepy because we were in this huge castle and [there were] all these areas that you never really went in or opened. I remember sleeping in there thinking, "I wonder if somebody's going to come out of that thing?" [laughter] It was spooky sometimes. It was spooky up there and it was dark because it was a big building and you only had certain spotlights outside. So, that's all you had. If you were on the third floor, you're not having the spotlight on the third floor. So, it was creepy sometimes, I remember that.

MG: Yes, I can imagine.

LH: Yes, especially that stairwell. I wonder if that stairwell is still there. It was on the third floor, it went up to that door. Do you remember?

MG: I don't know if I made it there.

LH: I'd love to see that. It has to be there because that was the way to get up to that turret. It was just the weirdest looking thing to me. It stuck in my head. [laughter] Such a weird door because it was like a door way up high, but that's how we would go up to the top up there. It was neat, really neat.

MG: Is there anything else I have forgotten to ask you concerning Kip's Castle?

LH: No, just all those neat, little areas that [I] can remember seeing. The chapel was beautiful because it had all the pretty--not that we were in there very often, but they had really ornate,

stained glass windows, which were really pretty. It was always just a pretty room. All that area over there, that wood and stuff, is just gorgeous. I'm not sure what it looks like now, but it was beautiful at the time. So, it was a beautiful place. Then, they had a beautiful rose garden. That's probably not even there anymore. It was beautiful. I mean, my grandmother had all different color--so, I'm not sure if it was my grandmother--it must have been my grandmother's because it was all different color roses; it was yellow, red, pink. It was pretty big, a pretty big garden, and it was down below. We could walk down a couple of steps and it was in this big area. All those big stones were their fences, so it was really neat. What else was there? She had the other garden, which was all the vegetables. So, we always got really good vegetables there too. It was neat. It was really a great place to grow up. I was there a lot more than most kids are at their grandparents because of family dynamics, who had to work. We were young, so we had to stay with them.

MG: Right.

LH: So, it was fun. It was a really neat place.

MG: Good. Well, I'm so happy to hear much more about Kip's Castle and I'm glad we got to meet.

LH: Thanks.

MG: Thank you for spending this time with me.

LH: Yes, no problem, no problem. I'm going to scan these pictures for you.

MG: Okay, great.

LH: Then, you can have these.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 7/18/2017

Reviewed by Laura Hedley 7/1//2019