INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The Reminiscences of

Evelyn and Everett Ortner

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Evelyn and Everett Ortner conducted by Interviewer Florence Daniels on December 29, 2003. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive's Project's collection of individual oral history interviews.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The views expressed in this oral history interview do not necessarily reflect the views of the New York Preservation Archive Project.

Husband and wife Everett and Evelyn Ortner purchased a brownstone in Park Slope, Brooklyn, in the early 1960s, at a time when the neighborhood was undergoing widespread disinvestment. Over the following decades, they undertook many activities to improve and restore their neighborhood, promote it to new homebuyers, and cultivate an appreciation for historic brownstone architecture among new Park Slope residents and the general public. Everett Ortner first details the unique history and characteristics of brownstone houses and how he and his wife came to live in a Park Slope brownstone. The Ortners then discuss how they made use of Everett's skills as a journalist and publicist to promote brownstones in Park Slope to young homebuyers and to convince bankers to extend mortgages to the buyers at a time when banks were reluctant to lend in older neighborhoods.

Evelyn and Everett Ortner founded the Brownstone Revival Coalition in 1968 after buying their home in Park Slope. They organized house tours, block parties, and open houses to raise interest in the old houses and the neighborhood. Because of the difficulty they had in getting a mortgage for their home, they were active in the anti-redlining movement of the 1960s. Evelyn Ortner was an interior designer and preservationist. She was born in 1924 in Manhattan and graduated from Hunter College, then went on to study interior design at the Pratt Institute and historic preservation at Columbia University. She contributed a lot of the research to the effort to landmark the Park Slope Historic District. Everett Ortner was born in 1919 in Massachusetts and attended the University of Arkansas. He also served in the United States Army during World War II and received a Bronze Star. He then went on to be an editor at *Popular Science* magazine for over thirty years.

Transcriptionist: Session: 1

Interviewee: Evelyn and Everett Ortner Location: Manhattan, NY

Interviewer: Florence Daniels Date: December 29, 2003

Q: Would you define a brownstone for me?

Everett: Yes. A brownstone has come to be a generic name for row houses, city row houses. Because in New York City most of them are brownstones, but then there are a lot of limestones. Some rich people had row houses made of marble, some of them had brick. Then, of course, there are some old houses that are made of wood. So in New York City it has come to be the generic term for all city row houses. Some people who live in brownstones really live in wood houses, which now have plastic facades. The word has also caught on outside the United States. My wife and I went to a conference some years ago—it was a back-to-the city conference—and people in various cities were referring to their row houses as brownstones.

Q: Is there such a thing as brown stone?

Everett: Yes, there is. It's a stone that comes from the sea, as sand filters down in the sea it forms stone, and then is dug up later on. Sarah *[phonetic]*, what's the word? It's made of particles of silicon falling to the bottom of the sea, and over centuries and centuries, hardening to become an actual stone. When it's quarried it's actually a pinkish brown, but as it dries it turns a browner brown. There are many, many shades. Most of the New York brownstone comes from Connecticut, near the Connecticut River, where it was quarried and taken across the [Long

Island] Sound to New York because it was very cheap to quarry it with steam machinery these days, in the beginning of the brownstone age. It was close by, easy to ship across the water. It was carved up along the shores of Brooklyn and Manhattan. Some of it came from New Jersey also, but most of it came from Connecticut, Because it was a cheap stone, and also because it could be carved into various, wonderful designs very cheaply, also, all with steam machinery, which was the new thing in the Nineteenth Century. The brownstone became the stone of the middle classes.

Stone had formerly been the province of the ultra-wealthy. Poor people had brick houses or if they had less money, wood houses, or shacks of one kind or another. But the rich had stone. With the invention of steam machinery, which made carving, cutting and quarrying very cheap, the brownstone became available to middle-class people. So we have brownstone houses.

Q: What years are you speaking of roughly?

Everett: Well, the brownstone started, probably, much earlier, around 1845 or so. The base of, I think, Trinity Church [Wall Street] was a brownstone. They also used it even earlier, I think. City Hall had a base of brownstone—the back of it facing north, which nobody was supposed to see. It was used very little, but when it became obvious that it was carvable very cheaply, it became the stone that people used when they were building multiple dwellings. So the man who bought up a one hundred-foot lot here, which he did on Seventy-Ninth or Eightieth Street here—he would buy up one hundred feet—the land was sold at auction. He would buy up one hundred feet, and he would put in X-number of brownstone houses, one on top of the other. It was a

cheap way to build, because they had common walls. It was easy to build, and the stuff was very appealing to people at the time. It made attractive houses for very little money, in those days.

Q: You said one on top of each other. Do you mean a two- or three-story—

Everett: I mean next to each other.

Q: Oh, next to each other. I see. If I, as a novice, was walking down the street, how could I tell what was a brownstone?

Everett: If you're looking at it, it's almost certainly brown.

Q: But are there any other distinguishing features—the door, the windows?

Everett: Not particularly, I think. But of course, some of the brownstone was badly installed. If you installed it in the wrong direction, it could chip off easily and you could see it. Sometimes a whole row would be showing signs of wear and age.

Q: I see. Now let's talk about your own, personal experiences. When did you buy your first brownstone, or get interested in it?

Everett: Well, now, this is a long story. Are you ready?

Q: I'm ready.

Everett: There's more to buying a brownstone than just buying a brownstone. You're dealing with the history of the city, all the neighborhoods and what happened to those neighborhoods. Evelyn and I were married in 1953. We lived in Brooklyn Heights for ten years. We had a wonderful old brownstone, a wide, magnificent brownstone, beautifully aged.

Q: You owned it.

Everett: No, we didn't. We rented a floor in that. We rented a floor in that, and we lived there for about ten years. Then we decided we wanted to buy a house, and that was in Brooklyn Heights. The 1960s was when we started looking, and the houses there were very expensive for the time.

Q: How much were they?

Everett: A house at that time, in the Heights, would gone for forty to forty-five thousand dollars. Sometimes a little less or a little more, depending on the condition—which was a little more than we could afford at that time. So we went looking farther into Brooklyn, because Brooklyn had rows of beautiful houses. Brooklyn had, probably, if you were looking at housing stock at the time, the finest urban housing stock in the country.

Q: How come?

Everett: It was a rich community. It was built at a wonderful time, when communities were being built. It was largely built up after the Civil War, after the ’60s and ’70s. It was a place where people who worked in Manhattan could retreat to, quiet not so businesslike. There was very little business there at that time, too. And because the land could be bought cheaply by developers, they built thousands and thousands of beautiful brownstones. All the downtown neighborhoods of Brooklyn were built, typically, after the 1860s, most of them in the 1870s and '80s.

Q: Did most of the people work nearby? Was transportation—?

Everett: There was transportation that took them there. That is, they would usually take the horse cars, which ran on Flatbush Avenue and streets like that, down to the ferries that went to Manhattan. Later on, after 1883, when the Brooklyn Bridge came into being, the horse cars ran across the bridge. Later on, of course, those were electrified. But it was fast. Now it certainly was easy to get to Lower Manhattan, where most of the business was in those days. It was as easy to get there from Brooklyn as it was, let's say, from Manhattan, where the building was going on also—maybe even less traffic on the way too. So if you were living on the west side, in Manhattan, or the east side, which was as long to get to downtown Manhattan—that would be even less if you lived in Brooklyn Heights or Cobble Hill. Those areas—really downtown Brooklyn—you could be in Manhattan faster, as you can, of course, today, on the subway. It's a stop or two away.

So that was an attraction to developers, to build all those houses. Also of course, a lot of companies, of course, a lot of companies were making products that would go into those houses were situated in Brooklyn, where costs were much less than they would be in Manhattan.

Q: What products?

Everett: Well, cutting the stone, making all the woodwork that went into the buildings themselves. Now those buildings, most of them cut a lot of wood, and the products—and the skills, also—doing the carving, or doing the beautiful plaster work they have inside many of those houses, putting the floors in, the plumbing. All those other things that went into those houses could be done much more cheaply in Brooklyn than they could be in Manhattan, as they can today. It's cheaper to renovate or fix up a house in Brooklyn than it would be in Manhattan.

Anyway. At that time, when we bought our house in Brooklyn, which was 1963, all the old brownstone neighborhoods in Brooklyn were going downhill fast, as they were in Manhattan too. The whole west side was going downhill very fast, too.

Q: Why? Neighborhoods had changed?

Everett: There were many social elements. Much of what happens in the world today is fashion, isn't that right? You wear clothes that are in fashion at the time. It means they're acceptable. People buy houses that are in fashion, and they make a statement with their houses, they make a statement with their cars. They buy a Cadillac, perhaps, or a Mercedes, because it looks good to

the neighbors. All those things. So when brownstones went out of fashion because they were old—when Victorian was a bad word and nobody cared particularly for it. It was an age when geometry was more important than decoration, so that people liked flat walls instead of with carvings on them. They used to take off the carvings. They didn't particularly like high ceilings—when people bought those houses, and they would lower the ceilings, drop the ceilings. Or with the first leak from upstairs, instead of fixing the leak and repairing the ceiling, they'd just drop the ceiling.

So, as these houses became less and less fashionable for people, particularly in Brooklyn—now Manhattan people rarely go to Brooklyn. Isn't that true? You, yourself, almost never go to Brooklyn. You have no reason to. It's not a place where you would live—although the likelihood is that you'd get twice as much space for the money that you now pay, or whatever you do, whether it be an apartment or—

Q: So what happened?

Everett: They saw that people were judged by the fact that Brooklyn was not in fashion. Isn't that right? Fashion, again. Fashion is doing what everybody else does. So, following the fashion needs, following what other people do—wearing clothes that are approved—buying houses in neighborhoods that were approved. This repeats itself.

There was a decline for other reasons also. You didn't have a garage for a car. People had cars and they had to leave them on the street so that was a problem too. Also as the houses went

down, it became more and more difficult to buy a house, a brownstone, anywhere at all actually, because the houses were old and bankers didn't want to lend on old things. So it was very difficult to get a mortgage. There were many social factors, also, that contributed. There was a decline in the popularity of brownstones over the years because they were old and American people like new things. Besides the fact of the car, air conditioning came in after a while and the old houses didn't have enough electricity, although you could install it. The fact that they were old—people, particularly people with less education sometimes, didn't like old things. So that was the reason for the decline.

After World War II, with the invasion of black people, people of color, into New York City, into those neighborhoods, the neighborhoods changed. There was so-called white flight—which is a misnomer, actually. It wasn't white flight, it was the flight of the middle class.

Q: This would have been in what?

Everett: We're talking about 1950s, ’60s, ’70s. All those times. It was a flight of the middle class because the schools became unacceptable at that time.

Q: Okay. Let's fast-forward. You're looking for another house—

Everett: Well I just wanted to tell you all the conditions that prevailed at that time. That was among the factors at the time that made the houses cheap and why a lot of young people did not live in those neighborhoods and went elsewhere. Among the reasons they went elsewhere was

that it was so difficult to get a mortgage. I'm a very middle-class person who always manages money carefully—like my job. I worked at one place for thirty-three years, so that's a sign of stability. But when we wanted to buy our house in Park Slope, we went to twelve banks before we could get a mortgage. We were turned down all over.

Now at that time we could have bought a house on Long Island, in New Jersey or Westchester, for $500 down or nothing down. There were a lot of people who didn't have the cash to buy a house, couldn't buy a house here. You had to have a quarter of the price of the house to get a mortgage. We paid $32,000 for our house. To buy that house we had to have at least $8,000 plus money to move in, plus money to do what fixing up was necessary—ten or twelve thousand dollars. Most young people didn't have ten or twelve thousand dollars cash. There are young people today, with big salaries who don't have $10,000 in the bank, too.

Q: How did you find your particular house?

Everett: I’m going to get to that. This is all about brownstones, why people didn't buy them, and why they came back to them. We didn't sell brownstones because they're nice and warm in the winter or cool in the summer. You bought them because they were superior houses, and you didn't buy them because you couldn't buy them, very often. One of the reasons that young people didn't buy houses was that the schools were not good. So a young person with a couple kids who could not afford to send his kids to private schools had to leave the city. So New York City exported thousands and thousands of young people who would have preferred to live here. That also made the houses cheap, because there was no market for them at the time in many places.

We bought our houses because a man named Bob [Robert] Mackla, in Brooklyn, had started a program to sell those—

Q: Can you spell that?

Everett: Mackla. Robert Mackla. He was a man who knew how to promote things. He took an organization in Park Slope, where we bought our house that had been founded in the 1890s, called the South Brooklyn Board of Trade. He changed the name to the Park Slope Civic Council, and he had the first house tour. I'm not sure if it was the first house tour in the city or not, but it was that kind of house, in 1962. He had what the called the House and Gardens tour. It was carefully named, because he wanted people to know that there were gardens behind those houses. If you bought a brownstone, you also got a backyard that could be a garden too—could be regarded as a garden.

Q: In proportion, how big was the garden? Half the size of the brownstone?

Everett: A typical brownstone—they come in all sizes, but most brownstones are fifty feet long and twenty feet wide. So the plot itself is one hundred feet deep. The house itself may be set back ten or fifteen feet probably—it's one hundred feet in the front—and in the back you have a garden that is probably, typically, thirty, thirty-five feet long by twenty feet wide. It's a substantial garden in the city, as ours is. You can brick it in or grow things in it, sit out there and

enjoy the garden itself. In the olden days, when the houses were built, people didn't use them as gardens particularly but they used them to hang the wash out there and things like that.

Evelyn: A kitchen garden.

Everett: A kitchen garden. A little kitchen garden where you could grow tomatoes. But I think it was not the sort of thing that people did, normally, sitting out in gardens. Now in our generation, people like to sit out in their backyards—call them backyards or gardens or whatever it is.

At the time we bought our house in Park Slope, it had a little publicity because of what Bob was doing in 1962. In 1963 he had another House and Gardens tour, at a time when most people were looking for apartments rather than buying houses necessarily. So in his House and Gardens tour, he also had a couple of apartments, where people bought a floor, or were renting a floor, or renting part of a floor—whatever it was. This was appealing to young people, too, who didn't necessarily want to buy a house but wanted a place to live where they could get on the subway and go to Manhattan.

We went on one of those tours, House and Gardens tour, given by the Park Slope Civic Council. We got to visit the neighborhood and know a little about it. Then we got word from a friend of ours that there was a house for sale that we might be interested in, in Park Slope, and we looked at it.

It was a beautiful house, very well maintained. It had been turned into many apartments, actually. It was a six-family house.

Q: Six-family house. What would that—?

Everett: A legal, six-family house.

Q: Two on a floor for three floors?

Everett: It was a four-story house. The two lower floors were apartments, then the third and fourth floors had two apartments per floor.

Q: Was there a basement in any of them?

Everett: All of them have basements.

Q: And what were they used for, over the years?

Everett: Well, the basement was a place where you had a furnace and you had storage. In the olden times, when the houses were built, you stored coal there. They'd have a big place for coal. The furnaces were enormous, the hot water heaters were enormous, so you needed a lot of room.

Q: And what did that evolve into, over the years?

Everett: Well, our basement is just a big storage place; you can't do very much with it normally. Now legally, the basement is any floor where more than half of it is below street level, or part of it is below street level. So legally, in many of these houses, what we think of as the first floor is actually the basement. So legally, in our house, we have to go down into our lower floor, two steps down. So, legally, our lower floor—the bottom floor—is called the basement and we have a cellar beneath that. So what we think of normally as the basement is really a cellar.

Q: Could you rent that out? Or do people do that? Make an extra dwelling?

Everett: Well, you can, but it's difficult. You have to dig out the whole thing in order to have it deep enough. If you want to use the cellar—the basement floor is a real floor, though it's called the basement. It's called the basement. We live in that. That's our bottom floor. It's two steps down from street level. But that is the bottom floor of our house. So we actually have—we think of it as a four-story house, but legally it's three stories over a basement. Then there is a cellar below that.

Q: I see. But do people make a bedroom or an apartment out of it?

Everett: Out of the basement? Of course. They're typically rented. A house like ours, if you broke it up into apartments, could be an eight-apartment building, two *[unclear]*.

Q: Even today, with zoning and—*[crosstalk]*.

Everett: A lot of them are. Well, that's permitted. It's a livable place. The basement is a livable place, yes. It just happens to be slightly below grade.

Q: Okay. So you went on the house tour *[unclear]*.

Everett: We saw our house, which was beautifully preserved. It had six fireplaces, six bathrooms. It has magnificent plasterwork, all intact, in the house. It had many other features—beautifully designed mahogany woodcarvings, all intact. All those things were intact, even though it had been turned into a larger house.

Q: How high are the ceilings?

Everett: They're almost eleven feet, nine inches almost twelve feet. That's on the parlor floor. All the other floors are nine feet.

Q: I'm trying to get a picture of this. How many windows? There's a window, then the stairs going up, and then a window? What does the front look like?

Everett: Our front has a doorway to the left. It's a large doorway with beautiful mahogany trim and all that stuff. It has three windows, from our parlor. We're talking about the parlor floor, now. All the floors have three windows fronting the street, but some of them four windows. The third and fourth floors have four windows because if you look at the front of this building, there's

an entrance over here, then you go up a stoop into that entrance, which is the parlor floor. You go up the stoop to the parlor floor. Under the stoop there's another entrance to the basement level—to the first floor.

Q: Where is the kitchen. Would you describe the floors?

Everett: Well, there's an original arrangement of these things, and then there's a conversion of these things.

Q: Both.

Everett: Well, originally, when the house was built, there was a cellar down below. That's where they put the coal, and there was a huge furnace. We have the original furnace. It stands about seven feet high, and is an enormous monster. The rest of it, we've turned it into a laundry, also down there. There's a lot of storage space. That sort of thing. But the cellar was a functioning place, like heat and hot water primarily, and used for excess storage.

Then there is the basement, our first-floor level. That typically, in olden times, contained a kitchen in the rear, a large kitchen in the rear—

Q: —overlooking the garden.

Everett: —overlooking the garden, right, in the back. Then there's a hallway—actually, two thoroughfares—leading from the kitchen to the front room, which was the family room. One of them was just a walkway through, another one was a storage room, also. It was larger and wider, and it was lined with cabinets, where, in the old days, you kept dishes and groceries and that sort of thing. That led into the family room in the front, and that was normally where the family ate, and where the kids were taken care of. They often sat together.

This parlor floor, which is the floor at the top of the stoop. When you walked in there, into the parlor floor, you'd walk into a hallway which led straight ahead to a set of stairs going up to the floor above. But if you went off to the side, someway or other, there would be doors. Typically those were sliding doors—pocket doors they called them because they slid back into the wall itself—and that would take you into the parlor. That was the entertainment room of the place, usually large *[crosstalk]*. In our house it's thirty-seven feet long, so it's a good-size room, twelve feet high. It's an important room, in every possible way—wonderful plasterwork—that would be typical. All the woodwork is mahogany on that floor. That would be typical, too. Some of them might have cherry, something or other, but there is a lot of wood in those houses. These old houses were built in the 1870s and 1880s, which were very elaborate.

Q: And you still have the original wood?

Everett: It's all there, and wooden blinds in front that open and close and that sort of thing, and magnificent floors. We have beautiful, beautiful parquet floors, all with beautiful designs. We

have a slightly larger house than many of these houses. For example, walking on Eightieth Street, we noticed, over here—was that where I counted them, or was that Seventh-Ninth Street?

Evelyn: Eightieth Street.

Everett: Eightieth street, where they have rows of seventeen feet houses. They're much narrower here.

Now when the houses were sold, typically they were sold in one hundred-foot widths. A developer would come along, somewhere or other in the 1860s or 1870s, they would survey this side and divide it into plots. They were auctioned off, usually in one hundred-foot widths. Now a developer at that point could make a choice whether he'd like to put three houses on that, which would be a seventeen and a quarter width, or seventeen and a third feet wide, or if he'd like to have five houses twenty feet wide, on his one hundred feet. Or, would he even like to have three houses, three beautiful houses, thirty-five feet, or almost that wide.

Q: We've got two more floors to go.

Everett: Okay. Those are two floors here—the parlor floor. To the rear of that is the dining room.

Q: The formal dining room.

Everett: The formal dining room, right, which was where you entertained the preacher when he came to visit on Sunday.

Q: How did they get the food from the kitchen? A dumbwaiter?

Everett: Almost all these houses had a dumbwaiter. Now all these houses were built—for example, in Park Slope, the census of 1890 shows that the average family had two servants. So you had a cook in the basement over there, cooking, and you had a maid upstairs, perhaps serving the dinner. In our houses and in many of the houses, they had little signaling operations. They had intercoms in those houses, built into them. The lady of the house could call down and say, "Bring up the soup, Maggie." And it would come up on the dumbwaiter. Now in our houses, and many of the houses, we have what was originally a butler's pantry. So when things would come out, they'd be put in the pantry. They had all the dishes there and so forth. They might divide it up, put it on dishes, and—

Q: How did the dumbwaiter work? Pulling a rope?

Everett: A rope, to lower it up and down. Yes.

Q: What have people done with that space, now?

Everett: In many cases—they're rarely used. In fact, I haven't seen an active dumbwaiter in any of these houses. Of course, the ropes fall and things happen to them. In our case, the dumbwaiter

has been turned into, in one case, a guest closet. On our dining room floor it's a utility closet, on our first floor. And upstairs it's just there with no use at all.

Q: And there were no elevators.

Everett: Well, in those houses, in some of the very elaborate houses, they did have elevators. Now in our house, somewhere around the 1930s, there was installed something called an inclinator. There's a company in Pennsylvania that makes those, called the Inclinator Company [of America], actually, and they started to make them in 1926. Ours was probably installed in the '30s, long after the house was actually built. Our house is an 1886 house. It was owned by one woman for many, many years, who was a child when the house was built and died as an old lady, in that house too.

Q: Where did you carve the space out of, to put in the elevator.

Everett: It climbs along the stairs.

Q: *[Unclear]*.

Everett: For an elevator, you would need a certain amount of space.

Q: But where did you take it from?

Everett: Well, this inclinator goes along the stairs themselves. It folds flat against the wall, and when you want to use it, it comes out, you sit on it, press a button, and it takes you up to the next floor.

Q: I'm not familiar with that.

Everett: It doesn't intrude on that. They call them stair climbers, today, except that ours is like no stair climber you've ever seen. It was built into the house and stained to match everything, and there are no motors that show, because it has cables that go down to the cellar.

Q: Do you use it?

Everett: We had it totally refinished, and I use it all the time now, yes. It's beautiful.

Q: Now I'm missing two floors.

Everett: Okay. Now there are two floors. Those are bedroom floors.

Q: One on each side?

Everett: Well, on the third floor, in the typical house—it's hard to visualize this, but the area taken now by hallways and whatever, becomes part of the floor of the bedroom in the front of the house itself. So there was a large alcove, typically on the third floor, and that's usually the master

bedroom. That alcove will take a bed so that you have a bed in an alcove then the rest of it is almost like a sitting room, typically, in those houses. Then, in the rear, typically, you had another room, another bedroom in the rear, and often there would be a small room between those two, with its own entrance into the hall. So if you had a house like that, the fourth floor would be very much like that.

If you had a house like that, mama and papa would have the master bedroom in the front of the house, with the alcove for the bedroom. Then you would have a maid or a nurse take care of the children in the rear room, and the rooms upstairs would be either for a servant or for children. They had big families in those days, so if you had three or four or five kids, you had room for all the kids. Also there would possibly be a couple small rooms for the help.

Q: Now would you talk about the landscaping in the front when you bought it? What was a typical brownstone landscaping when they were first built?

Everett: They didn't have landscaping at all.

Q: No trees, no—?

Everett: Well, the trees would be out at the curb. On the curbside there were trees, but normally not on the property itself. Normally not. All those houses were built with slate sidewalks, usually big slabs, maybe six or seven feet square, in front of the house. They would extend those, or have other slate slabs going into the house itself. Now, of course, all those houses had a big opening in

the sidewalk, itself, in front of the house itself, because they had to have a way of delivering coal down below, to the house itself.

Q: Oh, the coal chute.

Everett: A coal chute. So you had to have huge, iron doors, or wooden doors, that opened up, so the man could come around and send the coal down to the cellar, where we stored it.

Q: Did people have window boxes? Or were there any flowers, any color? In the old days?

Everett: I don't know that they did. I think it was not common. I don't recall seeing pictures. Now what they did do in those days, originally, in the house—most of them had awnings. Those were popular at the time, over the houses.

Q: Were they colorful, or just plain?

Everett: I don't know the colors, but I imagine they were striped, for the most part. A popular stripe would have been green and white, for the most part I think.

Q: Now. Let's update it. What has time done to the typical old brownstone?

Everett: Well, because they were unpopular, and people who could have maintained them the way they were when they were built had largely disappeared or left them to their children who

were moving out to the suburbs where you could have a two-car garage for a family with some money. They became less fashionable of course. These houses tended to be bought by slumlord landlord types, who turned them into many apartments, rent them out and make a profit on them that way. That's what happened, probably—I don't know what the numbers are—maybe to three-quarters of them, something or other, in Brooklyn, downtown and many of the neighborhoods in Manhattan—Upper West Side, Chelsea. I think the [Greenwich] Village, actually, and those above it, because it was popular for other reasons. The Upper East Side had some of that but not a lot of it, because the people with money were living there and they had a lot of fancy apartment houses, which kept the neighborhoods from falling apart. Also of course, all the movements that militated against a proper community pushed people from those areas into other areas that were in better condition.

So in Brooklyn, I think, parts of Flatbush stayed fairly good, and neighborhoods like Borough Park, Bensonhurst—

Evelyn: Fort Hamilton.

Everett: Well, they stayed fairly stable, pretty much. Of course, all the people who wanted to live in the city were moving into those neighborhoods and vacating the old brownstones neighborhoods—which were also more expensive to keep, too. If you had a brownstone house, it took more gas, and in many ways became more expensive to maintain. You would do plumbing fixing and you need update the electricity. If you buy a new house it's all built in, the electrical power is all built in. With an old house you have to install it, very expensively—all those things.

Q: What about the taxes? Is there a history of up and down, up and down?

Everett: Of course, by law you can't change taxes more than a certain percentage each year. So it it's not as if they really went up and went down. But taxes, of course, in all those neighborhoods are very, very low. It's one of the attractions. They're ridiculously low, as they are on all one- and two-family houses in New York City. They're ridiculously low. So some very rich people, even in these communities around here, pay very low taxes. Certainly, on the Upper West Side they pay very low taxes. For a house like ours, in Park Slope, which is worth a lot of money today, maybe $1.5 million, maybe more, we pay about $8,000 a year in taxes. For a house like ours, of equivalent value, in Scarsdale, for example, you'd probably pay about thirty thousand dollars a year. That's a political thing, by the way.

Q: I realize. Let's go back to how they have upgraded. What would I find that would be different in the house today than it was when they were first built.

Everett: Most of those houses, or a very high percentage of them, were rent-controlled, which meant that people paid ridiculously low rent. So somebody would buy a house, and they had no incentive to do anything better. You did the least you could. Nowadays it's changed, because there is a different class of people paying very good rents, and the landlord has an incentive to improve the apartment and do nice things—to paint frequently, fix it up and to maintain it.

Q: Are they still mostly rentals today?

Everett: I don't know what the percentage is, but a lot of them are rent-controlled. In the case of our house, when we bought it, we had four tenants. Actually, when we bought the house it had six tenants in it—one for the basement floor, one for the parlor floor, and two each on the third and fourth floors. Now we got rid of the tenants, or they went very rapidly, on the first and second floors, so we had a duplex in our house and we had four tenants upstairs. Now over the years we've gotten rid of two of the tenants who occupied the rear apartments on the third and fourth floors, and on the third floor now we have a library—we have made a beautiful library—and on the fourth floor we have a guest suite, for when friends come and visit. So we have just two tenants now, in the front third- and fourth-floor apartments.

Q: Do they use the common staircase?

Everett: They use the common staircase.

Q: Do they walk through part of your apartment?

Everett: No they don't. See, that's one of the nice things about these houses. The staircases and the halls are all apart from the main floors themselves. So our parlor opens into that common staircase, but it's closed, usually, all the time. It's all separate. Actually, the house lends itself very well to be turned into apartments. That's one of the reasons they've been saved, because they accommodate themselves to small apartments and large apartments. You can live in the whole house, or you can live in one of the eight apartments there. They make very pleasant

apartments, too. Now in our house everything is original, and our tenants love that, too. They have a nice, gas fireplace. We have the original shutters on the windows and all the sculpture and glasswork there and the original walls. Our common hall is lined with lincrusta, which is a Victorian material, which has never been painted. It's all original. Much of our house is original. That's one of the reasons we bought it. The fixtures on our parlor floor are all the original gas-burning fixtures, which have been converted to electricity. So they have a quality that's very pleasant.

Q: Now what have people changed. A seven-foot furnace is probably no longer—

Everett: Well, it's unusual. It works fine so I would never think of changing it, but most people, over the years now—these houses were all built with a different kind of heating system. They were all built with a warm-air heating system, which means that you had a furnace downstairs that heated the air, and went up through ducts to all the floors above, and came out, usually, through gratings in the floor or the wall, and heated the house.

Evelyn: We have no radiators.

Everett: We have no radiators, no pipes, no nothing having to do with heating, so it's very nice. That system was perfect but it depended on gravity, that is, the warm air rises all the time. That can be very slow, and on a very cold day, let's say, if you get below freezing, often those systems were not sufficient and the house would be a little chilly. That was why, in our houses, we had supplementary gas fireplaces. You'd turn on a gas burner, which we do occasionally, to warm the

house, or to get a little extra heat if we need it. But many people back then—you know there were salesmen selling things all over—and back at the turn of the century there were people selling steam systems and hot-water systems. And because many people found that their original heating system, warm-air heating system, was not competent to deal with the problem, they would install steam systems with radiators, and all the attendant nuisance of those things. Later on, somewhere in the '20s I suspect, maybe in the '30s—I don't know the date—they started installing large fans, as part of the furnace system—

Q: In the ceiling?

Everett: Nope. It's a fan connected to the furnace itself that pumps air through the furnace, so that instead of the furnace depending on a very slow movement of the warm air moving up, this now gives it a hard push, so that the air circulates very rapidly, and that actually heats the whole house very well, without any further problem.

So somebody had to design a huge fan—the fan is five feet across—that is contained in a huge, metal shell. Somebody had to do that. In our house, we have a superior heating system. It has no pipes, no nothing, and it's very effective.

Q: What do you do for a garage?

Everett: Well, of course, we do what many people do in Manhattan, too. If you have a car you either leave it in the street and move it from side to side. We actually have a public garage we

leave it in. We have it, when we want the car we call up and they bring it to us. It's an extra expense.

Q: Nobody has their own garage because of the way the *[unclear]*.

Everett: They were not built for cars. Now here and there, as there is in Manhattan, little places where you would keep your horses or your carriages—carriage house, right. So there are some of them here and there. I know they have a lot of them in Manhattan that they've turned into houses, actually. Some of them have been turned into little apartments, or little buildings.

Q: Were there changes in the kitchen?

Everett: Well, of course, the kitchens were all modernized. It's a very different kitchen. The kitchens originally were wood-burning. They had a wood-burning stove that had it's own little chimney, to send the fumes up there. They had running water. When the house was built I'm sure they had running hot and cold water in the house, but the stove was different. They didn't have refrigerators, of course. They had iceboxes in those days, so somebody had to carry the ice in and leave it out. The houses were not as efficient. First of all, people didn't own as many things as they do today. Unless you were very rich you didn't have all sorts of containers of one kind or another to worry about.

You were going to say?

Evelyn: I was going to say, much of your part in making this happen was with the Rockefeller visit—

Everett: What I was about to say is that—

Q: Wait a minute—

Everett: What I'm giving you is what you could read in a book about brownstones. Do you know much about these things?

Q: Somewhat.

Everett: What I'm telling you is what exists in books, but that doesn't have very much to do with me, just the way they were. Now if you want a description of brownstones, or if you want me to tell you about what my part in it—

Q: That's my next chapter. Okay. Now, how did you get involved beyond just buying a house and living in it?

Everett: I'm an editor and writer by trade. Besides other publishing houses I worked for Popular Science Magazine for thirty-three years. That's what I've done for most of my professional life, editing and writing, and so forth. I started as an assistant editor at Popular Science, and retired as the editor of the magazine, after many years.

Evelyn and I bought our house in August of 1963. At that time there was the Park Slope Civic Council, which I had mentioned before, sponsoring tours—

Q: —with Bob Mackla.

Everett: Bob Mackla.

Q: He's been around since, hasn't he?

Everett: He's still around. He had a major role in promoting park services, volunteer services in the park.

Q: Wait a minute.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay. Your involvement.

Everett: In the fall of the year, when we bought our house, we attended a meeting of the Park Slope Civic Council, a members' meeting. It was held in a hall somewhere or other—I've forgotten—a church.

Q: These were the local owners?

Everett: Local people. Right. It was a small group. Very few people had moved in yet. I think when I took a picture of the pioneers of Park Slope, maybe a year or so later, we assembled maybe forty or fifty people on one big stoop, and I took one big picture of everybody, the new people who had come to Park Slope—a community with thousands of residents. But at that meeting they were planning the house tour for the next year, and they were wondering how they could get publicity. Because I know something about these things, you can write press releases and take pictures and all that sort of thing, I volunteered to start doing publicity for the community, which I did.

So over the years, for a long time, I publicized every house tour that came along. That expanded and expanded and became more of an occupation at the time. This was something that evolved over the years. I would dress up several people in period costumes, like my wife, stand her up in front of one of these brownstones, and send it away—send the picture away. In those days the *[New York] World-Telegram* was still printing and the *[New York Daily] Mirror* was still alive. They were receptive to photographs like that, so we got additional publicity that way. That was my thing.

Now among other things, somewhere around that time, maybe 1965 or somewhere or other, a friend of ours, Joe Ferris, called me up. At that time all the houses, as they were being vacated, were being bought up by the developers—people who turned them into all sorts of things—SROs ,Standing Room Only," so called, where they'd sell somebody a room and put a new lock in it—

single-room occupancy—so it was even worse than turning them into apartments, or more so. Of course, the key to maintaining those neighborhoods—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay. You were saying—?

Everett: A few years before a lot of people had been buying those houses and had no intention of living in them, but turning them into little modules of one kind of another, and then bringing in anybody they could. So the neighborhood had been deteriorating and the quality of the houses had been deteriorating, and they were poorly maintained with almost no money in them. A lot of the best houses were being ruined that way by absentee landlords who bought them up. That was the time when a friend of mine, Joe Ferris, told me about a magnificent house that was for sale on Sixth Avenue, inhabited by an old doctor, Dr. Doyle *[phonetic]*, who had a younger wife and she wanted to get out of Park Slope, which was deteriorating. The neighborhood had been deteriorating and she wanted to get out.

This was a house that was lined with walnut paneling in the whole place. It was a beautiful jewel of a house, on Sixth Avenue, in Brooklyn. I guess it would have been near Park Place, around that neighborhood on Sixth Avenue. It was for sale for $16,000. That was a very cheap price, even then. Most people who were buying houses—we brought lots of friends of ours to Park Slope to look at our house and they bought houses, and the going price at that time, for a very good brownstone on a very good block, was around twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-five

thousand dollars. This one was much cheaper. We paid more for our house—$32,000—because it was more elaborate, and had more original linings or whatever, decorative elements, still there. We paid $32,000.

Anyway, it was for sale. So Joe and I got together. We found a couple more friends who were interested in doing something about this house. Doing something meant actually getting somebody to buy it who would respect it and live in it happily. Eventually, we did find a very nice young couple who bought the house—

Q: A single tenant.

Everett: Well, not a tenant, a single buyer, to buy the house.

Q: A buyer. To live in it.

Everett: What was their name? Pierce *[phonetic]*? Anyway, they bought this house. So there were four of us who got involved in this.

Evelyn: *[Unclear]*.

Everett: No. It began with a P. Anyway, we found someone to buy that house, then we found a few more people, and we thought we would form a little rescue organization, to buy up houses cheaply and then find the right people to buy them. Because most of these houses would come on

sale, nobody would come up on the market, nobody would know that they were there—desirable people—our meaning of desirable—didn't know about these things, so they were bought by the people who bought them up into apartments—the changing neighborhood.

So we agreed to form an organization to do that. We started an organization to see that the proper people, the people we wanted would buy those houses. That meant a lot of publicity to get this going.

Q: There were only six of you originally?

Everett: Actually, we started with four, then we got some more. Eventually, we ended up—we gave it a very unimaginative name—Park Slope Betterment Committee—to publicize it. Because I was a publicist and I knew about what to do, we got a lot of publicity. This started in many, many ways. First of all, I sent out press releases, which nobody ever did before, to all the newspapers, and then we sent out pictures. Then we organized tours, in addition to the annual tour, given by the Park Slope Civic Council, we organized our own special tours. And that means every time we found a house that had been bought by somebody or other, in some community that we wanted to publicize—tor example, we would say, this part of Sixth Avenue needs heavy promotion. We would have a tour of houses in that community—a half-dozen houses.

The themes of those changed. The first themes we started with were, believe it or not, “Houses you can buy for $20,000.” What we did was get a list of all the houses that were for sale and there were a lot of houses for sale. People were getting out. We would have somebody make a

list, go to all the real estate people, and there were not many at the time, and make a list of all the houses that were for sale.

Q: Did you charge for these tours?

Everett: No, we paid for them ourselves. They were all free, all free. All the expenses we paid for ourselves, too. We'd chip in ten bucks a piece into a pot. When that got used up, we would put in more money. All the work was done ourselves, and everybody who came to those tours—after a while there were hundreds and hundreds of them. We started with what you could buy for $20,000. People would go to those houses and look at them. A lot of them were not beautiful houses or were not in good shape. But, nonetheless, others were encouraged to find that somebody had ladders up and paintbrushes out, and was working on them. They would look at the house, and they would understand the value.

So we had a series of tours, starting with what you could buy for $20,000, and as prices went up, what you could buy for $25,000, for $30,000, in all those communities.

Q: What age people were coming in?

Everett: All young. All young. All young.

Q: What we would call yuppies, today?

Everett: Well, of a kind, yes, but these were very stable people, looking for homes, houses, not what you might think of as yuppies, maybe.

Anyway, we found after a while—we kept card files of everybody who came on the tour, so we would always know who he was, and he would get a notice. Now the notice would list on one side all the houses that were for sale at that time. On the other side it would list all the things that were going on in Park Slope. It was a time of ferment in the community, and block parties had been started up on a number of blocks. So we would, in the summertime, list the block parties that were going on, all the other things. If there was a concert or some kind or other in one of the churches, we'd list them—all the neighborhood things.

Q: Was there a community newspaper, like *Our Town* or something?

Everett: No, nothing like that at the time. We did it all ourselves. Then we had this mailing list, we grew and grew and grew. We would have letter—envelope-writing parties, get four or five people sitting around a couple tables, and we'd address five hundred to six hundred letters. Eve *[phonetic]* was a big signer, I was known as a licker, licking the envelopes. That went on for a long, long time that we did that. It was a major promotion.

Now what we did was we went after all the young people in Manhattan. The story was for what you would pay for a two-room apartment in Manhattan you could buy a house in Brooklyn. Which was true. So we got a lot of people who would not normally have thought of buying a

house in New York City at all. We got schoolteachers, artists, young people, professionals—all those people, family people of all kinds, typically—

Evelyn: —and bankers and lawyers.

Everett: Young bankers and lawyers. In those days there were a lot of bankers and lawyers who didn't make the big money they make now. Later on we made a study of the people who bought houses during those years; virtually all of them were college graduates, a very high percentage of them had further degrees, graduate studies or whatever.

Q: When you say those years, what years are we talking about?

Everett: Probably the five years from 1966, ’67 into the early ’70s. We had those tours of all kinds. We were doing heavy, heavy promoting all this time.

Q: Was this still the original group of four?

Everett: Well, it changed somewhat. Joe Ferris eventually bowed out. I was the guy who ran the thing for a long time. I ran this organization for a long time. It was very effective, and we did get thousands of people coming in. Now what we would do also in those times, we were very friendly with Father Buck, what was his name? Clifford [A.] Buck, who was the priest of the local [St. John's] Episcopal Church. He was very helpful to us. He let us use the undercroft—of

the church for our meetings of one kind or another. It was a large area, maybe fifty by sixty feet, something of the kind. Very large. We would set up stations in there.

Every time we had a tour this was the pattern. You would come on the tour, you would start at a certain place to see the tour. You would go from house to house to house. At the end somewhere there would be a place where you could talk to people. They would serve lemonade and cookies or whatever, so that at the end of the tour you could talk to people there, and have a neighborly feel about it. You felt that there was a community there. Then in the undercroft of St. John's Church we set up stations. So there would be a station there for lawyers. You could find out what was involved in that. There were bankers talking about mortgages. Somebody talking about schools. This was something I learned in the [United States] Army. You used to call them—

Q: A service station.

Everett: They had a name for it in the Army, which I've forgotten now, where you want to teach something you have specific groups and people walk around—

Q: One-stop shopping.

Everett: Right. Exactly like that. So we did that for a long time, and that was all very successful. We were selling houses, or, people were buying houses.

Evelyn: We were not selling them.

Everett: No. I never bought any house other than my own. A major problem at times was getting mortgages for these houses.

Q: Well, you had that problem years before.

Everett: Yes. I almost didn't get it. A lot of people were turned away because they couldn't get a mortgage, or they didn't have enough money or whatever, a lot of desirable people. At that point we made a survey of all the people who had bought houses in our community. As I said, virtually all were college graduates, people in very responsible jobs of one kind or another. Young people who all had trouble getting mortgages. We all had troubles. So we did two things.

First of all, with a survey, we wrote to David Rockefeller, who was then head of Chase Bank. We told him nobody was getting a mortgage from Chase Bank, how come? We got a very nice letter from the vice-president of Chase in charge of mortgages. So we went up there, and we made a presentation, four or five of us. We had all the figures of who these people were and the desirability of those houses, the desirability of bringing people like that into New York City instead of exporting them to the suburbs. We spoke to a man named Sawyer *[phonetic]*, who was very responsive to what we said.

One of the things about our houses was that these were—

[INTERRUPTION]

Everett: Anyway, we made a presentation to this man there, and one of the things going for us was the fact that all the people who came to these houses were looking for the old features that these houses had. They were not tired of them. So after we told this to Sawyer, we explained to him the difficulty of getting mortgages, and how the appraisers from the bank would often turn their thumbs-down on the houses. So he called in his chief appraiser. He said, "Now all these people are interested in buying brownstones. What do you think of that?" And the man said, "Oh, they're great houses. If you just get rid of that old stuff there, you're all set." The minute he heard that he understood the problem that the appraisers had with our houses. They regarded this "old stuff" as a minus factor. We thought this was why these people were coming in to buy these wonderful old houses. As a result of that, very soon after that, the Chase Bank committed itself to $100 million in mortgages to all the neighborhoods in New York City. That opened the gates.

Now another thing we did at the same time, because banks were not cooperating with us and giving mortgages, we had a big discussion about that we thought, well, should we picket them and do all those things? Instead, we decided to go the other way and make friends. So we had a cocktail party for them, and one of the members of our group was a rich banker who had a beautiful house covered with fancy paintings and all sorts of things, living the way a rich person would live. That's where we had our party. Now the bankers who came there represented, I don't know how many banks, but it was quite a party. Bankers go where they get free liquor.

Anyway, the environment impressed them; at the same time, it gave them the message. We gave them exactly the same thing. We had charts up showing how many people worked in this, how

many people worked in that, the educational level, and the financial level. Obviously, they made more than average people did, with their education or whatever, so that was appreciated. But the best thing about that was that we kept names of people, of the different banks, and thereafter, when somebody had trouble getting a mortgage for his house, he could call me up and I would call up somebody, a banker, and say, "This guy here can't get a mortgage. He's been turned down by three banks. Can you do something?" It was very effective. So we eventually solved the mortgage problem.

Evelyn: Tell what happens today, when you meet somebody you don't know.

Everett: Well, that's another thing. Over the years—this is all twenty, twenty-five years ago or so. About two weeks ago I was in a little copy shop, getting something copied, and some guy came up. "Aren't you Mr. Ortner?" I said, "Yes. Do I know you?" He said, "You were the guy who got me a mortgage, twenty-five years ago." So that was very terrific.

So that's one of the nice things in the area of promotion. Now we had evolved over a period of time a program for publicizing and reviving a community. You did this sort of thing—I gave house tours of a particular type. Everybody who came you got on a card somewhere, or you knew something about them. You gave them a chance to educate themselves about the community and about the houses and what they should know—all those things. There was a procedure. We had something like a ten-part procedure. Other communities came to us also, so they could come on one of our tours and they could get an education in how to do this, how we

promoted it. We gave them samples of our releases so they could model them after that, and they started doing that in several other communities.

Q: How large a community did you service? What are we talking about—ten thousand homes?

Everett: Well, Park Slope had—I've forgotten how many houses.

Evelyn: It was about 180,000 people.

Everett: A lot of people. Maybe eight to ten thousand homes. It's a large community. Park Slope ranges from Flatbush Avenue on the north to the Prospect Expressway, which is about Seventeeth Street, on the south. And on the east it goes from Prospect Park, west to Fourth Avenue. So that's an area probably five or six blocks wide by twenty blocks long. Maybe one hundred square blocks. Something like that.

Evelyn: It was all like Greenwich Village, at one point, they've added some stuff—

Everett: Now, of course, the community has expanded into a larger area. Real estate people sell houses that are not really in the old Park Slope, but are given Park Slope names, or one thing or another.

Anyway, as a result of all this, because we were serving a large community or were interested in doing it, we formed a citywide organization originally called the Brownstone Revival

Committee, renamed more recently the Brownstone Revival Coalition. That's the name of this organization, which still exists and still puts out a newsletter—a copy of which I have here for you, so you can see. What we started doing—first of all we got an office in Manhattan, because people from Manhattan don't go to Brooklyn but people from Brooklyn will go to Manhattan for whatever reason. The man who helped put us all together was Ken [D. Kenneth] Patton, who was then—

Evelyn: —an economic something. An economic developer.

Everett: Right. An economic developer. Originally it was a council or something like that, formed by Mayor [John V.] Lindsay. He got us an office in his place there, so we could meet there and have an address in Manhattan. Also he taught me a lesson. He said, "In order to have this organization work permanently, you need to have a paid employee. If you depend entirely on volunteers, they work this week, they don't; they get old, they get sick; and the continuity, the possibility of continuity is lessened." He got a grant or he got money from somewhere or other, I guess from the [New York City] Economic Development Council. Actually, he was chairman of the Economic Development something-or-Other, but he was also vice-president of the Economic Development Council. So they supported us for a long time, and that way we got a permanent employee so we could put out a newsletter, and also started a series of public meetings. So our first lecture on brownstones was the “Brownstone Architecture”. It was held at Donnell Library [Center], on Fifty-Third Street.

Evelyn: Opposite the Museum—

Everett: Opposite the Museum of Modern Art. The library is still there.

Evelyn: So they seat, or they did at that time 299 people. The first lecture we gave was given by Clay Lancaster, who was an architectural historian. We were mobbed. They were lining all the rails around there. It was the beginning of the brownstone frenzy, the mania, where people suddenly were looking for brownstones and finding them. A really crazy time.

Q: What year would that be?

Everett: This was probably about 1969 to 1970, somewhere around that time. So that started us off on a series of lectures. For many years we would have two lectures each year at the Donnell Library, and we did it until last year when we did the last of our Donnell Library lectures, because the subject is not as exciting now as it was twenty years ago, when it was a new world.

Q: What happened?

Everett: Well, I think at the time there was a possibility of people with little money or not so much money buying a house. Now these houses go for millions of dollars, and the people who can afford them, have them or can buy them. It's changed. Also, now everybody has the message. Everybody knows these are good. They're in the newspapers all the time. *The New York Times* has big articles about them. So it has changed.

So we did that. We also had a wonderful lecture by—what's the name of your famous professor from—?

Evelyn: Henry Russell Hitchcock.

Everett: Henry Russell Hitchcock was one of the great gurus of preservation or whatever. He gave one of our lectures also.

Evelyn: And Jim Fitch.

Everett: James Marston Fitch also, one of the great gurus of—they were among the early people who lectured at our series, and drew crowds of people. That was another thing we did. And we expanded.

We put out our newsletter here. Within a year or so after we founded the Brownstone Revival Coalition we had almost two thousand members, from nowhere, from nothing at all. People just came to the lectures and became members, or heard about us being members.

Q: What were the charges for membership?

Everett: At that time it was $25.

Evelyn: But you got you a publication.

Everett: But you got the publication, you got invited to our lectures, and that sort of thing. Now, of course, we're down to about six hundred members, but the organization still exists. Off and on I edited the newsletter, but for the last ten years, or fifteen years, I guess, I've done this alone. This is the last one I'm going to edit. I've announced we're going to have to get somebody else to do these. So anyways, there's a present for you.

This was all part of the promotion. Now around 1971 or '72 Brooklyn Union Gas Company got involved with us, and it happened in this way. They were looking for an old house in which they could install modern gas equipment for demonstration purposes, and they bought a house in a community adjoining Park Slope. Actually, it was in Prospect Heights, but not far away. The community rose up in arms against having a demonstration house here. They visualized hundreds of people coming through the community and all this traffic, which they didn't want, and on and on and on. So they passed resolutions and did all the things to dissuade the Brooklyn Union from doing that.

We heard about that, and on our block—we live on Berkeley Place. On Berkeley Place, on the next block, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, there was a house that had been in litigation for many, many years, and had turned into a wreck. The windows were broken, and pigeons were living there, and the roof leaked—everything bad about a house was bad. So I got a hold of those two people—actually, they were two men, public relations men, from Brooklyn Union, and we proposed that they buy that house and restore it, which they did, over a period of time. I think they bought it for $17,000, as I recall—something like that, in that neighborhood. It was a very

successful project for them, enormously successful. People passed through by the hundreds. Now actually, Evelyn designed the house. They furnished it and designed what happened to it. All those things, really a model house, and it had gas equipment there. They had a gaslight burning, they had to give it a few good, old, Victorian charms, that sort of thing.

Anyway, it was enormously successful, and Brooklyn Union Gas Company won the national award from the American Gas Association for the best publicity project in the country. So it really paid off for them. That encouraged them to do something else. There was another man—what's his name? Nat Hendricks. He was forming a little coalition somewhere, in Brooklyn also, which was the Brooklyn Brownstone Conference, and I was heavily involved with that.

Q: What was the purpose of that?

Everett: To get people together in common causes. So among the things, he put on little projects of his own, at the Brooklyn Brownstone Conference. We actually had, in 1971, an enormous "Brownstone Ball," which was held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music [BAM]. They had a big space, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music was just coming to light at that time. It was good for them and good for us at the same time.

But we had proposed to the Brooklyn Union Gas Company that we have a brownstone theatre; that we take a space somewhere or other, and put up exhibits from all the other brownstone communities in order to attract people. So the Brooklyn Union Gas Company agreed to try it on an experimental basis, and we took a floor in the hotel on Montague Street. What's that old hotel,

that's now—you know the hotel. Anyway, it's an old hotel. They took a floor in that and arranged a series of exhibits, representatives of some of the communities here. It was enormously successful.

So the next year, I think that was 1972, Brooklyn Union Gas Company had its headquarters in Brooklyn on Montague Street. It was a block deep, actually. It went onto the next street, which was Pierrepont Street. The next year I think it was 1972, they vacated that entire floor, and they built little booths all along, eighty booths. Every community in Brooklyn had a booth there. Then they had booths for all the insurance companies, and banks and police and health departments. Everybody who had anything to say about Brooklyn had a booth there.

Q: What year was that?

Everett: Seventy-two. Nineteen-seventy-two. In addition to that, they had a fleet of buses, six buses, going out to different communities. So, for example, if you wanted to see what the Fort Greene neighborhood was like, you'd get on the Fort Greene bus. You could get on a bus going to Bedford-Stuyvesant, a bus going to Park Slope, a bus going to these half-dozen different communities—

Evelyn: With a tour leader on each.

Everett: —with a tour leader on each. Or, rather, you would go there and there would be a tour guide waiting for you. You'd get a tour of the neighborhood, come back, and an hour and a half

later, when you came back, you could go out on another tour, so you could see a couple different communities.

Those fairs ran for seven years, weekends. They were weekend fairs, Saturday and Sunday, and we clocked, one year—I think it may have been the third or fourth year we were doing that—we clocked twenty-five thousand people coming through that fair. That's how many.

Q: Over the weekend.

Everett: Over a weekend. So if you were interested, coming from Manhattan and buying a house—and the houses have been going up in price. We're talking about sixty-five, seventy-five, eighty-thousand dollars or a hundred, going up steadily in price, as they became popular and as people came to know them. Of course now as more and more people got friends in those communities.

Now I worked for *Popular Science*, as I said, for many, many years. When I went to work there not one person—we had a staff of thirty-five people—not one of them lived in Brooklyn. I was the only one who lived in Brooklyn. Almost all of them lived outside of Manhattan. I think two or three of them might have lived in the city itself. They were all suburban people. That was true of many white-collar job people, living outside—clerical types.

Now Brooklyn Union, also, did a lot of advertising. They had commercials: "Come to the fair this weekend." All those things, promoting, promoting. They also made a movie. It was called

Cinderella of Berkeley Place, which was about that house, showing it in its original state, and what it turned out to be. They made another film, also, Brownstones of Brooklyn, and then another one, also—I forget—that was the other one about—because they were doing so well at this, they were very interested in doing other things. There was one block—what was that block? Had turned it into old mattress block. I don't know you're old enough to recall, those were like—if people had old mattresses, they would take them onto that block. It was a garbage block. So they actually restored a couple of houses over there, then they put in a Brooklyn Union headquarters there, a building, to promote things—the information headquarters they put on that block, restoring the whole block. It was beautiful, and they made a movie out of that.

So with all that promotion, we had a major commotion in New York and people came and bought houses and bought houses and bought houses.

Evelyn: From all over.

Everett: From all over, actually. I remember getting letters from people. They would get a copy of the Brownstone Newsletter or hear my name, and we would get letters from them saying, "We expect to come to New York next year. How do I buy a brownstone." We had a couple of people in Paris who remain members, who've got special stamps on them, because we had to mail the – *The Brownstoner* to Paris. All those things. So it stirred a lot of other things.

As a result of that, we expanded still further. It occurred to us that because we had a program in New York that was so successful in stimulating buying in an old neighborhood and bringing that old neighborhood alive again, we thought we would go national.

[INTERRUPTION]

Everett: I was talking about our party or the fairs, which was the brownstone fairs of the Brooklyn Union Gas Company, which were so enormously successful. They ended after seven years, for reasons that had nothing to do with the success of the fairs—because they were always very successful—but the man who promoted it, a man named Fred Rider, from the Brooklyn Union Gas Company, he retired. He was succeeded by a guy who was not interested in that kind of revival. So Brooklyn Union ceased sponsoring the fairs, although they continued for a period, having some small interest in it, and then that, too, died. Because at that point they had a president of Brooklyn Union who was looking toward a different ambition for the company. He wanted to expand it, and they changed the name to Keyspan Energy and did various other things. It ceased to be directed toward Brooklyn itself, but had a larger outlook for the company itself. So Brooklyn Union ceased to be a part of our partnership.

Now a couple things I was going to mention along the way. One of the things that contributed to the destruction of the brownstones in all the cities, but very heavily in Brooklyn, was the demolition program subsidized by the United States government, as part of a model cities program under President [Lyndon B.] Johnson.

Q: Was this HUD [United States Department of Housing and Urban Development]?

Everett: No, no. It was a separate operation. I believe it was separate. They were subsidizing the demolition of houses in New York. The pattern was something like this. As you know, many of the old neighborhoods, both in New York and the Bronx particularly, destroyed parts of Manhattan by people who came in during the black invasions in New York City. There was a lot of crime, and there were people there who were totally irresponsible. They destroyed things, and the houses, because they were old and because they were easily divided into apartments –they fell into the hands of people who made money out of the worst conditions, and were deteriorating rapidly.

A typical pattern was this. A house, after a while, would become unlivable; that is, people would tear the walls apart, they'd do this, they'd set fire to it. There was nobody living in there. Then some vagrants would come in there. They would set fire to it, in the course of heating their food or whatever it was—shooting dope—so after a while a house would become unlivable. Then a man from the Buildings Department [New York City Department of Buildings] would come around and say the house was dangerous and should be demolished. Then there was a whole demolition program. There was a department of demolition in the city, which would handle the demolition.

Now, typically in New York City and probably elsewhere in other places, if you had a house that was in bad condition and you tore it down, you then created a lot, and that lot became a receptacle for garbage and old carriages, and mattresses, people and whatever it was, and that

would start destroying the block. Even if you had a good house next to it, you would want to get out. So you would sell your house to some guy who would run the house the way he had run a preceding house that would eventually get destroyed. The house would be sold for nothing. People abandoned them, and the city took over. The city didn't take care of them, and all those things would happen.

So there was a department of demolition. The thing was to keep that first house from being demolished to save a block. Now we had a friend, or a guy we knew well, anyway, who was head of the Department of Demolition in the city. That was—

Evelyn: You mean Rick?

Everett: No, no.

Evelyn: Sam.

Everett: Sam Azadian, head of the department of demolition. This was one of the things created by Mr. Lindsay, who created little departments where all his friends got jobs—which was true. Sam Azadian was head of that department, and we knew him well. I knew him well. Anyway, I got him to give us a list of all the houses to be demolished, where they were. By this time we're talking about the middle '70s or whatever it was, maybe earlier than that. Probably. We would look at the list, several of us, for communities that we knew or streets that we knew that were still pretty good. So we would call up somebody. If we had somebody over there that we knew

well, we'd call them up and say, "Hey, this house is being threatened. See what you can do." Usually, it was useless, because not only was it considered a good thing to tear down those old houses, but it gave employment to a lot of people who had no skills otherwise.

Q: These were brownstones?

Everett: Yes, beautiful houses. At one time beautiful houses. So these brownstones were being torn down for the most part, in these old communities, and people did not consider it a waste at all. "Oh, we're just getting rid of these, and we'll replace them with better housing." Now the possibility of replacing them with better housing, if you think in terms of living space—bigger rooms, high ceilings, some civilized things about it—they adapted themselves very well to modern apartments. Nevertheless, they were going very fast. So we would try to get the word to somebody in those communities who could save them. There was a small group in Bedford Stuyvesant springing up, to try to do something, and in other communities we had friends. We tried that.

Now a couple of times, when a house in our own community in Park Slope—which was at that time doing fairly well—but, nonetheless, there was a house on—

Evelyn: Park Place?

Everett: No. I forget where it was—that we tried to save. It's the one where they built a new house in its place. It comes right off Flatbush Avenue. Anyway, it was a house that was in fairly

good condition actually, and was scheduled for demolition. So we talked to the contractor and we gave him a a hundred bucks just to hold off for a day, while we had a lawyer friend go into court and try to save it. The guy who owned it lived someplace else and had long ago lost interest in it, and on and on and on. We tried to save it. We lost a couple other houses like that.

Now the city got $5,000 as a subsidy for demolishing a house, which was the cost of it. So the city paid for the demolition. For about one thousand dollars we could have saved the house. We could have put stone blocks, or concrete blocks, in the windows, blocked up the whole thing so nobody could get in, and it would have stood there, waiting for a better time. Better than that though, it would have saved it from being an empty lot, which would collect garbage and destroy it. There was no interest in doing that at all. No interest. Thousands and thousands of very good houses were destroyed that were later replaced by public housing, and you know the fate of public housing, or much of it anyway.

So that was one of the programs we had that did not work. But it was also part of the feeling at the time that if you just got rid of those old houses, you would do better. There was a feeling also that kids who wandered into old houses would automatically be committed to crime. If only we could put up nice, new, modern houses, then they would live worthy lives instead of being criminals. That was one of the things we did.

Now let's see. I think I've covered much of what I—of course, we had block parties all the time, going on there. There was a major group—in fact, we have a wonderful sign down in our cellar, about eight feet long, that says, "Brownstone Café" *[crosstalk]*. We put up the sign and then

people would cook chickens, make food, we'd put out tables and things and make a party, make life a big party—which was part of it.

That's a funny thing now, just as an aside. Our block parties, on our street, Berkeley Place we used to have a couple of block parties every summer, for a long, long time—bring people around, have fun. Kids would have things to do. It was just one way of having fun in the neighborhood, and people meeting people. In those days everybody among the pioneers knew everybody. It was a community of people who were interested in preserving the community. So I remember at the time we had our Berkeley Place block party. We funded this—whatever costs there were if there were any, like sending out invitations, all those things, and everybody put a dollar in the pot. That's how we did it. Now because we got some publicity out of all these things, I was invited to go to Sixty-Third Street, on the East Side, where they were forming a block association. I don't know why they thought they needed one but they did. So there were all these people talking about things, and there was one woman there, she was the wife of a man who had been—

Evelyn: Very famous.

Everrett: —secretary of the army or something like that, very rich. So I sat with her while they were having this discussion, and she said to me, as an aside, "You know our house is the only one here that has an indoor pool." *[Laughter]*.

Q: Wow. Wow.

Everett: Then they would discuss, "Well, how much shall we put in?" So somebody said, "Well, shall we put in $75 a piece." And everybody said sure. I was thinking of our one dollar a piece people at Berkeley Place.

But also one of the things we saw, among the models we had—you could live in a house like a millionaire on Sixty-Third Street. A schoolteacher can live in a house in Park Slope, the same house, like a millionaire lives on Sixty-Third Street. Now often it would actually be a better house. People on the Upper East Side have a lot of money. They can call in an architect to remove all the decorative stuff, paint over the wood, put in different windows. Down here we look at those windows over there, they've got these enormous windows that have nothing to do with the original. They're twelve panes, fourteen panes, you put in little balconies, all those things. So in case there is some of the old architecture preserved, people who are rich don't preserve them. They destroy them. They have their architect. But the poorer people, in the poorer neighborhoods, what they do—even the poorest class of buyer of those houses—that transfers them into rooming houses. They just drill holes in the wall and the doors so they can put in another lock, and another lock. Otherwise, he doesn't spend any money on the house. So the houses are preserved pretty well, or many of them are.

So those were all the things that came along the way, in a long career of preserving brownstones and doing what we could to bring people in. Of course, now we've brought in more people than we need in the neighborhoods, and when you walk through Park Slope and all the adjoining communities, it's lovely—civilized people. When Evelyn and I bought our house in 1963, our big

commercial street, with all the stores, probably a third of them were vacant, maybe a quarter of them were vacant, empty.

Evelyn: And no babies.

Everett: No children. No children. No children, anywhere. People with children were moving out. They didn't stay there, because the schools were impossible. We brought in friends from outside, nice liberal people we met in Manhattan. We went to a party, they'd come visit us, want to buy a house. But if you had children, school-age children, coming to Park Slope, the schools were intolerable. We had some friends who put their kids in school for a year, then took them out and sent them to a private school. Now if you could not afford a private school, you couldn't live in the neighborhood. So all the nice people, who would have been middle-class people, who would have been wonderful citizens of New York, we exported to other communities—exported them to wherever they went; to where the schools were better. Of course, there was a policy at the time of bussing black kids in, so they bussed them in, and in that case, where the schools were halfway tolerable, it turned them all black.

Now our friends—little Andrew Marshall *[phonetic]* went to a school like that for one year. The kids all had a bad experience. They had bicycles there, they lost them. If they had money they were shaken down. So all these things happened at the time. All those things made the neighborhood more difficult to live in. So you had to have people willing to overcome those problems. Now, of course, we have a couple schools that are pretty good, and a high school, a

local high school, which has been all black up to now, is in the process of being made into something else, so everybody can go there.

Q: This is beginning to sound dèja vu, from when you first started. So you start all over again.

Everett: There are many battles going on in the city itself, to overcome its problems. But there is more hope for the city in communities like that, where there are a lot of intelligent, middle-class, very liberal people, willing to cope with it, rather than just fleeing, and going out.

Q: What are the main problems in Park Slope now.

Everett: Actually, they're minimal. In a way we never had before—we had one reasonable restaurant in Park Slope when we moved there. If you wanted to go to a restaurant that was it. Otherwise, there were hamburger places. Now the streets are lined with restaurants, fancy, wonderful restaurants.

Evelyn: Expensive.

Everett: Expensive. We had dinner last night in a wonderful restaurant. So you choose among twenty good restaurants on Seventh Avenue, Fifth Avenue, Smith Street, lined with wonderful restaurants, expensive. Now on Saturday night, two Saturdays ago, Evelyn and I were going to eat out at a restaurant. We drove around. We drove from restaurant to restaurant, and they were all full. On Saturday night at eight we could not get into a restaurant. We eventually ended up

picking up a pizza or something like that, and taking it home. That's what's happened to that community.

Evelyn: And all young.

Everett: And young. Now the streets are lined with baby carriages, and nannies taking care of the kids. Of course it reflects the population now. The house next door to us just sold for a million and a half dollars, and it doesn't compare with our house in beauty or whatever it is. So I don't know what ours is worth, but it's real money. That's what's happened in recent years. There are no major problems. Now I think if the school problem could be solved—we now have one good school, [P.S.] 321, that operates fairly well. The high school is not a good school. So if you have a bright kid, who can go into Stuyvesant, or get into Stuyvesant or one of those, he's okay. Otherwise, you have to pay for a private school, $15,000 a year or something—

Q: Minimum.

Everett: Minimum, right. So that's a problem. Now I think that the neighborhood is really deserving of a good school and I think eventually it will have it. There's a program now to take our local high school, John Jay High School, and do something special with it, starting this coming year, I guess. So we'll see what happens.

Q: Are you going to appeal to the Board of Ed [New York City Department of Education] to try and get things done?

Everett: Somebody else is doing that. I have my little business that I handle, but all the other things, like getting the streets cleaned or whatever, that's somebody else's problem.

Evelyn: *[Unclear]* hospital.

Everett: *[Crosstalk]* handles that.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay. Go.

Everett: Now because we of the Brownstone Revival Coalition thought that we had a good program that worked in New York City—or, it was at the right time, anyway, for doing these things, when there was a shortage. Prices were very high in Manhattan, and there were a lot of young people going there, looking for housing, and the brownstone movement took off, because it showed them the possibility. So we thought we had a good program and we wanted to go national with it. So we decided to have a national conference. We went to the Waldorf Astoria [Hotel] and we sent out something like—we now had funds for this—something like eleven thousand invitations to our party, to our conference in New York, which was called Back to the City. Back to the city, bring people back to the city, on the basis of the old housing that most of the cities had. All the cities in New York, or most of them, eventually ended up with rich patrons in the city itself. So those old houses, often people left behind. People either moved as the

neighborhoods changed, as the innate kind of city it was changed. The old houses were abandoned.

[INTERRUPTION]

Everett: Because we thought we had a program at the Brownstone Revival Coalition for saving old neighborhoods and using them as a way to preserve the city itself, by keeping people in the city itself, we decided to have a conference at which we could talk about the things we had done and get ideas from other communities, where similar things were going on. So we decided to have a conference called Back to the City, bring people back to the city, using the old neighborhoods as a core for reviving the city. We sent out eleven thousand invitations, and as a result we had 250 people from all over the country coming to our conference at the Waldorf Astoria.

Evelyn: This was *[unclear]*.

Everett: This was '82 city. That was in 1972. We had a conference rate from the Waldorf Astoria of $36 a room. That's how long ago that was, more than thirty years ago. We got all those wonderful people. We established a pattern for these things that we used throughout the conferences, year after year. Friday night everybody would come in and we would have a wonderful conference, we would have a wonderful cocktail party, and that was the year we had it at the Century Club. You know the Century Club, right? We had a wonderful party, for our friend Brendan Gill, at the time. Everybody loved it. Then on Saturday we had an all-day

conference, discussed with lectures. We had the president of the National Trust [for Historic Preservation], Mr.—

Evelyn: Jimmy [James] Biddle.

Everett: —Jimmy Biddle. He came from Washington. We actually had a friend who was working for the National Trust at the time—I can't remember his name—who wrote his speeches, so they all sounded pretty good, and said pretty much what we wanted them to say. Now the National Trust had never discovered cities before. It was made up of little old ladies who were preserving Jefferson's home, or this one's home, or whatever. But to tackle preservation in the city, a whole community was a new thing. We got our friend, who had actually been a former board member of the Brownstone Revival Coalition, gone to Washington and worked elsewhere—he was now working for Jimmy Biddle. He wrote the speeches and—

Q: What was his name? It'll come.

Everett: Tom somebody-or-other. He wrote speeches for Jimmy Biddle, announcing that the National Trust would now get involved more in city things. They took some of my slides so Jimmy Biddle could put on a little show, showing nice things in the city, to worry about. All those things. So that helped the National Trust to kick off also in new directions. These were rich ladies who had nothing to do but worry about the houses of famous citizens, or whatever.

Evelyn: Jim Fitch used to say they were, "Blue-haired ladies in tennis shoes".

Q: Oh, yes. In New York, yes.

Everett: So that kicked off a new program for us. We thought it was going to be a one-time conference. But the people who came there found it so worthwhile that they wanted to have a conference in their own cities each time. So we had a group of people who were very hot in St. Paul, Minnesota. They were dying to show us.

Now incidentally, the pattern of this thing evolved at the first conference. We said we had 250 people. We said in advance, not knowing how many people would come, that everybody who came to that conference would have a Saturday night dinner at a brownstone house in New York City. So I had my genius over here, working it out. We got a lot of people we knew together. They would each say, "Well, I'll take ten or twelve people, I'll take thirteen, I'll take six—"

Evelyn: No, they took four and –six.

Everett: Well, they took all sorts of numbers, in I don't know how many locations. Maybe fifteen or twenty, around the city, Manhattan and Brooklyn, for the most part. Every one of these people got a paper, telling him how he would get to his destination. If he was going to the Village, on Eleventh Street or whatever, he had a paper that would say, "From the Waldorf Astoria get on this bus." Every one of them got one of those papers, when he signed in. He was assigned to a particular place.

This is now thirty years later. Some of the friendships made at that time, by the people who came to New York and had dinner at somebody's house in Brooklyn or Manhattan, still exist. The people are still friendly, because of the warmth of the occasion itself. They didn't go to a restaurant, not in the hotel itself, but in a house that had been revived, in a reliable community. So that was a very important thing. That established a pattern. Thereafter, we had thirteen different conferences in thirteen different cities, starting in St. Paul. Then we went on to Hartford, Connecticut—

Evelyn: Washington D.C.

Everett: Washington, D.C., San Antonio, Texas, Milwaukee—

Evelyn: St. Paul, Minnesota.

Everett: They were all very successful. That also sort of dwindled toward the end, as the idea of preservation in the city got around and people knew about it. Also it was a problem itself. In order to have an organization that does those things, you have to have a permanent staff to do it, and I'm not very good at raising money.

So it worked out very well. We did it with the staff of our Brownstone Revival Coalition doing the letters and doing all that stuff. But after thirteen years—also, I keep getting older all the time—so that sort of dwindled. But it was an enormously—

Evelyn: That's not true. He gets younger.

Everett: It was enormously successful, for those years.

Q: Shall we stop a minute, and you can do your thing?

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: This is Evelyn Ortner.

Evelyn: I've gotten into all this thing we've been talking about with Everett, because I'm an interior designer and a preservationist, and my education has all been in New York City. I was born six blocks away from where we are at this moment, in Yorkville, which is now a historic district, where I was born—right? Henderson Place.

I married into Brooklyn, and it's the best thing that ever happened. I love it. Anyway, I'm an interior designer and a preservationist. My education was all through public schools in New York and Hunter College, which was wonderful to me. I graduated cum laude, doing my homework on the subway. And Pratt Institute, when I was married. Then I did a graduate program of historic preservation technology at Columbia.

Before that—my husband mentioned, in the early days of the landmarks—before we had a Landmark Preservation Commission, there were pickets at the old Pennsylvania Station, very chic picket lines. Everybody was on that, architects—Philip Johnson, Brendan Gill.

Everett: The Metropolitan Museum *[unclear][crosstalk]*.

Evelyn: The Metropolitan Museum. We picketed governor—

Everett: Now, just a nice note over there. This was a picket line arranged by Bob Mackla, his name has come up before, who was a park man. I don't know if you know the name. He was a great preservationist of parks, and he had arranged very good publicity. So everybody who came on picket line—the men were all dressed in tuxedos, and the women were all wearing evening dresses and fur coats.

Evelyn: Right, minks.

Everett: Right. We had our dog there. We had a big german shepherd. So here was this picket line, with twenty people all dressed up.

Evelyn: Nelson [A.] Rockefeller stopped *[crosstalk]*.

Everett: Right, Nelson Rockefeller came by *[unclear]*.

Q: Why were you picketing the Met?

Everett: Because we liked it, but mostly because our friend Bob Mackla induced us to get involved in this, because he didn't want the Met to start moving into the park, which is what they proposed to do. So I chose the Seventy-Fifth anniversary of the—

Evelyn: I don't remember what that was.

Q: That was [Thomas P.F.] Hoving's time.

Everett: Yes, right.

Evelyn: That's right. Well, let's see.

Q: Let's start when you bought the house.

Evelyn: There was no commission yet, and I had a campaign—everybody would send postcards to the mayor, Mayor [Robert F.] Wagner, and he got a thousand postcards, saying, "Please vote yes for a Preservation Landmark Committee." And he did. It worked. That was 1965, ’66.

Q: Was that an outgrowth of the Penn Station demolition?

Everett: Yes, it was.

Evelyn: So there we were. We were living in this area which we thought was landmark quality. As Everett said, he went to the commission and said, "Oh, we don't have anybody. We don't have to do all the work." And they didn't. They had like three people, and they had no budget. Harmon Goldstone was the head of the Landmarks Commission [New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission]. So we said we would do the work. Everett and I organized this, and we had a friend who was the editor of a famous architecture magazine, John [M.] Dixon.

Everett: It's an architecture magazine that just died a couple years ago.

Evelyn: I asked him to please give a quick course to half a dozen people who were going to write architectural descriptions of 1,800 houses. Well, of course, it came down to two of us who wrote 1,800 houses—my friend Bill Younger, William Younger *[phonetic]*, and I. Bill was a teacher so he was busy during the year, and we would work summers. We worked for, I don't know, seven years—

Everett: They would go down to the Buildings Department, to look up all the old records—

Evelyn: Research, and then go around and look at the house, and do an actual, on-site. We did that, and in 1973, we became—

Everett: Well, before that, though. It was all prepared in 1970, at the time.

Evelyn: We finished all the research, and politics being politics, and being local in New York particularly, the Landmarks Commission would designate every three years. So you had three years to do your work, and then they would designate. We were ready, and the borough president called me in—Sebastian Leone—and he said, "You understand, we're going to get your designation for Park Slope, but we have to designate Bedford Stuyvesant first."

Everett: For political reasons.

Evelyn: For political reasons, right?

Everett: Right.

Evelyn: So I said okay. But the thing that happened after that, the law was changed so they could designate any time, every year. So we got in and were finished in 1973, with the designation, which was a blessing. It was a lot of work. A lot of work.

As my husband said, this was the time when Harvey Lichtenstein came to the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and it was not like the Brooklyn Academy today. He was a great seer and sage, he knew what to do, and he developed this thing. We had him in our house, speaking to groups, and we took him to the City Council. It was a whole different ball of wax then. Consequently I had these flea-market fairs and we raised money—

Everett: Tell about the flea-market fairs. Talk about it. Describe it.

Evelyn: It was a large parking lot, and I sold space for something like twenty-five dollars. Some people had stores, some people were craftsmen. Then people paid a a dollar to come in. The people who had the stands also paid something back to me. So sometimes I would get $4,000 for a weekend.

Everett: You raised what? Fifty thousand dollars each summer—

Evelyn: —for the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which was a lot of money then.

Everett: *[Unclear]*.

Q: I'm telling you, when you interrupt each other and you both talk, it won't be transcribed.

Evelyn: So that was my introduction to big board. Then they got a lot of important people on the board, and the success of the institution, we believe, is the success of the community, the brownstone community, that is the downtown brownstone community, called Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Park Slope, Cobble Hill—all those people were people who would support the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the programs that they had—the dance programs, and so forth. So that was one part of our life there.

The other thing was the Brooklyn Museum. I've always been interested in art. I did watercolors and did other things when I was at Pratt, so I became interested in the museum and I had a

meteoric rise. They had something called the Community Committee, which over the years has raised—these are volunteers—over the years has raised millions of dollars for the support of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It's maybe thirty-five years old, and we would have an annual ball, and sometimes we'd have a one million dollar gross, so that was something very important. Today I have a continuing—I have to get this in because it's very important to me—I am a docent at the Brooklyn Museum, and I give tours on everything but my favorite is Egypt. I'm learning the hieroglyphs now, which is very difficult and wonderful. I love it.

Anyway, we feel very blessed that we are right near BAM, near the Brooklyn Museum of Art, near the important library and near the garden, and we participate in all of those institutions, in one way or another. Now I'm a member, though I've been very delinquent, on the Historical and Cultural Committee of the Municipal Art Society—committee. I was a member of the board of the Fine Arts Federation, and a founder of the Brooklyn Center of Urban Environment, which I was on for many years.

Everett: That's Prospect Park.

Evelyn: Prospect Park, yes. I forget about Prospect Park. One of our greatest institutions is Prospect Park, and we love it and use it, and we work for it.

Everett: And you also participated in saving the old Boathouse.

Evelyn: Oh. I forgot about that. The Boathouse in Prospect Park dates to the early part of the Twentieth Century—1907 or 1910—and it had been restored, and it had some kind of terra cotta facing which had deteriorated and fallen off the wall, from that restoration. So I went to the parks commissioner, who at that time was August Heckscher, and August Heckscher worked on a program, and we got a new architect. At that time it was Giorgio Cavaglieri.

Everett: *[Unclear]* Bob Mackla sent out about 1,600 postcards, wasn't it?

Evelyn: No. We got Heckscher to do it, and he went to the city to get money for the park.

Q: What year was this?

Everett: Thirty years ago.

Evelyn: It must have been '73, '72—

Q: *[Unclear]*.

Everett: *[Unclear]* about ten restorations, *[unclear]* not all restorations *[unclear]*.

Evelyn: The second one he had done was okay, but it was—it fell apart. They just redid it again and now it's an Audubon Cultural Center.

Anyway, then I went to Columbia, and when I finished I worked for the New York Chamber of Commerce and I was in charge of the portraits, and the restoration and care of those portraits, and the archives. As I said, David Rockefeller was my boss, and one of my favorite anecdotes was—we had some wonderful large urns that were given to Governor DeWitt Clinton, upon the completion of the Erie Canal—

Everett: From the merchants of New York.

Evelyn: From the New York Chamber of Commerce merchants. I got a fantastic price, and I went to David Rockefeller and I said, "The Metropolitan Museum wants to give us, half now and half in six months." I thought that was wonderful. He said, "No. No way. That downgrades the price." So they got a donor, and they paid for it immediately.

Everett: This was when the Chamber was folding, selling a beautiful building.

Evelyn: Anyway, when I finished at Columbia, I was looking around for something to do. I'm not sure what I was working on at that time. I got the job here, at the Chamber of Commerce, and one day, in Brooklyn Heights, we were passing the Church of St. Ann of the Holy Trinity. Somebody comes out and grabs me and says, "I want you to see this. We need your help." So from that moment on, my next twenty years were involved with the St. Ann's Center for Restoration in the Arts. So I called again on Brendan Gill and Susan Henshaw Jones, and had a whole brownstone church—

Everett: Now president of the Museum of the City of New York.

Evelyn: But here, Florence, we had a whole brownstone church. The brownstone was in terrible condition, but they had a very important, historically important, set of stained-glass windows. They were the first set of stained-glass windows made solely in the United States, in 1847, by William [Jay] Bolton. So that was a very interesting project. I got Kent Barwick to come over to look; Brendan Gill came; Susan Henshaw Jones; and we came under the aegis of the New York Landmarks Preservation—what is Peg Breen?

Everett: [New York Landmarks] Conservancy.

Evelyn: Conservancy. That's what I was doing, restoring those windows all that time. But in order to do that, in order to get money for a church, we had to have another function, which is why we had the function of the art center, the performing arts. There was going to be prayer, preservation of windows, and performance.

Now I'm busy studying Egypt. I've been on August Heckscher's Prospect Park Advisory Board. I don't remember any of these things, goodness. We've gotten a lot of awards. I was the research director and designer for ports and terminals of the Fulton Ferry Firehouse, co-founder in 1966, of the Victorian Society in America—

Everett: Do you know Margot Gayle? Margot Gayle used to live in the Village *[unclear]* Victorian Society.

Q: Is this 1956.

Evelyn: Sixty-six. Margot Gayle met Nicholas Pevsner, Henry Russell Hitchcock, and so forth, and Nicholas Pevsner is great—

Everett: Do you know the name?

Q: He's one of my favorites.

Evelyn: I'll tell you a funny story later. Nicholas Pevsner said, "In England, in Europe, we have all these other centuries, but you only have the Victorian century there. Why don't you start a Victorian society?" So Margot said okay. She called together some people, I being one of them, and she said to [J.] Stewart Johnson, "You'll be president, you'll be this, you'll be that." And I was the chairman of programs, or whatever. I didn't know anything about this, but I learned, and we got wonderful publicity on the trips that we had to the Octagon House. Things like that.

Everett: You'll probably remember this. On the first big trip they had, they went to Rhode Island, to—what's the big city in Rhode Island?

Evelyn: Newport.

Everett: Newport. They had a tour of Newport that Evelyn had arranged, for the weekend or something. So we went up there and came back two days later or something. Brendan Gill was on that tour. Now what impressed them, they stopped off during the day to have a little respite or something or other. They served champagne, that Evelyn had provided, and she had also gotten real glasses, not plastic. Brendan Gill was so impressed by that, that he wrote a wonderful piece for the *New Yorker*—

Evelyn: Yes. "On the Town." Right.

Everett: Which kicked off that boat.

Evelyn: So I was involved with that. I went to Adding Hammertat *[phonetic]*, and stuff like that. So whatever activity we've had, they've been reciprocal. Everett does one thing, I do another and they complement each other *[crosstalk]*.

Everett: She doesn't talk very much about it. She's still involved now. Now the preservation, the stained-glass—

Evelyn: Oh, yes. That's another thing. After we left St. Ann's and the Holy Trinity, the stained-glass studio, which was my interest—I responsible for getting Joan Davidson to give, and Tony [Anthony C.] Wood, who was on my board at one time—to give $40,000, if you can believe that $40,000 would do that, to start a stained-glass studio, which we built. There are special tables and lights, and it was wonderful. As a result of that—

Q: Is this in Park Slope?

Evelyn: No, it's in Brooklyn Heights.

Everett: Now in Dumbo.

Evelyn: Now in Dumbo. Anyway, when we left the church, which was about three years ago. I was interested in maintaining that stained-glass studio, because we have some of the finest people working on this. So we now have another organization called the Brooklyn Stained Glass Conservation Studio, and we do new windows and old windows. The Kress Foundation has been very, very good to us. They have supported apprentices. We're probably on our fifth or sixth apprentice that they support, which is very important to us. So it's teaching, restoration and preservation.

Everett: *[Unclear]* technology that *[unclear]*.

Evelyn: I know we've done a lot of other things I keep forgetting, but that's mainly it. Triangle parks I told you about. That was during the Lindsay days. We got him to do triangle parks.

Q: You mentioned it, but—

Evelyn: Well, along Flatbush Avenue and in many other areas of the city, there are little areas that used to be black-topped and they had blinking lights, traffic lights—

Everett: Because the grid of the city is not the same as the old avenues, so they come at strange angles.

Evelyn: So I was talking to somebody who was at the zoning commission—Rick [Richard] Rosan—and I said, "What can we do? Can't we do something about this ugly black-top?"

Q: There was a specific one that you were—

Evelyn: Right. So he said, "We'll get a meeting together with Lindsay." He was a pal of Lindsay's, and we did.

Q: His last name again?

Evelyn: His name is Rick Rosan, Richard Rosan.

Everett: He's now head of the—

Evelyn: —Urban Land Institute.

Everett: —Urban Land Institute, in Washington.

Evelyn: So he did, indeed, and not only did they put a park, with little cobblestones and trees and benches and this one, it became a program for the city to do these triangle parks.

Q: We have one on 106th [Street] and Broadway.

Everett: They put in one, and then they put in another one—

Evelyn: —on Flatbush Avenue. That is very satisfying, to see that. I don't know. Let's see. Lots of other things. We've gotten a lot of awards for spirit of life and stuff like that.

Everett: We have a lot of awards.

Evelyn: We don't have enough walls.

Everett: In our house we have a center *[unclear]* all over. *[Unclear]* quite old. Nevertheless, the house goes on, and Evelyn keeps looking for things. I have to tell you that we had the first meetings of the Brooklyn Secession Society there, at our house. We had some meetings there on that. Unfortunately, they didn't come to anything *[laughter]*. We also founded a monarchist society. If we could give everybody a title, it would be very nice.

Q: Everyone?

Everett: Well, if you can join us, you can become a duchess. That came to naught, but it was an occasion for some parties.

Evelyn: But getting back to Park Slope—we are really delighted to be there. It is a vital, young community, and when I go down to the subway and I see all these young people with their briefcases and stuff, backpacks—you would not be here, if it were not for us. It's changed. It's a wonderful community.

Everett: It makes me think also—you know, Harvey Lichtenstein is the guy who revived the Brooklyn Academy of Music from nothing. He would not have survived if the neighborhoods had not changed around him. I think that's true. Now at the time we were doing these things, we didn't remake New York alone. But there were people like Ruth Goldstein in Fort Greene; a fellow named Snyder *[phonetic]* in Cobble hill. Brooklyn Heights had a couple, the Pearsalls. All those people were all working at the same time. But I think that—

Evelyn: I think they were energized by the publicity that you got.

Everett: I see what we have programmed. Not just, you know, *[unclear]* but we had a program and we had a number of people that worked with that program, *[unclear]*. So I think that helped make a difference, also.

Evelyn: But we hate to keep doing the same thing over and over again.

Everett: Well, now we have to *[unclear]*.

Q: What about all your papers and things like that?

Everett: Nobody would want my papers, because they're in my corner of our study, where I am now, they're just boxes and boxes of things. We also have a lot of books. We collect books. I have a collection of *[unclear]* books. I don't know how many, maybe six to seven hundred books. I'd have to hire a library to index them.

Q: You can hire a librarian and archivist and help you go through the papers and file them.

Evelyn: We need a librarian. I don't want anybody looking at those papers.

Everett: *[Unclear]*.

Evelyn: Do you know the DCR [Digital Cassette Recorder] here?

Q: Yes.

Evelyn: We can send one of those tapes.

Everett: Yes. We had a tape made last year, not very good. We'll do better this year, but—

Q: A tape of—?

Evelyn: Of the preservation volunteers.

Everett: *[Unclear]* mostly about *[unclear]* in Colorado. We had a little bit about—

Evelyn: —about New York.

Everett: —the cemetery.

Q: I have it on. Do you want me to—?

Everett: We had a number of French people working with me, with cemetery last year, 2002, and *[unclear]* Greenwood cemetery belongs to the Societé Culinaire in French. They used to have burial societies in New York. Poor people always had burial societies. You would come to New York with your family. A death in the family is not only a personal tragedy but a financial tragedy. So there would be money for a reasonable funeral and all those things. So somebody from the same town, wherever it was—Paris or Berlin or a little Polish shtetl—established a burial society. They'd buy a piece of land, and then if something happened to some member of the family, they could be buried there, and the society would defray the costs. The French have the same thing. They have the Societé Culinaire, blah, blah, blah, Societe Culinare that was the name. It started in 1885, I think, and as of last year I think they had something like fifty to sixty

to seventy occupants. These are all relatives, mostly chefs, of people who worked in the restaurants of New York City.

So *[unclear]* Greenwood Cemetery, wouldn't it be nice to have these restored—these old cemetery plots. Do you know how many people are buried in Greenwood Cemetery? More than six hundred thousand people. So can you imagine the work—more than six hundred thousand. A lot of very, very famous—so it would be fun to have them working on this stone, the Societé Culinaire Philanthropique. Now the only picture *[unclear]* cemetery was 1835. Never a picture of a live person appeared in their annual report until this last year. Because we put five of those French kids behind this stone, that says Societé— and they're all smiling nice. I took that picture and gave it to them, and that picture is the first live people to appear in the cemetery's annual report *[laughter]*. I'll send you a package, if you'll give me a card.

It was so nice talking to you.

Q: No, I'm just hoping that it will—

Everett: *[Unclear]*.

Q: —come through, which is what my concern is.

[END OF INTERVIEW]