

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The Reminiscences of  
George Burke

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with George Burke conducted by Interviewer Sarah Dziedzic on November 9, 2021. This interview is part of the New York Preservation Archive Project's collection of individual oral history interviews.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are 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.

George Burke was born on Staten Island and grew up in Annandale before moving to Florida with his family. As a young adult, he joined the U.S. Air Force and served in the medical department, spending time in locations across Europe and Alaska. While stationed in England, he studied interior design and architectural history and began to collect antiques through estate sales and flea markets, focusing on ceramics, paintings, light fixtures, and many other decorative items from the Victorian era. He had the military ship the items back to family members in New York City, a perk of military service that made moving his collection back to the States possible.

After Burke returned to Staten Island, he purchased and restored two houses and an old restaurant and bar before he was contacted by Bess Seguire in 1981, who had inherited the then-deteriorated Seguire Mansion. She stated, "George, I want you to save my house," and agreed to sell the house for a feasible sum in exchange for his promise to restore it. Burke, who knew of the home and property from the time when he was a child, was committed to the challenge. He moved into the house shortly after the sale, and worked from the basement to the roof, and outwards throughout the grounds and stables, to complete the restoration. Burke kept records of the work, most of which he completed himself and financed the through the sale of his business, the Tidewater Inn. Eventually, he was able to move his collection of Victorian-style furnishings safely into the home, and add to it larger pieces of furniture to complete the restoration.

In this interview, Burke talks about working with designer Mario Buatta, along with the House of Scalamadré, to select furniture and fabrics to decorate the home in the Victorian style. He also discusses the donation of the Seguire Mansion to the Historic House Trust, and his vision for the ongoing maintenance of the home and property. Burke is joined in this interview by his niece, Linda Daller.

Transcriptionist: Brandon Perdomo

Session: 1

Interviewee: George Burke

Location: Staten Island, NY

Interviewer: Sarah Dzedzic

Date: November 9, 2021

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

Q: Today is November 9, 2021. And this is Sarah Dzedzic. Interviewing George Burke, and—

Daller: Linda Daller.

Q: —and Linda Daller for the New York Preservation Archive Project. And we're doing this interview in Burke's home, in the Seguire Mansion on the South Shore of Staten Island.

Burke: You want it from the first day I was born in the hospital across the street? Is that what you want?

Q: Yes, yes.

Burke: Okay. Tell me when you want me to start.

Q: Yes, you can tell me about your early life and the memories you have of growing up here.

Burke: Okay. Well, I was born on Staten Island. I was born right in the hospital across the street,

and grew up 90% of my time on Staten Island until I became old enough and I joined the military. And that was the Air Force. And with the Air Force, I enjoyed every minute. I was seventeen years with the Air Force. I traveled all over the world, traveled to Alaska, all over, with the military. And I was the assistant to the general who was the surgeon for the European Command. And I was in the medical department, worked in the operating room.

So whenever the big surgeons traveled, I always traveled with them—traveled all over Europe. Because we went to about every Air Force base in Europe there was, and I got around to see everything. I collected all my antiques and all my stuff when I was traveling. That's what's in this whole house, all the things you see. And, of course, being in the military and traveling with them, the government shipped all my stuff that I bought and picked up—shipped it all back to America for me. Otherwise, I'd never be able to have half the stuff that's in here because it would have cost me a private fortune to have it shipped. But because I was military, the military shipped—when they moved me, they moved all my stuff.

So here I was with all this stuff, sending it home to my family, sending it to my sisters. Soon, nobody had room in their house to store anymore of my stuff. So they said, "You better get back here and do something." So I came back, got out of the military, got a job working for Saks Fifth Avenue. And I worked there for quite a while, and I lived in the Bronx. My sister, Frances, got me a nice little apartment in the Bronx, right next to her. And I lived there for quite a few years. And then finally I had a man come in and talking to me about how he's bought a place on Staten Island that he's opening up a place like Saks only not as nice. And he asked me would I be interested in working for him out here on Staten Island. And I had to laugh. I said to him, "Are

you kidding? I know the Port Richmond store you just bought. And I know everything—I'd love to go out to Staten Island." So he said, "Good. I'll give you a job. You come out and take over the boys' and men's department in the store." I said, "That's fine. I'll do that." So that was over in Port Richmond—it's still there, I understand, the store. So I stayed there, worked for him for years. And then I decided I'd get involved again with things that are going on. And I saved quite a bit of money.

And one day I got a call from Mrs. Seguire. And she said, "George, do you know who this is?" and with her big Southern accent. I said, "Well, the only one I know that talked like that is Bess Seguire." She said, "Well, this is me." I said, "What is it, Bess?" She said, "I want you to come and save my house." I said, "Are you kidding, Bess?" I said, as a kid growing up, we were always down on the beach, looking back up at this big white house that looked like a big Southern mansion. And we used to say, "Wow, wonder who lives there? Wow, what a great place." I said, now here you are, the woman we always wondered about, asking me if I'm interested in saving that house? I said, "Where are you?" She said, "Well, I moved out years ago and went back to Georgia. And I just got a call from all my lady friends saying that my house is falling apart. It's going to hell. And I want somebody to take care of it. I remember you always loved it and liked it. Are you still interested?" And I said, "Well, of course I am. I'd love that old house." I said, "But Bess," I said "your house—I don't know about saving it. From last time I saw it, it looked like it needed a bulldozer!" She said, "No, no, no." She said, "you can save it. I saved it years and years ago." She said, "Now you can save it."

And I said, "Well, I can save it. If you give me a big helping hand here." I said, "You know, I

don't make that much money. I'm only a salesman in a department store." I said, "and it's going to take a lot of money to put that house back together." She said, "Well, I'm going to help you all I can." And I said, "But why would I fix a house I didn't own?" And she said, "Well, why don't we talk about that." She said, "If you're interested in buying it, I will make the arrangements that you can own it. And you can put it together and fix it. And I'll see to it that, financially, things work out for the two of us. So I said, "Well, Bess, if you're interested in doing it, I'm interested in doing it."

So I moved into the house here. It was a mess of a mess. I lived in one room, for almost five years. I slept in it, lived in it, ate in it. And I, throughout the time, I went from room to room in the house and restored it. First thing I started with was the basement because it had four-foot of water in it. It was a mess. I started with the basement. And then I went through floor and room after room, and took almost five years to put the house in good shape, the way you could see it. And in the meantime, I made a couple of little investments and they turned out very well for me. And with that money, I restored most of the house. And then I was able to get all my stuff out of storage and out of people's homes where I stored them, and furnished the house and moved and lived in the whole house, took care of it. And as you see it today was from me doing all those little things.

Then I started—I said, "You know, there's a lot of things on this end of the island nobody wants, it's the forgotten-end of the island. All these empty buildings and things. So I went around and looked and looked and I said, "You know, I could open a restaurant." And I walked around and I found a couple of nice places. I found a beautiful place in Tottenville and I opened it and called it

the Tidewater Inn. And I had a beautiful restaurant and a bar connected to it. I restored that, and that was an old mansion—an old pillar-fronted mansion—looked like the house, similar. And it became quite the place to be. And I made a lot of money. And with the money that I made from there, I put it right back in the building. Restored the building, looked around, come down, bought this house from Mrs. Seguire, and then moved out of the bar and restaurant—because I had a room upstairs in it. And I had a little house in Tottenville so I decided, well, I'll move into this big house—in here—and I'll get rid of all the property that I have in Tottenville. So I had people come in and wanted to buy the Tidewater Inn. And I got a good price for that. Got a good price for a couple of other real estate pieces that I bought and fixed up and sold. So I figured, “hmm!” So I went down in Rossville and I bought a beautiful, big old, rundown place and restored it completely. And a friend of mine I was very good friendly with was John—

Daller: Scalia?

Burke: Scalia. And he owned the funeral home. And he said, “George, you know, that big, beautiful house that sits empty? I could make another funeral parlor out of that.” And I said, “No, let's not make a funeral parlor. If you want to come in a business with me, John, let's make into a beautiful restaurant.” So he said, “Okay, I've never owned a restaurant, but I'd be willing to try it, George.” So I said, “Well, John, you're gonna have to put a lot of money in it because you have all the money, as being who you are. And I only have so much money being what I am.” So he said, “Don't worry about it. We'll work it out, one way or another.” And so the two of us started and we made—called it the Old Bermuda Inn because John loved Bermuda and he was putting a lot of money in it. So I said, “Well, I would have named it The Rossville Inn because it

was in Rossville, but he will he loved Bermuda and he wanted Bermuda Inn.” So I said, “Yes, John, we’ll call it the Old Bermuda Inn. And that still is, today, one of the great places around here, the Old Bermuda Inn, and John still owns it.

So after a couple of years going back and forth, his daughter, she decided she wanted to get involved in it. And she wanted to start running things and taking things over. And I never got along with her that much because everything I wanted to do, she said, “No, no, no, I don’t like that. And I don’t like this.” And she’d go to her father and her father and say, “You know, George, she’s my daughter,” and this and that—and I said, “Yes, well, John, let me tell you something. Let’s stay friends. Either you buy me out, or I buy you out. What are we gonna do here?” So he said, “Well, I really love doing this, George.” And I said, “Okay, John, that’s fine. You buy me out.” And he bought me out. And I took the money. And I invested in a couple of things. And they were good investments. And I said, well, I’m going to retire. I spent enough time breaking my back. I’m going to retire, I’m going to go down to that big old house, restore it, fix it all up, move in it, and enjoy it. And I’ll invest in a couple of other things that will give me a nice little income, and I won’t have to worry about it. And that’s what I did. And that’s where we are today.

Q: Thank you for that story. I want to go back and ask for some more details about your childhood. What were the things that you did when you were young?

Burke: What were the things I did when what?



Q: When you were young—when you were a kid.

Burke: Oh, when I was a kid, we lived in Annandale. My father was in the political-end, and he was in Borough Hall and everything like that. And my father—we were quite wealthy, growing up. We are a big family. There was nine of us in the whole family. And all my brothers. I, being the youngest, of course, seeing everybody growing up. And my father died, and we were all very young. And he died young. And after he died the family still lived like we had my father's money involved. And then when we realized we were broke, all my brothers joined the military, got married, moved away. And there was nobody but my mother and I now, living in our house. And it was quite difficult to maintain the big house we were living in. So my mother decided she would make it into a two-family, and rent out one part of it.

And then one of my brothers had just gotten out of the military. He was in the Air Force. And he said, "Mom, I'll move in to the other part of the house. I'll help renovate it, fix it up and such." And that's what we did. And Bill moved in, and he stayed there for quite a while. And then he got married and moved in with his wife. My mother and his wife never got along too well. And my sister, Bess, she was married to Walter, her husband, who was in the Navy. And he was stationed here, in St. George, and he would come home and we'd live in the house.

Well, Bess, and my brother's wife, Evelyn, never got along. So Walter was re-stationed to Fort Lauderdale in Florida. So one day, my sister Bess said to my mother and me, she said, "Go pack. We're not going to stay and put up with these two people. Mom, you own the house, you own at least part of it, or half of it. Sell the other half to Bill"—that was my brother— "and you and

George, move with me to Florida.” So we all thought that was a great idea. So we talked to our brother Bill and he had come up with the money, bought the house. And, minute he bought the house, did a little work in it, put it right up for sale. Because Evelyn didn’t like the house, his wife. And it didn’t take long to sell because it was a big piece of property, nice house. So my sister Bess said, “Well, come on, let’s go to Florida. Let’s move out, you’re being kicked out anyway, the house is sold. You got to get out.” So we moved to Florida.

Then I was down in Florida for a while and I’m wondering, “Well, what in the hell am I going to do in Florida?” What was I? In my early twenties? I was maybe nineteen, twenty—something like that. And my brother Bill and my brother Ed decided to go into an automobile repair shop. And Ed was very good at taking dents and things out of cars and he could spray paint. So they went into repairing things. And what they did is they bought a whole fleet of old taxis. And they repaired all these taxis, repainted them, and then sold them all to Cuba. So while I used to work then with them, and then I decided, this is not for me. So then I said, well, what the hell am I gonna do? So I said, “The hell with this. I’m joining the Air Force.” So I went out and I joined the United States Air Force of course. And I loved it. I went to boot camp, I loved it. I loved being there and everything. Then I got shipped to Europe.

Daller: So not that much time was spent on Staten Island. Staten Island was very early on, and then Florida, and then off to Europe. So there wasn’t a lot of time spent here.

Burke: Yes. Was very little time on here. Of course, I went to school here. I went to grammar school and high school here. But, God, that was almost 100 years ago, you know?

Q: [Laughs] Yes. So tell me about when you went to Europe. Where were you stationed and what was it like?

Burke: I went and I was stationed in England, and I loved being in England. Of course, over there—when I was over there—England was just getting out of the bad part of the War [World War II], and they had nothing over there. They didn't even have soap.

So I would go to the flea markets and things. And people were selling anything out of their house to support themselves and live. So I would walk around, I'd look and I'd see some beautiful stuff for sale, for nothing. And getting an American Dollar from being in the service, getting my pay—even though it wasn't that much—but at that time, over there, it was worth a fortune. So what I did, I decided, well, I'd go in—and we had where you could buy all your liquor and such in the post exchange. And I went around and we all had—you were only allowed to buy two bottles of wine and a bottle of whiskey, or something. You weren't allowed to buy much because it was worth a fortune over there to the general public, to the British. We all got coupons. We were only allowed so much. So I went around to all the nurses—of course, I was in the medical department—and I asked all the nurses, “What are you doing with your stamps? Do you drink?” “No, we don't drink.” So I would collect all the stamps. And I'd go in and I'd buy all the liquor with those stamps. And I'd go downtown and I'd wheel and deal for a bottle of whiskey. You could ask for their house and you'd get it. So I went down and I just went around and everything I seen—all the stuff you see hanging in this house, most of it come from me going around and wheeling and dealing in, you might as well say, the black market. And then I shipped it all back

home. And you can ask—[gesturing to Daller]

Daller: Oh, my mother was his sister.

Burke: Yes—

Daller: Everybody got something. But the story that was cute—remember the lady in England, the antique dealer, that used to bring her bottles all the time? I can't remember her name. But you used tell me. She was great because she would know—

Burke: Mrs. Murphy.

Daller: There you go—see?

Burke: Mrs. Murphy.

Daller: And you loved Mrs. Murphy.

Burke: Oh, I loved her. And she used to drink all the whiskey like crazy. I'd bring her bottles of whiskey and she'd say, "Listen, George, I'm going to an estate for sale—everything in it is going! You're coming with me." So I'd say "Okay, Murphy, let's go!" She was something, I mean. She was great, I loved her. But she used to wear three, four dresses and she smelled like an old goat! And, well, let's face it, they never had any hot water over there at all. Everybody

smelled like that. So it didn't matter. But I'd go off with Murphy and we'd go to these estate sales and most of the stuff that's in here was, I bought and shipped it all back.

Daller: And when he wasn't doing that, he was horseback riding because he loved to ride and that's kind of segued himself to the Seguire House and to Bess. But when he was in Europe, he rode. He got involved with riding there and was constantly riding. He was always at the stables there.

Burke: Oh, yes.

Daller: You met some interesting people there.

Burke: But anyway, when my time was up in the service, they shipped me back here to—

Daller: —Alaska.

Burke: —Alaska, and I stayed in Alaska. I loved Alaska. And while I was up there, I was sent up to work with Father Tom. And that was in—where the hell, what did they call that area where all the Eskimos lived? And I was a medic. So I went up with Father Tom and I had to take care of all those Eskimos, if any of them got sick or hurt this or that. And if I couldn't take care of them, I'd call down to the base and they'd send a helicopter and they'd pick them up and take them down to the hospital, because we had to take care of them, because Alaska was ours, and all the Eskimos was our responsibility. So, I'd do that. And all those Eskimos just loved me. I loved

them too. They were great. I had the best collection of the most beautiful carved ivory and things because they didn't have money but they would give you things. And they would give me all kinds of beautiful little carved objects and things that would be carved out of the whale's teeth or—

Daller: What about the coat? The story about the coat that you had from Alaska?

Burke: Oh, well, the Eskimos up there would give me beautiful mukluks and all kinds of things. But unfortunately, all the stuff up there was cured by urine. And if you were wearing them and you went and got in your car and turned the heater on, you smelled like piss. So I couldn't take any of the clothes. If you lived in Alaska, where it was always cold, it was fine. But those things, I couldn't. But I had all this beautiful carved stuff. And as I said, I was in the military up there and we weren't a big group of military, it was like a small base. And all this beautiful stuff, I used to put in a big box. And we had our barracks, of course, and having your barracks, the only thing you had was a big trunk where you kept all your clothes in. It was under your bunk. And that's where I had all this wonderful carved stuff from the Eskimos that they gave me.

When they shipped me back from where I was, where the Eskimos were, they sent me back to the base, because they were shipping everybody now, back—after your time was up, you had to go back because you couldn't stay any longer than two years, and after two years, you had to come back to the States. So I had all my goodies packed in a box, getting ready to go. And I had this goddamn old sergeant who was going back also, but he was getting out of the service, and he was being discharged. He had come into my room when I was not there, stole everything. Stole

all that carved stuff, stole all that stuff, that whole box of stuff. And I didn't realize it because I was always working. I was always in the operating room or someplace like that. And then when I went looking for my—his name was Joiner—and everybody was saying, "Well, Sergeant Joiner is leaving, Sergeant Joiner is leaving." And I never thought much of it. And I went in and I noticed my big box was gone. So I went out and I said to—I had two roommates, and I said to my roommates, "Where's my box?" And they said "Oh, well, Sergeant Joiner came in and took it." I said, "Oh, no!" I went running out. By the time I got to the to where they were discharging them and such, he had just been discharged and left on an airplane. And they said he had the box, and took it with them. And that was the end of that. But—

Q: Wow, terrible.

Burke: Yes.

Q: Let me ask you some more about the items that you collected when you were—

Burke: More about what?

Q: Your collection of the items that you bought from Mrs. Murphy.

Burke: Oh, all the stuff that he took?

Q: The stuff that you got in England, from Mrs. Murphy.

Burke: Oh, ha!

Q: What grabbed your eye? I mean, how did you decide what to purchase, what to collect?

Burke: Well, I was always an antique collector. I grew up loving it and always having it, and my mother was great with it. We had beautiful stuff in our home, all the time. So I just grew up with it, knowing it. And when I seen it all over there, and when I seen the British people were poor as church mice, they were selling everything. And I would just would go around and I'd just pick stuff up. And as I said, for a thing of whiskey or a bottle of wine, they'd give you anything, because none of them have had it for years and years. Because look how long the war went, and England had nothing. So that's where I got most of the stuff that's here in the house today.

Q: And so when you were deciding what to collect, were you thinking about—

Burke: I was thinking about getting a big home, having a home, and what I would want in it—the paintings, what kind of furniture, carpets, everything. And if they were there and I could see them, and I could ship them free because the government had to ship it for me, and I had my sisters, who would store them for me—I had had a great opportunity to pick up all this stuff that was beautiful, get it for nothing, and the government ship it back for me, and my sisters would keep it until I got a place to put it.

So when I get out of the service, I got a job. My sister—her mother [indicates Daller], Frances—



my sister living in the Bronx, she got me a little apartment and she got me a job working for Saks Fifth Avenue. And so I had all that stuff in my apartment.

Daller: So can you imagine a three room apartment filled to the brim with antiques? I said I was the only person at that time—my uncle gave me my sweet sixteen there, and all my friends were invited to come formal. Everybody came in to a coldwater flat in the Bronx and walked in amazed because they've never seen anything like that. And it was the most amazing party. It was a sweet sixteen I'll never forget.

Q: Where did you live in the Bronx?

Daller: We lived several places. This was in the East Bronx, this was on 167th and College Avenue. So we lived there, and it was a big courtyard and there were four buildings and the center courtyard was all grass. They were all six floor walkups and, that's where you lived! You know, everybody grew up together. And my uncle came in and was part of the whole group. And everyone became extremely close. I said, I still have friends that my—our parents met before we met. So it shows you that you have a friend forever.

Q: And so all these items went up—walked up the stairs and were, carried back down the stairs.

Daller: Mm-hmm! So when he left the apartment and came to Staten Island, things started to move back into different sisters' again until he was ready to relocate it again. So everything just kept going off and someone would have all of this, someone would have all of that. I mean, we

had clocks, baby-Ben clocks, hanging in apartments. So it was fascinating.

Q: And how did you keep track of all the items in your collection as they were moving from—

Burke: Well, a lot of this stuff, I never got back, because once you left it for years and years, you weren't going to go back and say, "Well, give me that, and give me this." Was it your mother I gave her all the blue and—

Daller: Oh, the—Oh God now, what's it called?

Burke: All that stuff from England? What was—

Daller: It just went right out of my head!

Burke: Yes, it's—Wedgwood.

Daller: Wedgwood!

Burke: All the Wedgwood.

Daller: So I have the Wedgwood.

Burke: She has it. And my other sister—now, of course she's passed away—but now her

daughter took it, and the daughter gave it to her daughter. All that gorgeous porcelain, like the Flower Seller's Children—it's a big piece like that. And it's three little girls sitting on a bench with big baskets of flowers in front of them. And each little petal and everything is done beautiful. It's Meissen. And I had beautiful big pieces of Meissen that I got when I was in Germany, and it all went here and there and—I can't get it back. I can't go and say, "You know, fifty years ago that was mine, and I never gave it to you. I want it now." I could never get it.

Well, on the—on the fireplace there, those two big candelabras, they're Meissen. I bought those in Germany. I think I got the two of them for five bucks or something like that. Now they're worth a couple hundred-dollars apiece. But, that's what I did. I went around and I got it and shipped it all back home. And a lot of it got given away, got lost. Don't remember what happened to it, right? And that was it. But I still have a lot of it. Still kept it. Because I certainly—I never passed up a bargain. And I had more bargains from Mrs. Murphy. Good God! Because she would always want her bottle of booze. So she was always, "Come on, George. We're going to this estate. They're getting rid of everything! I'll tell you the good stuff!" [laughs] And that was it.

Q: Can you tell me about studying interior design?

Burke: About what?

Q: Studying interior design?

Burke: Oh, well, when I was in—I guess I was in England. I can't think of the name of the thing now. And, I had a lot of time over there in London and so I decided, "Well, hell, I'm going to go to school and learn something." So I took interior design. And I went to Hammersmith College. And I took interior design and the history of architecture, and something else. And I took that for years. And because of that, and especially the interior design thing, I went around, did little jobs, and did things, and because I learned so much by going to that to school there, that when I got back here, I got nice little jobs here and there. People, "Oh, could you help me—?" And especially when I came to Staten Island and I was working for Sherwin Williams, and—what the hell, Florence? She was the girl who hired me, and she ran the big Sherwin Williams store. It's still there in Port Richmond. And she said, "George, you have so much with design and such, I want you to take over the wallpaper department and the fabric department." I did fantastic for the store. Oh, they loved me. And people were coming from all over the island. And, then I got—who'd I get from the city? You just named them—

Daller: Mario?

Burke: Mario Buatta and a couple of people of his friends that were just as big. And they'd come out and I'd get involved with them. They'd come out and I'd say, "Look, I can get you this. I can get that." Because you could get it through the—and once I got involved, I did really, really well. Then I decided, well, I'm going to get myself a nice apartment. And I did, I got in St. George wasn't it?

Daller: Yep.

Burke: Yes, and I had a beautiful apartment for years in St. George. But the only thing was it was too small. So I rented the apartment next door, and I broke a hole in the wall. And I had the two apartments! [laughs] And I lived there for a long time. Did quite well. And then I said, well, now I'm going to buy a home. So I found this big beautiful, French, mansard roof, big Victorian house in Tottenville. And I decided, well, I'm going to pick up some nice buildings. So I picked up this one building that had a little old bar next to it. And the whole big building used to be a big private home, and then they had made it into a restaurant. And they added this big dining room to the other side of the house. There was the main house, over here was the bar, over here was this big dining room, and this was the main house. So I bought it. And I renovated the bar, I renovated the other side, my two sisters came to work for me, running the kitchen and the dining room. And a couple of my friends came as bartenders for me. That place took off like you couldn't believe.

Daller: And that was the Tidewater.

Burke: And that was called the Tidewater Inn. And that went for years. And one day, I was sitting in the dining room. And I was so damn busy, I never got to go home. I had just bought this house, and it needed a lot of work. And I never had time—sometimes I'd be sleeping on the pool table there because I just couldn't leave!

Burke: So, my sister Marge, and my sister Bess, would come over and help me. They'd work out, and they'd be waiters, or this and that. And it was one of those busy, busy, goddamn nights.

Everybody had left, and Bess and Marge were there, and Bess said to me, “George, sit down. Come here, Marge.” I said, “What?” They said, “Sell this goddamn place. You’re working too hard. You made enough money. You can retire. Or you can do a small whatever. But this is too much for you, George. And we can’t come over here—” because both of them lived way out in New Jersey, and they’d come every day. And finally their husbands were getting pissed at them, because they were never home, they were always here. So she said, Bess said, “We’re going to have to quit, George.” I said “Oh, shit. I don’t know what the hell I’ll do if you do that. What will I do?” And I had two or three other girls that were there. And they said, “Well, we can’t handle it, George. There’s too much business going on here.” So we’re talking about this and talking about this. And one day—

[PORTION OMITTED]

Burke: So I did that [sold the Tidewater Inn]. And then I—what’d I do then, I—oh, I paid for this house, didn’t I?

Daller: Mm-hmm, yep!

Burke: Yes, I paid off this house. And then I what else? I bought another restaurant, didn’t I?

Daller: Well, you got involved with Burke’s Landing with Scalia. The Old Bermuda Inn.

Burke: Yes. Oh, that’s right. I bought those buildings. And I took John in as a partner, but I

owned the Old Bermuda Inn and the two buildings. Because that's what I bought with the money.

Daller: Then you got rid of that—but those are the early days.

Q: And that's what allowed you to buy this house?

Daller: Well, no, Mrs. Seguire allowed him to buy—

Burke: No, I already had this house from the first deal. But, with that money, I paid this house off. Because Mrs. Seguire was holding the—

Daller: The mortgage.

Burke: Yes, she held the mortgage on it. So I paid it off and bought it in cash, with the cash.

Q: Well, tell me about getting started on this house. You said you started with the basement.

Burke: Oh god. Well, by this time, I had a lot of money. I could. So I moved into the front parlor room, there. And I went from room to room and it took me a couple of years, didn't it?

Daller: Yes, at least four.

Burke: To put it back—because the house was ruined, it was in terrible shape. A lot of the windows were broken out of it. Because the water was in the basement for so many years, all the dampness had lifted all the floorboards and everything, and so I had to dry the house out, and replaster the walls. The ceilings had fallen down because a lot of the drain pipes had leaked. The roof was shot because the old guy that was caretaker here, he used to walk around on the roof and watch all the boats in the harbor. And they were slate, the roof, and by walking on the slates, they broke and they slid off, and wherever they slid off, the rain poured through because it was holes. So it took a fortune, but I had it, all that money, to restore the house. I had all the plasters done. I had all the walls done. I had the house put back together. This whole corner—you could stand and see the street out there, so this whole corner was rebuilt. I'm sorry that, during all that construction, I wasn't taking photographs, of step by step.

Daller: Well, you did at a certain point, because you have a lot of photos. But it only reached a certain point of it, not in the very beginning.

Burke: Yes. But I mean, that was—the holes, the plaster gone. I mean, after it was finished, who cared?

Daller: At least the property itself, because when you stood outside, I mean, you couldn't see anything. You couldn't see the grounds through the trees and it was just covered and everything.

Burke: Oh, it was all overgrown with undergrowth. I had a bulldozer two weeks, riding back-and-forth, and back-and-forth, and back-and-forth across the front of the house because you



couldn't see the house from the water. If you were at the water looking up here, you couldn't see the house. I took forty-four big trees down in the front field just so you could clear the front and see the house. And then when you could see the house, it was a goddamn mess. Half the railings were gone off the porch, and the column was falling over, and, oh, Jesus. But I had all that money!

Daller: Well, remember how much it took to paint the whole house, and how you had to paint sections of it? Because he paid for the entire outside himself.

Burke: Yes. Yes, by the time I got to do all that I had no money left. [laughs]

Q: [laughs] How did you figure out what needed to be done with the house? Did you know that from—?

Burke: I knew that. Don't forget I, for years—in London, I went to university. And I studied architecture and the history of design and everything, I know all that. I know everything, what to do.

Q: And how did you decide, I guess, how to rebuild? For example, could you tell what the original construction was? Or did you have to just guess and make decisions?

Burke: Well, when it came to really heavy construction, like this whole wall being rebuilt and things, I had to hire carpenters and I had to hire plasters to plaster the ceiling. I mean, this whole

ceiling was shot. I mean, I couldn't do stuff like that all the other stuff I could do. But things that, well, were that—you needed carpenters that knew, that were good carpenters. I mean, I could do a little woodwork, but I wasn't a carpenter.

Q: And you knew the style from having studied the history of design and architecture.

George: Oh, I knew the Seguines for years. I mean, as a kid going down here crabbing, down on the beach, we used to look back at the house all the time. And I always used to say, "Wonder who lives there!" and so forth and so on. And I finally got to meet Mrs. Seguine because she had stables at that time. And a lot of people kept their horses in the stables. And I was always a horse person. So I'd go over there and, of course, Bess Seguine was always over there. That woman, she lived in riding clothes! And all these houses would never here! This was all field, all the way up, and she used to turn the horses loose on all the fields out there. But what she did is she sold off parcel after parcel in order for her to live here in the house because she had no income. And she was living here all by herself. Then she got to the point where she couldn't keep it anymore. That's when she said to me, "George, go save my house." And I came down and looked at it. You couldn't even see it. It was so overgrown. It was terrible. So I said to her, I said "Bess, the only thing I'll save your house is a bulldozer! Don't look at me. I'm no bulldozer!"

Daller: Because you might remember, he was away for so many years. So by the time he came back, all this had changed. Before he left, the house was fine.

Q: In good condition.

Daller: Mm-hmm. So coming back to it was a change.

Burke: Of course, I'd been in Alaska for all that time. And then I'd been in Europe all that time.

Daller: You weren't here. You weren't on Staten Island.

Q: And did you keep records of the restoration process?

Daller: Yes.

Burke: Well, I knew how to do it. That's what I was. I was an interior designer.

Daller: But he has albums upstairs, photos. Lots of photos, costs, everything. It's, all the numbers are accounted for.

Q: So it's budgets and the contractors, all that stuff.

Burke: Yes. And then of course, being in New York and being in the thing like that, I got to be very, very good friends, with Scalamandré. So I'd go up there and I'd say, "Ed, Adriana, what do you got?" "Well, we got some old fabric, out of date fabric." "Give it to me!" And I'd take it. Adriana would come out and she'd say, "Well, I'll tell you what, George. With that old fabric, there's enough to make drapes for one window. I'll do the whole window. I'll make you the

drapes.” The drapes are still up there. A lot of these drapes, they did. They gave me the fabric and they did it and such. Yes. And then when they decided that—they owned a beautiful house on one of the Keys in Florida. And he wanted to retire and he gave his son the business. And he and his wife, Adriana, they retired and moved to Florida. The son and his wife took over Scalamandré. They didn’t have it six months and they went under. They just couldn’t handle it. They couldn’t. They couldn’t handle it, the clientele that came in. And so they lost it. So there’s no more Scalamandré, I don’t think, is there?

Daller: And that was there forever.

Burke: I think, what was left of it, the sons moved to California and they opened up a Scalamandré in California. I don’t know if it ever took off. But all’s I know, they closed in New York and they moved out there. And that was the end of them. But they did a lot for me. She came and did a lot for the draperies and everything here. Yes.

Q: Did you keep up a conversation with Mario Buatta about—

Burke: Oh, God, Mario come out here all the time. He used to stay out here. And he had helped me—you know, while I had my own ideas for design, and whatever I thought of, he said, “George, that’s great. With a little more improvement,” and he would do a little improving on what I wanted, you know, then it was perfect when Mario did it.

Daller: As a matter of fact, we had an event years ago. And we recognized Mario at the event. So

he came out. He brought a crowd with him and it was just to tell him thank you for everything that he's done. And he kept up with him, up until the time Mario passed away.

Burke: Yes, Mario come out all the time. Well, he lived on Staten Island. He was born here.

Q: Can you give me an example of one of the things that you worked on together in the house?

Burke: Well, most of the stuff in the house, he worked with me. Yes, he helped me with the colors, and this and that, and what I should get—good orientals for the floor, which I had but they weren't these. The orientals that originally were on the floor here, I put up in the bedrooms upstairs. And my nephew—what the hell was he? He was an antique—he had a big rug business in—

Daller: Hawaii.

Burke: Hawaii. And he dealed in antique rugs, and regular rugs and everything. Finally, I think his wife got sick with that lung disease, didn't she? And she couldn't—they couldn't keep up with it anymore. And he said, "George, I'm selling my business. I'm getting rid of everything." He said, "I have three of the most beautiful Persian carpets from Persia," said, "You can't get them anymore." He said, "They're antiques but they are brand new, never used." He said, "I'm giving them to you." And this is them. There's one here, there's one there, and there's one in the other room. These are those Persian carpets.

Q: When you were making those decisions about decorating, were you thinking about a particular style, like a historic style, that you were going for?

Burke: Well, I wanted a beautiful Victorian look. And that's what this house is. I mean, these little gold chairs, are Victorian—that's a Victorian chair—everything is really Victorian. That whole salon set there was a Victorian salon set—and the couch is a camelback. So most of the stuff is Victorian—turn of the century and Victorian.

Q: Can you tell me about moving the collections here, out of storage and out of your sister's houses into this house?

Burke: Well, I'll tell you, there wasn't that much in storage—the stuff that was in storage wasn't big pieces, maybe one or two. Most of them were little things. Most of them were like china and vases, such like that. Most of the furniture that's here—I never furnished the house until I owned it. Then I went looking for the big pieces.

Q: So those things that you got later on, after—they didn't come from Europe.

Burke: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, I see.

Burke: After I had the house, then I got the big pieces of furniture.

Daller: A lot of the paintings came from Europe, though.

Burke: Yes. Well, the paintings and the small stuff like that—that like that mirror and those paintings and all that stuff—that was all the little stuff. But big stuff like couches and chairs and that kind of thing.

Daller: That's been acquired over the years. Yes.

Q: And, do you keep records on, on those kinds of things?

Burke: I used to, but I didn't I didn't keep it on everything. Like this chair that you're sitting in, these are Chippendale chairs in the Chinese style. They are Chinese Chippendale. And I got these. I found these here on Staten Island in somebody's basement!

Daller: From Michael and Jennifer, your nephew.

Burke: Oh, my nephew. They bought a house. And then the people that moved out left a bunch of old furniture, and these were the two that they left. It was piled up in their basement. When I was over there looking at their house. I said, "Gee, look at these chairs." And they said, "Yes, look at them. They're piled up. They're going out for the garbage." I said, "No, no, no, I'm trying to take them." So I took them and I had them all redone and reupholstered, and here they are.

Q: Is there somebody in particular that you work with for reupholstery or restorations?

Burke: Yes, there was a little man in New Jersey. Remember him?

Daller: Yes, he passed away.

Burke: He passed away.

Daller: It was like, we can't even find him anymore. You know, he just passed away. One day, he was gone. But he did a lot of the work for you.

Burke: He did almost all the upholstery in the house. He upholstered that chair with the things in the back. And I wanted these little chairs tufted but he had passed away before he could get around to tuft—

Q: Do you remember his name?

Daller: No, I don't. It's been so long now.

Burke: I don't even know how we got him.

Daller: I got him.



Burke: You got him.

Daller: Yes, I found him. I found him through somebody.

Burke: Yes, he did that little sofa there. And he did these two chairs. And he did the big sofa in there, didn't he? Yes, that was all Scalamandré.

Daller: He did the sofa upstairs as well. He did so much work for you. And he was so good. He worked by himself. But he was excellent. He was an old craftsman from the other side. He was from Central America somewhere, and he just believed in everything had to be right. He appreciated it. So, unfortunately, there aren't many people that care that way anymore.

Q: Yes. So a lot of the things that you acquired to furnish the house were in poor condition, and then you have them reupholstered and restored.

Daller: Yes. Now, this is a portrait of Joseph Seguire. That's the only thing in the house left from the Seguines.

Q: Wow.

Burke: Yes. He's the man that built the house.

Q: Was that here in the house? In good condition?

Burke: No, who gave me that? What was her name? She lived up on Lighthouse Hill. Shit. She was a very good friend of mine, a really pretty lady. And then finally she sold the house and she bought a beautiful place in Greenwich Village and moved to Greenwich Village.

Daller: But that's how he [referring to the painting of Mr. Seguire] came back to the house.

Q: Another local collector.

Burke: Yes.

Q: I wanted to ask, also, there's a painting of you in the house, right?

Burke: Oh, what I want to do is—over that fireplace, I want to take that painting down—and bring my painting and put it over that fireplace. Because I wanted the man that built the house, and this is the man that saved the house. That's what I wanted. And I want my painting. And that painting of me, that's upstairs in my bedroom—did you ever see it?

Q: Just a picture of it.

Daller: I'll take her on a tour.

Burke: Yes, it's a big oil painting, a big painting like this. And Luis Cañizares painted that. I was living in London, and I was studying the history of art and design, or something like that, in the University of London, and he was going and he was studying art. And he come from a very, very wealthy family in Madrid. His family was like aristocratic. And Luis was really, really a great guy. And we were great friends. We'd go down through the junk yards and whatnot. Christ, we had a good time. But anyway, I had come back to America. And he was studying art and he painted my portrait that she'll show you, that's upstairs. He painted that for me. Luis was great. In fact, he was just a few years older than I, and wasn't it last year we were trying to locate him?

Daller: Yes.

Burke: And he had just died.

Daller: Yes.

Burke: And he was one of the top portrait painters in Madrid. Before he died, that's what he was. And he's the one that did my portrait upstairs. But I've got to bring that portrait down and put it above that fireplace and get rid of that painting that's there. I don't need *The Death of Cleopatra* hanging above my fireplace. [laughs]

Q: So what was it like when you had the house finished and furnished? When did it start to feel done?

Burke: What, this house?

Q: Yes.

Burke: It's never finished! I'm always doing something. I just repainted. All these walls used to be white. A couple of years ago, I painted them this color, didn't I?

Daller: Oh, yes. Probably. Because you never finish, you're always finding something to do.

Q: How did you establish a relationship with the Parks Department and the Historic House Trust?

Burke: I think that was—who'd ya call-it got me involved with that. We just mentioned him—

Daller: Lance? Or was it Mario?

Burke: Mario.

Daller: Mario.

Q: Oh!

Burke: Mario Buatta got me into all of that. He introduced me all the time to—because look at

look at what he was. He was the top interior designer in New York. He did the White House and everything.

Q: So he knew how much work it would take over the years and what a relationship would be like to—

Burke: Oh, it was a relationship over whole period. Yes. Because he lived right here, lived right here on Staten Island. And he was the one that took me around and showed me where to get the good fabric. And where to get the good buys, and all that kind of thing. And if you went around with Mario Buatta, that was like going with the President of the United States. You know, everybody knew him, and everybody, wow. He says, “He’s my good friend,” and so on, “We live on Staten Island.” And I got to know a tremendous amount of people that way. That’s how I got to know Adriana Scalamandr  and the Scalamandr s.

Q: Was it Mario that suggested the life tenancy agreement?

Burke: What’s that?

Daller: No. That came in part from the attorney. Yes.

Q: Okay. I wanted to know some more details about the life tenancy.

Daller: We really can’t give you any details on that.

Q: Oh, okay!

Daller: It's life estate that he has. Yes, but that was all the legal aspect of it. Okay.

Q: So it's confidential because—oh, okay.

Daller: Right, we really don't discuss any of that.

Daller: Okay.

Burke: I had a beautiful big old house in Tottenville that I loved. That house, it was a big French mansard, big Victorian. It's still there. It's a beautiful house. In fact, I think it was just landmarked wasn't it?

Daller: Yes, on Arthur Kill Road.

Burke: Yes. Just landmarked. And I got a big certificate for saving that. I forgot whose house it was. It's some very wealthy unknown-known person who was there. When I bought it, I didn't know what was that one's house. Put through the years, people recognized it and everything.

And now the people that I sold it to, the Pistillis [James and Kathleen Pistilli], they had the whole thing researched and now it's got landmark things on it and everything.

Q: Did you start the restoration process at that house?

Burke: Yes.

Q: What did you do there?

Burke: Oh, well, look what I did. I restored all those buildings down in Tottenville, all those great old buildings. Lookit, I saved the police station and the two buildings next to the police station. The old—what the hell was it—grocery store. I saved that, that's still there. My big old Victorian house is saved, and that's still there. And the house across the street from it, the Old [Sir Walter] Tyrrell House. Unfortunately, all the grounds are—I don't even know if the house is there anymore! I know all the grounds that were around it were beautiful gardens. And the last time I went there, there was all houses built in it. But I don't remember seeing the main house. And that was, Mrs.—these mirrors came from that house, they were in the parlor in that house—What the hell was her name? Because my house was right across the street from it. And we were great gardeners and she had always come over in the spring, and she gave me little cuttings of all the flowers, and the different things. Yes, Mrs. Mackey. That was her name. They were the Mackeys.

Q: Was that house that you restored in a similar condition as this house?

Burke: Oh, it's in beautiful condition because the guy I told you, Jimmy Pistilli, he had it landmarked. It's down in Tottenville, beautifully done. It's a big plaque on it, it's landmarked

and everything.

Daller: But when you got it, it really was in need of repair.

Burke: Oh, god!

Daller: The staircase wasn't even straight. If you stood outside and looked at it, the staircase went that way.

Burke: Yes, I had to go down in the basement, and put a post, and then I had to jack up the stairs. And I had to have somebody upstairs, standing on the stairs, and told me when to stop jacking, when the stairs got level, because the stairs were like this. And when they got level, he screamed, "Okay, George, they're level, they're level!" And then I put a big post—I put a big cement thing on the floor. I put the post on it up under the floor where the newer posts in the staircase was upstairs, and then, when I took the jack away, it sat on the post. And the post is still there and the staircase is still in good shape—but that's still in the house, now, down there.

Q: And you said that you restored the garden there too?

Burke: The what?

Q: The garden.



Burke: Oh, yes. You'd have to see the house to see what I'm talking about. The front porch was up high. And here was the street. And there was a big flight of stairs that went across the big porch across the front of the house, posts. And then upstairs was like a big balcony above that porch. But under that porch was the basement. But the basement was the summer dining rooms and summer kitchen. And there was French doors that went out from the basement under the porch. And you'd walk out, and the porch was all brick, and at the end of the porch was a big arch that had little windows in it and a French door where you could walk out to the garden. And from the garden, you could come back in under the porch and down into the kitchen in the basement. And it's still there, it's all there. But I restored all that. Of course, when I bought the house, that was all weeds growing up among the bricks. And the porch, I don't think—one end of it, you wouldn't dare walk on because the whole thing would have collapsed. And the house was really, needed shape—but thank God it was built as well as it was built, otherwise it would have fallen down. I restored the whole house—well, how long did I live there? Christ, a good ten, twelve years.

Daller: Yes, definitely. That was a great house.

Burke: Oh, god, it still is.

Daller: That was the house that had ghosts.

Burke: That what?

Daller: That had a ghost. Remember?

Burke: Oh, the ghost? Yes—

Daller: That's a story you should share, about the lilacs and the lady.

Burke: Oh, I forgot about that. I bought the house and Bess and Marge came over. And they said, "Oh my god, George, what are you—" Oh, and who else was that? Brother Bill?

Daller: No—

Burke: About the candle? Or was that brother Ed?

Daller: No, that was Ed.

Burke: Ed. He come over he looked at it. He said, "What in the hell you're buying this old piece of shit for?" He said, "Is it insured?" I said, "Yes, I took big insurance on it." He said, "Good. Put a candle right in the middle of that floor and go take a walk." [laughs] He called it the one-candle house. I said, "No, no, no. I'm gonna save this house. I'm gonna save it, it's a gorgeous house!"

Daller: And that house was beautiful. Oh my god.

Burke: Yes. Well, now it's a landmark!

Daller: I mean, that big wrap-around porch that went all the way around the house. And the backyard is beautiful.

Burke: Yes. And the basement was beautiful, where you can walk out onto the porch and out into the garden.

Daller: But it was the thing with the lilacs smell. Do you remember that?

Burke: Oh, when I bought the house, everybody told me, "Oh, what are you buying that old crap for?" Well, I didn't say I bought it because I got it practically for nothing because they couldn't get rid of it. People didn't want it because it had such a reputation as being haunted. And it was actually three stories high. It's still there, you can see it. And there was a whole other floor, another story, and it's built with the French style, in the French mansard. Because it was a big roof, like this, and then the gutters run around. And these roofs had big arches, like this. And they were the big windows that looked—and that was a whole, big—just like here, it was another story. But when they were building houses, if you had a third story, your taxes went out of sight! So they built it like an attic and it was called an attic but it was a whole complete story. But it looked like an attic with the roof like that and everything. And they copied that from France, because that's what it was, it was the French mansard. And that's what they were doing in France to keep from getting it taxed. And you would have been taxed in this country if it was already like that. So because it was done like the French did, I never had to pay tax, or only tax

on a two-story house, instead of a three-story.

Burke: But what were we going into before I got into the architecture?

Daller: The lilacs.

Burke: Oh, and then the house, when I bought it, everybody—the real estate lady, she wouldn't come in. That was Mrs., what was her name?

Daller: I know what you mean.

Burke: Anyway, she was well known here on Staten Island. In fact, her husband was a big-wig. Well, it doesn't matter, her name. But anyway, she said, "I'm not going in the house. The house is haunted," she said, "if you're interested in it, George, here's the key to the front door, you go." And as I said, there was a big flight of stairs that went up and a big porch across the whole front of the house. And underneath it was a whole kitchen and dining room that opened out to under the porch. And then you could walk under the porch out into the garden. But the upper story of the house was two more floors. And they were big floors. And it was very much built like this house. Because there was a big double parlor like this on one side of it. Then there was the main hall that went through, just like this: door, front door, back door. Then, on that side, was the dining room, and the kitchen. Right? Yes, the dining room and the kitchen was on the other two, side. Then upstairs, was all the bedrooms. And then, on the third floor, which was in the mansard roof, that was all the servants' quarters. And that was a kitchen, and that was bedrooms and a

little living room, all up there. Where all the servants lived.

And then, on the side of the house in the back, there was a little piece built out. Because back when they built the houses, kitchens were never built in the house. Kitchens were always built in a house outside by themselves, and a breezeway going to the house, because the kitchens would always burn down. And that way, it wouldn't burn the houses down. So all the big mansions were built with outside kitchens. So that had the outside kitchen. And it never had a kitchen. So when I got it, of course, the old kitchen was in—I had knocked it down because it was all falling apart. And in the basement, I put the kitchen and a dining area and everything. And I took that room and made it into the dining room. And the only problem with that was the kitchen was downstairs. And in order to have food and such, you'd have to bring it up the back stairs. It's still that way. But that was a big improvement, putting in the kitchen, because there never was a kitchen in the house—and where the kitchen is now, that was the laundry room.

And right outside the window right here, is a great big round, thing that's all brick—great big round thing, big as this room, covered-over—and that's where all the water from the drain pipe from the roof would go in there and fill it, and it was called a cistern, and that was connected to the kitchen downstairs. And that's what where all the water, for all the laundry, and all that kind of stuff—not the drinking water, the working water—would come out of that big cistern, and would go into—and the pump and everything, it's still down there, connected to that thing out there. But unfortunately, it all fell in. It's still there, the framework of it, with the brick. But that was the cistern for doing all the laundry and everything in the basement. And the kitchen was outside. The kitchen was never in the basement. But I put the kitchen in the basement and sealed

up that, because once that filled up with water, it would leak into the basement. So I made sure it was filled in with dirt the rest of the way, so I wouldn't have that water getting in the basement. But that's what that was. That was a big—it's still there.

Daller: See, now you learned about kitchens.

Q: Yes, absolutely. I have questions about closets too!

[INTERRUPTION]

Burke: What did you ask me?

Q: Can you tell me about the ghost in that house?

Burke: Oh. Oh, that was the ghost in Tottenville.

Q: Yes.

Burke: Let me think of how all that started. When I bought the house, the real estate people, they wouldn't go in. One woman wouldn't go it, can't think of her name. But anyway, she said, "No, I'm not going in. There's a ghost in there." And I said, "Well, I don't believe in ghosts. So don't worry about it." Ghost in the house—if she's gonna live there, she could do some cleaning up, do some dusting. But some strange things did happen in the house. And I said to the real estate lady,

I said, “Well, how do you know there’s a ghost in there?” She said, “Because the old lady that originally lived in the house. She had a caretaker or she had a woman that took care of her, or something. And in the back of the house, it’s still there, is a—Christ, it must be half the size of this room—is a huge, huge lilac bush. And all the time when all the lilacs would come in the spring, and the whole place would smell of lilacs, it’s gorgeous, still is.

I can’t think of—doesn’t matter, the name of the people. But the old lady that lived there was very, very sick. And she had this woman who was a caretaker. What the woman who was caretaking her, what she had to do was constantly keep lilacs next to the bed. Or next to the chair where she was sitting. Of course, she loved the smell of lilacs. And through all the years that the old lady had this woman taking care of her, the lilacs were always in bloom—when they were in bloom, they were in the house. And when they weren’t in the house, they would go and buy them at the stores, and there was always lilacs in the house.

So finally, I think, the old lady died, didn’t she? Yes, she died and she was in the front parlor in the coffin, wasn’t she? Yes, and I had bought the house, but I couldn’t have the house and move in until she died. She was living in the house until—she owned it until she died, and then I would take it over. So she finally died. I moved in the house, and I would come in the house, and right in the front hallway, you could always smell lilacs. The real estate lady wouldn’t come in. She would say, “The lilacs still in the front hall?” And I’d say, “Oh, is that what that smell is? It’s a real pretty smell.” She said, “Yes, it’s lilacs.” She said Mrs. Whatever-her-name-was always had to have lilacs. Always, in that vase in the hall. And I said, “Well, the smell is still there.” And I said to her, “Whatever happened to the old girl?” And she said, “Well, years ago, when she

died,” she said, “she was laid out in the front parlor in the coffin, and it was nothing but lilacs. That’s the only thing people could bring. If they brought flowers, it had to be lilacs.” So I said, “Oh.” So that was that—I got that little story.

And, oh, no—before then, when I had moved in, I had moved in, and the house had been empty for years. I moved in, I cleaned it all up. I fixed it up. I did everything. Oh, God, I worked so damn hard. And on top of that, I still worked for Sherwin Williams. So I still had to get up every day and go to work. So I come home dead tired. I had a dream that—in my dream, I woke up and I was laying in bed upstairs, and I could smell lilacs. I didn’t know they were lilacs, but I could smell something pretty. And I said, “Oh, shit. What the hell is that coming from?” So I come down the stairs, and as I got down the stairs, the smelling got stronger and stronger. So I figured, oh, shit. I bet I left the cellar door open under the stairwell, from the basement, and I bet that’s the soap I’ve got in the washing machine that smells like that. So I go downstairs. No, it wasn’t that. I’d come back up and I could still smell it in the hallway. So, that’s it, I said, to hell with it.

So a couple of days later, I have a dream. And I dream that I heard some noise. And when you’d come down, there was—the stairwell come down, and it was a double parlor, like this, and where this door was, was with two double doors. And there were two windows, like this. I come down the stairs and I opened the door. And right there in front of the windows was a coffin with all the flowers around it and everything. And I walked into there and I walked up, and the lid was closed on the coffin. And I said, “What in the hell is this doing in my house?” So I opened up the lid and there was this old lady laying in there, with this big lace collar around her neck, and her hair was puffed up behind her head, like that, was all gray. And she was laying like this. And I



looked in the thing, I said, “Holy shit. What the hell is this?” All of a sudden, she went, “You’re in my house, and get out!” Holy Christ. I woke up with a sweat. And I said, “Was that a dream? Or is that real?” That was real. I bet she’s there. I bet. I’m gonna go look. So I run downstairs. I open the door to the parlor. Of course, nothing’s there. It’s empty. So I said, whew! What a damn dream, there she was, laying in her coffin there, with her finger at me.

So the next day, I’m up and I’m outside. And my neighbor across the street, who had lived there forever, she comes over again with a couple of little plants for me. Mrs. Mackey. Was her name Mackey? I think so. Anyway, I said, “Oh boy, did I have a scary dream.” I told her my dream. She said, “George, when she died, she was laid out in the coffin, right in that room, in front of those two windows. And she was laid in a dress with a big lace collar. And she was laying with her arms, like that. And that’s where she was.” She said, “You saw her in your dream.” I said, “Holy shit,” I said, “you think that was her?” She said, “It could have been her.” I said, “Then she went like that and chased me out of her house.” She said, “That was her. She was a nasty old lady!” But that was funny. I dreamed, I saw it. I knew what she looked like, I knew where it was. I had no idea that that was it, when I bought the house or anything. If it wasn’t for Mrs. Mackey across the street telling me about the funeral, I would have never known. But I dreamt it and I knew every single thing about it.

Q: Wow!

Burke: So I don’t know if that was a ghost.

Q: Yes!

Burke: Or what.

Daller: Well, he said, he felt that house had spirits in it. He said, when he was moving here, he told the people there, he goes, “I’m moving. If you want to come, behave yourselves. If you don’t want to come don’t show up.” And he said since he’s been here, he has nobody here. There’s none of the spirits. But the other house, one of his friends was pushed down the stairs. He said he believes that whoever was in that other house, really didn’t want people there.

Burke: Down in the basement, my friend Eric—he was great, with this Ouija board and all this stuff—and he said, “George, let’s do a seance!” So we got a bunch of people together and we went all down in the basement. And we were sitting in the kitchen in the basement and he was going on the Ouija board and I said, “What does it say, what does it say?” And Eric is sitting there and he’s talking, and he’s sounding like a lady, and he’s saying, “You’re in my house, and I don’t want you. You are to get out. I don’t want you in this house. Get out. If you are going to stay, you better do this this and this,” whatever the hell it was. And, she said, “If so, we will give you gifts.” And then that was the end. And then the Eric woke up, and I said, “Well, I don’t know. Eric. I’m going to get gifts now because I’m staying in the house and I’m going to fix it up.”

So, I would say—what was it?—the spring, and in the back of the house was the entrance to the cellar with the double doors, where you walked down the stairs, and it was all brick, and it had

the doors. One of the doors was shot, so I took this door off, and when I did, the brick wall, on the side, started falling out. “Oh shit, I’m going to have to rebuild the wall.” So I started pulling the bricks out, and wrapped up where one of the bricks was, was an oil cloth rag all wrapped up. I said, “Oh shit, look at this.” And I pulled that out and unwrapped it, and what the hell was in it? A brooch that I gave Bess?

Daller: Maybe.

Burke: Do you remember?

Daller: No. Probably.

Burke: But anyway, it was a big beautiful cameo brooch, and was wrapped in an oil cloth rag! So I took that out of the brick and I got some cement, put it all back in, put the wall back up. And then, it was—I guess that was in the spring, then later on, I don’t know what I was doing. Anyway, there was three things that I found by doing some work—like, gifts—I forget what they were. They were all women’s stuff.

Daller: Well, yes. It makes sense because she was an old lady. So that makes sense. She left things there. That was all what she had in mind!

Burke: Well, if she left them there, she had to come back as a ghost and tell me that they were there!

Daller: She did!

Q: [laughs]

Burke: But I forgot what the other two things where. Some kind of jewelry. But the one that I remember was a great big brooch. And I often wondered what happened to that brooch because I gave it to Bess. But not long ago, I was talking about it. And Diane said, “Oh, Marian has it.”

Daller: Maybe, yes.

Burke: Her sister has it [indicating Daller]. But I forgot what the other two things were. They were some kind of jewelry like that but I don't remember what it was.

Daller: That's interesting.

Burke: One was a necklace with a heart on it. A necklace with a gold heart that opened like a—

Daller: Like a locket.

Burke: Like a locket. But the picture in the locket was all crumbled up. You couldn't tell what it was. Yes. And I gave that, I think—I don't know if I gave it to Bess. So, I don't know. I probably gave it to Bess. Yes, but it was weird. I found three things like that.

Q: So about this house, I wanted to ask about the Friends of the Seguire Mansion.

Burke: About the what?

Q: The Friends of the Seguire Mansion—the friends group.

Daller: Well he formed that, that's the board.

Q: Yes!

Daller: And he formed the board in order to support the house. Because the problem was is that my uncle was paying for everything in the house—he was paying for the heating, he was paying all the utilities, paying all the bills. And even though the house belongs, in essence, to Historic House Trust, they weren't reimbursing him for anything. He was incurring all the expenses. So we brought that point up a few times. And finally, we met with John Krawchuk, when he became in office. And he saw the way to help out, and I said, we'll form a board and what we'll do is we'll continue to have fundraisers in order to support the house, but we need additional help and support as well. So that's how that all came about.

Burke: So then I gave it to the Historic House Trust of New York—

Daller: Years ago—

Burke: —years ago, because I couldn't afford to keep it. And they were going to pay for everything if they owned it. So I gave it to them. And I kept life rights for it. So as long as I own it, I own it, they'll pay for it. But when I die, they say they're going to make a museum out of it.

Q: And—if this is something that you can't discuss, let me know—but, for example, if you decide to repaint, like you did in this room, is that something that the board fundraises for?

Things like that?

Daller: Oh, that's exactly—I mean, because that was the reason for getting a board, was to also help get things done. Because the other way, my uncle was digging into whatever a little bit of savings he had, in order to pay. I mean, one year, the oil bill here was \$11,000. And, you know, who has that!? In a house that you don't even own? It wasn't fair to him to keep paying for it. So that was the reason we chose to do a White Party. We were doing other parties at the time, the only thing we still maintain is the White Party. And the White Party we do in order to take care of doing cleanup on the lawn, doing any kind of plantings, or anything, because he did it all the years. Up until a year ago, he was still cutting the lawn! He can't do this anymore. I mean, it's physically impossible. So we need to get help. And that's what I called out for was help. I need to get someone in to do a good cleaning on the house, someone to take care of maintaining it. He's done it for forty-plus years, now it's time to give back.

Q: And so, what sort of vision do you have for, you know, the next the next forty years, for how the grounds are maintained and how—

Daller: Well, he hopes that Historic House Trust and the Parks Department work hand in hand and maintaining it—that they'll maintain it as a museum. They'll take care of it and be able to show tours. And have something on a loop in here, which we've been trying to do, where it'll be an audio and a video of him discussing the house, because nobody knows it any better than he does. And no one's going to be able to talk about it, and point things out, and say where it came from, or what's the history behind it. I've been to the Tenement Museum, and I love the fact that there's a woman on a loop and she discusses living in the apartment. And that makes more sense to people when they see something. So that's my uncle's hope for it as well.

Burke: And I'm leaving everything that's in the house—it's staying. I'm giving nothing away. It's all stay in here.

Q: And will the board continue and play a role in in that?

Daller: Well, they hope to. If we can reach an agreement with Historic House Trust, by all means. We have a choice in having a caretaker come in also to maintain it. You want to have someone living in it, you can't have an empty house.

Q: Right. That's the usual setup, I think, for historic houses.

Burke: Chris will stay living here. And she'll be caretaker.

Daller: Yes, well, that's what we just said, yes.

Burke: The only thing is, the house will be closed. And if they're gonna make a museum out of it, they're gonna have to pay somebody to greet people and take them on tours. They can't just say, "The doors are open for anybody, just walk in!" Somebody will walk in, and say, "Oh, I like those chairs," pick them up, and take them, and they'll be gone.

Q: Yes. Right. And is there a way where, according to how you would like the house to be maintained—would everything stay in its place? Or is there a way for things to be changed?

Daller: No, that still has to be discussed.

Q: Okay, all of that. Well, do you know what your preferences are?

Daller: No. No, it's not something we're talking about right now.

Q: Okay.

Burke: But everything will stay here exactly as it is, because if it's going to be a museum, people are not going to come in and look at empty walls.

Q: [laughs] No!



Burke: They'll come in, but you'll have to have somebody as a guide. Because people will come in, and there'll be four or five people and somebody will walk by and just pick this up, and pick that up. But before we know it, there won't be a thing left in the house.

Q: What do you think the role of this house is, in this part of Staten Island? I mean, you talked about it, when you were a kid, that it was this big house that you would see when you were out on—

Daller: It's a part of the history of Staten Island. It's a part of the history that should remain. The fact that the Seguire family—this was the farmhouse, their mansion was in Rossville—and that's long gone. And places on Staten Island are being destroyed every minute of the day—you find another house is going—and it's happening in all the boroughs! They're deciding they want to build, so they tear down and build. So if this can remain a part of the history, that'll be great for people to appreciate. Will they appreciate it? I'm sure some will. But how many people really have a sense of history anymore? They don't know it. They really don't know what history is all about. So they—

Burke: —the Historic House people did give me a big bronze plaque to put on the front of it.

Daller: Stating that it is part of it part of Historic House—

Burke: —and thanking me for saving it.

Q: Yes. I wanted to ask about the Equestrian Center. That was something that you had restored—is that right?

Burke: What's that?

Daller: The stables. The stables were here for years. When he came he got everything going. Chris was the one that got involved with it. But the problem is, it's so limited on Staten Island. And over the years, it became just prohibitive to try and do. The mayor and everybody else in the city—you can't ride on the beach. You can't ride on the street. You can't ride anywhere but in a circle arena. Nobody wants to do that.

Burke: Yes. They even stopped you riding in the parks. And so people said—they took all the horses and they moved to New Jersey.

Daller: If they can't ride, why should they be here?

Burke: Yes.

Q: So part of why it closed was because—

Daller: That was 100% of why it closed—

Q: —that the city prohibited—

Daller: Plus the fact, it cost a fortune to take away the manure. Everything has to be environmentally done properly, so by the time you figure it out, you're spending more money, when you're making no money because you have no horses. So it just became a moot point. You know, nobody wanted to end it but nobody wanted to, say, "Let's do it. Let's keep fighting it," because there was no way to fight. I mean, look, they've been trying to get rid of the carriage horses in the city, for how long now? It's just a shame. It's all part of history, and they're just destroying it every way they can.

Burke: And what is a shame is—like, you take [one of our former boarders], she has two horses that she used to keep here all the time. She had to move them to New Jersey. So every time she wants to go riding, she has to go all the way to New Jersey, ride her horse, and then come all the way back. And so she's got the bridge, and it costs money. And it's more expensive to keep her horses there than it was here. And I miss all those horses. And not only that, we got a lot of manure—I used to have it to put on all the gardens and to put on the fields and whatnot. And I could turn the horses loose and they'd keep all the fields cut and mowed, you know? Yes, of course, they could eat all the grass. So it's a shame.

And that was a couple people from Tottenville, caused all that. How the hell they got to the right people, I don't know. And how people went along with them, I don't know either. But they are the ones that—up in arms, saying, "Aww, that poor horse. That poor horse. I went over there, and it was standing up sleeping!" What the hell do you think it was? On a goddamn pillared mattress sleeping? She was on TV complaining about it.

Daller: You know, people don't understand them. Unfortunately, you got to find environmentalists, they've got to look for things and they've got to point things out. "That's not good." The same thing that's going on with statues. You want to take down every statue that's been there for a thousand years because, "No, that statue shouldn't be there. That's annoying certain people." What was it, in the city? They had *The [Charging] Bull* in the city and they had the little *[Fearless] Girl* there. Well, he didn't want the bull with the little girl. Now the little girl had to be moved to Wall Street.

So as long as you have people, you're going to have change, and people are going to say, "That doesn't work! That works!" Thankfully, no one's come here and said, "Oh, you might have had slaves." I mean, I'm sure if somebody came and decided to look back, they'd say, "Oh, no, there's a reason for a house like that." People have ideals that are very strange. Why can't they just appreciate something for what it is? And the fact that somebody could save a house like this, and want to show it to people, and let people hear about the history behind it? But it doesn't work that way. Unfortunately.

Burke: Well, look at the mansion! Too bad that there wasn't somebody with a brain. The mansion was gorgeous! Absolutely gorgeous. I mean, this was just a farmhouse. You could imagine what the mansion looked like. The mansion had a huge ballroom and everything in it.

Q: So tell me about what it's been like for you to live here.

Burke: The what?

Burke: What it's been like for you to live here.

Burke: What it's like to live here?

Q: I mean, I live in a small apartment, so what is it like to live in a kind of museum quality home?

Burke: I don't find any difference living here. I mean, it's just normal living in a normal house.

Daller: He enjoys the whole house. There isn't a room he doesn't go into. He spends time in every part of it. And think about it. He's been maintaining it for forty-plus years. So you really can't even try to say what does it feel like? It feels like home, because that's what it's been. That's the only way to explain it.

Burke: Of course, I come from a big house. All my life, I was raised in a big house.

Daller: But it feels like home. It's no different from home.

Burke: I never lived in a little small house, I have no idea.

Daller: And he uses every room, he doesn't sit in one room. He'll utilize every room of the

house. And in the summer, he sits outside, enjoys the outdoors, enjoys the lawn, the grounds.

Burke: And it's great when you have friends come, you have extra bedrooms, you can put them all up. You don't have to worry about, sleeping on your couches and all that kind of stuff, and, you know, pulling out fake beds, and that kind of stuff. I don't know, I'm just used to it. I have no idea what it would be like to live in some other place. I mean, I had a beautiful condo in Florida. But that was a condo. But that was big—a big, two-bedroom condo.

Q: You mentioned that the South Shore has changed in the last few years. Would you like to elaborate on that?

Burke: What?

Q: You mentioned that the South Shore has changed in the last few years.

Daller: Well, it's just the fact that the South Shore has gotten very built-up. You could see with all the houses over here, it's gotten very built up. They're all "McMansions." You can go and look and read about anything about the South Shore of Staten Island. They talk about Tottenville, it's all "McMansions." Everything has changed, all the old houses are torn down. They tear down one house and build five.

Burke: Well, a good example is the one right here at the end of the street. They tore down those two nice little cottages that were there. And that guy, look at the size of that house he just built.

And what's going on up the street here now? Isn't that a huge house they're building, you told me?

Daller: Yes, that's another one.

Burke: Yes. And that was nothing but a little house that caught fire—was just a little, little house. And now they're building—I haven't seen it, but Linda says it's a huge house they're building. I mean, let's face it. Staten Island and the South Shore is the only place where people can still move, be in a country feeling, and build what they want to build, and have a garden and have a lawn and, you know, they can be in the country and still be in the city.

Q: And you feel that that's at risk because of the development that's happening now.

Burke: Oh my god. I'm offered fortunes for the front field, for the side field, for the backfield. Constantly. Developers. "Would you just sell me two acres there? Would you sell me the acres in the front? Would you—?" It's unreal! That's why I did what I did, because I figured that if anything ever happens to me, all of this, now, will have to stay as it is. They can't build houses on it. They can't develop it. They can't do anything. It has to stay exactly as an old plantation house. All the grounds, the stables, everything—they can't change a thing. So it's saved forever. And I hope whoever is in charge of it—Linda will probably be here in charge! [laughs] But, it'll be here.

Q: Yes.

Burke: And all the others like it, well, I can remember, on the other side of the pond over there, going along—the mansions that were over there. The one in particular, United States Steel [Corporation]. People that owned U.S. Steel, their mansion was over there. The walkway going to the beach, it's still there, where the house was. Oh god, that was a gorgeous mansion. Bulldozed that down. There's a bunch of little houses now built all along through their gardens. They were gorgeous. Well, what are we talking about? Right across the creek.

Daller: Yes, absolutely.

Burke: Right across the creek. That was—you probably don't remember—there was this great big factory right down here, built on the beach. And it was called SS White [Dental Manufacturing Company]. And it did all the dental work—any kind of dental work and everything was manufactured there. I think there were hundreds of people that worked there. In fact, my mother worked there. And their mansion, the White people that owned SS White, the White family, owned right across the creek, there, where the Captain's Quarters [private development] are. That was the most beautiful mansion. Formal gardens, stables—stables that you could live in. More beautiful than people's houses. Those stables? Oh, God, it was gorgeous. Unbelievable. And the people that lived there, they got a little too old to stay there. The whole family kind of—and the ladies got too old, and they decided they were going to move and go live in—I think Georgia or Virginia, I forgot. But they donated it to the Sisters of Charity, figuring that the nuns could live in that gorgeous mansion. And they did. They moved in there, and they lived there. But they hadn't been there, maybe five, six years, and I guess they decided, “Oh!



This the expensive piece of property!” They sold it to the developers. The developers came in with bulldozers—bulldozed that mansion, bulldozed the stables.

Daller: And built all the condos.

Burke: Oh, God, I stood on the edge here and I watched what was going on over there. It turned my stomach just to watch all of that gorgeous stuff just destroyed. Destroyed. All went into the landfill. What a shame. The mansion, oh god. I was in the mansion when the sisters lived there. It was unbelievably gorgeous. The woodwork, the moldings, the parquet floors. What a gorgeous home that was. Well.

Daller: Well, that was greed.

Burke: What a shame.

Daller: Yes. But that’s part of what’s been going on down here. It doesn’t happen on the North Shore because we’re very condensed and it’s a dense population. But down here, all the beautiful homes that were down here are gone. They’re very few. And if you can capture and keep something that looks like this, then this is a big plus for the area. It’s a plus for the borough too. But again, I don’t know that Staten Island appreciates anything, because we had a Borough President at one time that we asked him a question about something and his answer to my uncle was, “Well, why would you want to put a new suit on an old man?”

Q: Wow.

Daller: So I think that said a lot.

Q: Yes. From what you've described, the different places that have been demolished over the years were extremely different from each other. So this house tells a particular story, a long history, but it can't tell the history of the other houses because they were so different.

Daller: No. And if they only would have remained, they would have been a part of it, and everything could have been fully appreciated. I mean, Captain's Quarters, instead of building all those condos down there, it would have been beautiful to have another stately home there. It would have been spectacular but greed set in, and that's what they did.

Burke: Yes, but just think of that gorgeous, big—the mansion that this was their farmhouse, up the street here, that was gorgeous. Big fluted columns with big Corinthian capitals on them. And the house was like this, a big piece with two big wings. And the porch went all like this, around the house. Must have been twelve big columns, it was, oh! It was like a mansion you've never seen. It was unbelievably gorgeous. And I wish the hell I could have gotten a hold of that before they tore it down. I would have saved it. But I was glad that I got this. And the only reason why this survived is because nobody wanted the farmhouse! This was the farmhouse. That was the mansion. That was gorgeous. I got one or two things out of it.

Q: Was it a similar style as this house?

Burke: What's that?

Q: Was it a similar style? Architectural style and interior style?

Daller: It was much grander.

Burke: Well, the house, actually, from the outside, is a—oh, shit—the name of it went right out of my head.

Q: A Greek Revival house?

Burke: Greek revival. That's what it is. It's Greek Revival. Yes.

Q: And the mansion sounds similar.

Burke: It was. It was similar, only bigger and more ornate. It was gorgeous and very ornate—was very, very much like Greek Revival. Like there was old Greek, like the Parthenon, the Greek temples—oh, it was beautiful. The columns weren't square wooden ones, like these, they were beautiful fluted ones with all the Corinthian leaves on the tops of them and all that stuff. And it was twice the size of this house.

Q: Well, I'm pretty much at the end of my questions. Is there anything else that you would like

to add about the house as it is now, the history, or the future of the house?

Daller: I think we've touched on everything, really. I think he's given you a great history of what started and, basically, you've talked about his life from the beginning, so, I don't know. Is there anything, you think? I don't think anything's missing?

Q: No, I think we've—

Burke: Well, you've got to thank Mrs. Seguire. Because she begged me. Sure, I'd no idea of ever owning his house because I had a beautiful big house in Tottenville—big French style house. And she kept, "George, please, go save my house. Save my house." And I thought, "Oh, shit." I was down on the beach one day, I forgot what we're doing. Oh, we were crabbing. And I looked back, you could hardly see the house. It was so overgrown in the front yard and everything. And I'm looking at looking at it and I said, "You know, that's the last house. That's it—there's no more of them. They're all gone. I should really do something to save it." And it just was luck that I had just sold a real estate deal and made a lot of money. And I had the money to do it, and I said, "You know, let me do it."

My brother, he come in and he said, "What are you, nuts? This old—? Burn it down, put a candle in the middle of the hall. Take a walk." I said, "No, no, I'm gonna save this house." He said, "Oh! The only thing that will save this house as a bulldozer!" [laughs] But anyway, I saved it.

Q: Yes! We're so lucky that you did.

Burke: Yes.

Q: Yes. Thank you.

Burke: I'm glad I did. And I'm glad I did what I did, about just giving it to the National Historic Trust. Because, now, they can't tear it down. They can't do anything. The stables, everything has to remain the same. I forgot—there's ten acres that is landmarked now. So it'll be part of Staten Island that people, maybe fifty years from now when there's not a spot left, they'll all come out and they'll look and say, "Wow, this is what it used to be."

Q: Yes. Thanks very much to you. So thank you. And I think we can end there.

Burke: Well, I don't know if people will ever realize in years and years to come that I saved so much, but they did give me a plaque for restoration. So I got this on the front porch somewhere, nailed to the house, but—doesn't matter. Just as long as it's saved and it's here. What is a shame is some of the mansions—the really, really ornate mansions that were torn down. That was a shame. Yes.

I did go around and take pictures of what was left of some of them. But what was really, really bad was people, if they were going to build a garage, or they were going to build something, they'd go to that big, beautiful mansion and rip the siding off of it and take it back to build what they want to build. They'd go in and they'd take the windows out and they'd use the windows,

and they destroyed it. They just went and just vandalized it to hell until there was nothing but a shell left. And then, it was declared unsafe, and they come in and knocked it down. And that was only one of them. They were all along the waterfront here. All the way to the Great Kills Harbor. There were some gorgeous mansions. The one owned by the steel company—was that a beautiful house! Oh, God. I thought for sure that would never go. And then, where they built the school—what is that girl's school up here? Off of Hylan Boulevard? Linda?

Daller: Oh, I don't know. I don't know what it is.

Burke: It's right on the Boulevard and it goes down to the beach. But they tore the house down to build that school. That was a shame.

[INTERRUPTION]

Burke: So that should pretty well cover it, I think.

Q: Yes!

Burke: Anything else you want to know?

Q: No, that covers it! Thank you so much.

Burke: Sure. Now what are you going to do with this?

Q: So this is going to part of an online archive.

Burke: Oh, okay.

Q: So we'll have audio recording and a transcript for researchers—and I'll remove those names that you mentioned, Linda.

Burke: So, in other words, fifty years from now, if someone wants to learn about the house, they can find out.

Q: Yes. And also about the history of Staten Island, or the style that the house is decorated in, the Victorian style, your collection. And then the Historic House Trust will use it as well to understand what's important to you about maintaining the house.

Burke: Well, I hope it gets maintained. I hope it isn't that the people who have access come in and empty it because I've had people say, "Oh, when you're not here, I'm taking that painting, and I'm taking that painting, and I want that couch," you know. That is the only thing that worries me—that the house will be stripped. And you can't control it from the grave. But you do have Chris that's upstairs that lives in the servants' quarters. She said she'll keep the doors locked and call Linda if anybody wants to get in and take anything out.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

[END OF INTERVIEW]