Oral History Interview with Judith

Conducted by Jody Beck

for the DC Oral History Collaborative
as part of the Cleveland & Woodley Park Villagers' Stories Project

November 8, 2023
Fifty minutes and thirty-two seconds

Home of Judith
Washington, DC

Summary: Judith discusses her experience with the Village community, highlighting the support she received in times of need, particularly with health challenges and transportation. Judy reflects on the significance of learning to ask for help, emphasizing the importance of community and accepting assistance during the COVID era. She shares insights into her hospitalization, where the Village facilitated follow-up care and introduced her to valuable services. The conversation touches on the effectiveness of existing Village programs, including the potential for innovative initiatives such as Zoom dances. Throughout, Judy expresses gratitude for the friends and support networks that have looked out for her, illustrating the vital role of community in her journey.

Cleveland & Woodley Park Village is a nonprofit membership organization that serves residents in Washington, DC's Cleveland Park and Woodley Park neighborhoods. It is part of a national movement to assist older adults as they age in their own homes. The Village's mission is to create opportunities for older adults to be actively engaged, support those who need it with volunteer assistance to help them live independently, and work to create a welcoming community for people of all ages. This oral history interview was conducted under a grant from the Humanities Council of Washington, DC to the Cleveland & Woodley Park Village.

Biographical Information: Judith was born in New Haven, Connecticut on May 17th, 1935. She now lives in Washington, DC. After a lifetime of watching dance, Judith began taking dance lessons at age 71 to help with health issues. She is now a performer and choreographer who enjoys facilitating classes, especially for multigenerational groups. Judith earned a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Queens College, City University of New York, did graduate studies at Columbia University and The New School for Social Research, and obtained a Certification as a Certified Health Consultant from Perdue University. In her professional life she was an economist and later a consultant teaching business writing and presentation skills. Judith has been a member of Cleveland & Woodley Park Village since 2014.

Topics Covered: Cleveland Park. Woodley Park. Older Adults. Aging in DC. The Village Movement. Community. Senior Services. DC History. Cleveland & Woodley Park Village Membership. DC Villages. Disabilities. Gentrification. Dance. Theatre.

Locations/Neighborhoods Mentioned: Cleveland Park, Woodley Park, Forest Hills, 20th Street NW, N Street NW, Friendship Heights, 15th Street NW, U Street NW, Columbia Road NW, Anacostia, Brookland, Van Ness, Dupont Circle, Capitol Hill, Lincoln Park, Eastern Market, Georgetown, Dupont Circle, 12th Street NW, Constitution Avenue NW, Takoma Park, Devonshire Place NW

Jody Beck: Okay. I'm Jody Beck, and I'm here with --

Judith: Judith.

Jody Beck: So today is November 18th --?

Judith: Eight.

Jody Beck: Eight. I was out of town last weekend. I have no idea what day it is! I got that -- it's the 8th ovember, 2023. At least I have the year right. And we are in -- is this part of Cleveland Park? Or you technically --

Judith: It's Forest Hills.

Jody Beck: It's Forest Hills, so a little bit north of Cleveland Park.

Judith: Yes.

Jody Beck: But you also lived in Cleveland Park earlier, or Woodley Park?

Judith: Well, here's the thing. Theoretically, I'm in the Northwest Neighbors. But when we got ready to join the Village, most of the things that were happening up here were in homes, and my husband was disabled and used -- had mobility things. And so we knew a couple of people down in Cleveland Park, and so that's how we ended up there.

Jody Beck: Well, we're glad you did.

Judith: And we have somebody else in this building who also is in the Village.

Jody Beck: We have a couple of people that are just slightly out of the boundary.

Judith: Right, right. It's an overlap.

Jody Beck: So why don't you tell me a little bit about your childhood, where you were born, and how you ended up in DC, unless you're one of those rare DC natives I meet once in a while.

Judith: Right. Well, DC is really my home. But I was born in New Haven, Connecticut, on May 17th, 1935. And I don't know exactly what time I was

born, but I was the first child born after 9:00 in the morning, because a new baby shop was opening up, and I won the prize.

Jody Beck: And what was that prize?

Judith: It was a kind of bassinette kind of thing, yeah. Yeah.

Jody Beck: I bet your mother was pleased.

Judith: Yes, indeed. Yeah.

Jody Beck: And did you have siblings? And where -- where did you say you --

Judith: No, I'm an only child.

Jody Beck: Where were you born?

Judith: New Haven, Connecticut, yeah.

Jody Beck: New Haven, Connecticut. So only child, okay.

Judith: I'm a only child. You know, well, I liked being an only child, I guess, but I don't like it now, because I wish I had siblings now.

Jody Beck: Do you have cousins? Or were you close to any other relatives?

Judith: Well, I come from a very small family. I have actually one cousin, but I have two children, I have two grandsons and I have two great grandchildren.

Jody Beck: Wow!

Judith: So I'm doing my best to increase the family size.

Jody Beck: And are they local? Are they around here?

Judith: No, unfortunately. Let's see, my two sons, one -- well, he works with horses and so he moves around a lot. But he's pretty much Pennsylvania, Delaware, that kind of thing. My older son lives in Brazil. My grandsons, one is in Florida and the other one's in Upstate New York, with the two great grandchildren.

Jody Beck: So you visit there often?

Judith: No, actually, I don't travel anymore. So, but they'll be coming, the grandsons and family will be coming for Thanksgiving.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: How did I get here? Well, most of my life I lived in New York, actually. And --

Jody Beck: In the city?

Judith: Yeah, in the city. Sometimes, you know, yes, in the city, but the children were raised in Queens, which is, you know, kind of suburban, individual houses, that kind of thing. And then I moved into the city when I was divorced. And I remarried, and we lived there for quite some time. And then my husband got a job down here at Treasury. And so I commuted for two years between Washington and New York, so I was still working there.

Jody Beck: And what was your job? What was your occupation?

Judith: Well, at that time, I was working for Blue Cross Blue Shield in New York. But my lifetime, actually, until I got here, I'm an economist by training, and so I worked many years for the Conference Board, which is a research organization.

Jody Beck: I've heard of it.

Judith: Yeah. And there I worked in Economics for quite a while. And then I left there, and went to the City of New York and was the supervising economist for the Department of Consumer Affairs. They hired me back to the Conference Board, and I stayed there for a number of years, and then went to Blue Cross Blue Shield, and I was there for about five years, and then came here full-time.

Jody Beck: So what was New York like, when you were growing up? Different from today, I assume.

Judith: Well, yeah, I mean, I grew up actually in Brooklyn. Well, it was, you know, it was quiet, neighborly. Then I moved into the city. And quite frankly, in the city, it's a combination of neighborhoods. And so when you're in your neighborhood, you have everything that you want, and people do know each other. I mean, they may not know each other, but they know by sight. And, you know, and we lived down at the edge of Greenwich Village. You know, for a while I lived in Upper West Side, and that was interesting and nice. Then we moved down to the Village where my husband had lived before.

And again, it was, you know, a community. He went to get a paper one day, he had lived in the Village before I met him. We went to get a paper one day, and the paper guy looked at him, and said, "David, where have you been?" And that was at least 15 years. So, you know --

Jody Beck: Wow!

Judith: -- the whole thing about New York is -- that people don't realize is that it is a group of communities.

Jody Beck: And you know, I think there was a story in *The Times*, they just mapped everybody's neighborhood. They asked where they lived --

Judith: Oh, right.

Jody Beck: -- you might want to look at that because it --

Judith: Yeah, I did see it, yeah.

Jody Beck: So that's true about neighborhood. That's really amazing. So you were an only child. So did you have contact with grandparents, or other -- or were your neighbors your family at that point?

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: What was that like?

Judith: Okay, family. Let's see, when we lived in New Haven, and of course my grandfather was there, my grandmother had died before I was born. But he remarried. And so that was -- if you ask me who's my favorite relative ever, it's my grandfather.

Jody Beck: Why is that?

Judith: Well, he -- he just taught me so many things. And I learned all these things that are useless for me now, like how to change a fuse, etcetera, you know? How to bank a furnace.

Jody Beck: Okay, you're right. (laughter)

Judith: Right. But he also had wonderful stories, you know, that he would tell me. And so, you know, I was very close. My great aunt, Lucy, also was there, and I, as a matter of fact, I lived with her for a while. And even when we left New

York, I spent summers in New Haven, mostly with my grandfather. You know, that was good --

Jody Beck: So was it in an apartment? I've never been to New Haven.

Judith: Okay.

Jody Beck: And I've been to a lot of New York neighborhoods, but never New Haven.

Judith: He was the superintendent in an apartment building. And, you know, it was interesting because it was only two stories, but in a U-shape, you know. So I don't know how many apartments were there, but so he was there on Chapel Street. And let's see, when we lived in New Haven, we lived several places, but I remember living on Orchard Street. And we lived in a three-story house, and we had the second floor, and a big porch on the front, which was great for playing. My great Aunt Lucy lived down the street a ways, and she was, what shall I say --

Jody Beck: You're smiling when you think about her.

Judith: Yeah. Right. She was, you know, she was a woman who knew what you were supposed to do with your life, and how you were supposed to behave. Oh, gosh.

Jody Beck: Which probably was not your choice. Her choices may not have been yours.

Judith: Well, I was a quiet kid, and you know, I, shall I say, I had a rich interior life. And so what people did or said didn't really bother me very much. I was very self-contained.

Jody Beck: Well, I think that's true of a lot of only children.

Judith: Mm-hmm.

Jody Beck: I'm reading a book now by -- I'm going to forget her name, she was the first woman president at Yale, or at Harvard, or one of those. And she's an only child.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: No, she's not the only child, but she was, I think, the only girl, and they were spaced. And she talks about that in the book, about --

Judith: Yeah. Yeah.

Jody Beck: -- because she and her mother didn't agree about her life. So your aunt and you didn't necessarily agree about yours.

Judith: Right. Right. And, you know, that was pretty true. You know, my family, they just didn't understand why I wasn't more social and outgoing, and whatever.

Jody Beck: And was it also because you intended to -- you got an advanced degree of some sort, you got a degree that allowed you to have job that was, you know, a really important kind of job.

Judith: Right, well, you know, by that time, my family was pretty much gone. And I actually started college when my kids started school. And it was wonderful, we'd sit at the dining room table and do our homework together.

Jody Beck: That's great.

Judith: Yeah, so it was great. And then so I graduated from Queens College, which is part of the City College in New York, and then went to Columbia, studying economics for a while. Left there when my marriage broke up, but went to work at the Conference Board at that point. And that was a great experience. It was a great place to work.

Jody Beck: Yeah, I've heard it's an interesting place. I don't know much about it, but I have heard of it. I met somebody once that worked there --

Judith: Right.

Jody Beck: -- so you were doing policy ideas for businesses, or governments?

Judith: Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: That would make sense, yeah.

Jody Beck: Okay. So you had to drop out of college at some point. But you went back and finished?

Judith: No, I didn't drop out of college. No.

Jody Beck: Oh, you didn't drop out? I apologize, yeah.

Judith: No. No, I just started when my kids --

Jody Beck: Oh, when your kids were old enough, okay, all right.

Judith: And I was in a PhD program at Columbia. I did all the coursework, but I just never finished the dissertation, yeah.

Jody Beck: And a lot of people --

Judith: Right, yeah.

Jody Beck: -- because that's -- I mean, the coursework is one thing, but writing a dissertation is your life for, like, the next three or four years, right?

Judith: Yeah, well, at that point, you know, I got an interesting job. And that kind of was what I did.

Jody Beck: Right. And so you were married and then divorced, and you were raising your kids from a young age?

Judith: Well, no.

Jody Beck: Oh, okay.

Judith: My kids were high school at that point, you know, so --

Jody Beck: Still tough on them and on everybody.

Judith: Yeah, so they were pretty much on their own at that point.

Jody Beck: And you said one of your children works with horses?

Judith: Yes.

Jody Beck: What does that mean?

Judith: He's a -- what do you call it -- he's a trainer. Yeah.

Jody Beck: Cool! Okay.

Judith: And he -- both of -- both of my sons went to Brown, and the younger one, I guess he was nine -- nine points short of his degree. And he just wasn't doing real well, and they suggested that he come home for a semester, you know. And he started going to the racetrack, and just fell in love with horses. And that's been his life ever since.

Jody Beck: Well, that's great. I mean, that's -- I think I can see that being a cool career.

Judith: Right.

Jody Beck: And what does your other son do?

Judith: He was a psychiatrist, he's retired now.

Jody Beck: And is he -- which one has the children?

Judith: He has the children, yeah.

Jody Beck: Okay. All right. And they're both grown?

Judith: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Jody Beck: And what are they doing with themselves?

Judith: They do things with computers and software, and all of that. And, you know, every once in a while, I'll sit down and ask them to explain to me what they do, and I really have no idea what they do.

Jody Beck: Same with my nephew, who's a tech guy.

Judith: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. All I know is that they're well-employed, you know, and they're happy with what they do, so . . .

Jody Beck: That's great. So you said you worked for the Conference Board, and you worked for the City of New York, right?

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: And so what kinds of things -- were you an expert in one area, your economics? Or what did you mainly work on?

Judith: Mm-hmm. Well, when I started out, I was working as an assistant to the chief economist, and doing all kinds of macroeconomics things. And then I moved into the consumer economics area.

Jody Beck: And in New York, that's been a really powerful office, hasn't it?

Judith: A --

Jody Beck: The consumer part of New York City?

Judith: Oh, oh, well actually, at the Conference Board I was doing consumer economics, so . . .

Jody Beck: Oh, okay. Okay.

Judith: You know, surveys and that kind of thing. But then when I moved over to the Department of Consumer Affairs, that was more of an activist kind of thing. Actually, my first boss was Betty Furness.

Jody Beck: I was going to ask if -- so what was she like to work with? That's who I remember talking about these things.

Judith: Right.

Jody Beck: And she also, like, sold washing machines on TV or something, right?

Judith: Right. She used to open the refrigerator and do the ads, you know, for that, yeah.

Jody Beck: But what was she like to work with?

Judith: She was a lot of fun. Yeah, you know. And she was -- you know, she was eager to learn. We used to -- every Friday afternoon was devoted to all of us coming in and throwing questions at her that she, you know, needed to figure out the answers, and if she didn't, then we had to teach her what she needed to know. So she was terrific to work with -- work for.

Jody Beck: I was going to say, that's a kind of a sign of a good boss, that she wants you to challenge her and teach her things.

Judith: Right. Yeah.

Jody Beck: Do you remember one in particular that you had to teach her about?

Judith: Well, one of the things that I did was to run the food price survey. So I had people going out, so food issues would be the things that I would be talking to her about. You know, other people would be handling other things.

Jody Beck: So prices, or quality, or both?

Judith: Both. You know, we went to -- we went the guys out to all the supermarkets, and they would come back and -- with prices of a basket that we had, and also some concepts. But then we did a lot of things that were really interesting. You know, the office was down in Chinatown.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: And one day, we had a delegation of leaders of that community who came in to see us, and it was just when our country had bombed the rice paddies in Laos, and so Vietnam was done, and so the price of rice that was growing here in the United States was growing, and it was affecting them so much, because they could not afford the staple. And what we discovered was that in the subsidy program of our country, the Department of Agriculture, peanuts and rice were in the same category. And so they were being artificially price-sensitive. And so we did a lot of work here in Washington, you know, coming to Washington to talk to the Congress people, and we finally got them to decide to separate the peanuts and the rice.

Jody Beck: That does seem like an odd pairing.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: But the rice was what was important to them.

Judith: Right.

Jody Beck: Which if you didn't shop in Chinatown and rice wasn't your staple, you wouldn't necessarily know.

Judith: Right. Right, because you know, you don't eat that much rice, most people, you know. But the rice, you know, that's grown in Louisiana and Texas.

Jody Beck: So your move from New York to Washington was kind of extended back and forth.

Judith: Right.

Jody Beck: So what was it like when you ended up in Washington? Did -- where did you live in the city? And when you first came here?

Judith: Okay. Well, when my husband came down here, he lived with his mother on 20th and N. And then she -- and when she died, he moved up to Friendship Heights. We had made this commitment that we would spend two years thinking about whether we wanted to move permanently to Washington, go back to New York, or continue the, you know, the back and forth. And it wasn't -- we were here for about a year, and we bought a house on 15th and U.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: So that was a different neighborhood than it is now. What was it like to live at 15th and U?

Judith: It was at the beginning of the gentrification of the area. And it was interesting, because, you know, it's a small block. And even in 1989, it was still the kind of place where people knew each other, kind of thing. And families who had been there for three generations, you know, so that was interesting. And again, you know, this thing about community, I was standing waiting for a bus one day, and a cab pulled up. And he said, "I know you, you live at 15th and U," because there used to be a store where the cab drivers used to go. And I said, "Well, I don't have any money for a cab." He says, "No," he said, "I'm going down there. I'll take you." So, you know --

Jody Beck: Community, right, yeah.

Judith: Yeah. So it was kind of like that. The thing though, is, I will tell you, when I came to Washington, it was almost impossible to find a decent loaf of bread.

Jody Beck: Compared to New York, right? (laughs)

Judith: Right. You know, the last place I lived in New York was on the Lower East Si-- not the Lower East Side, but the East Village. And the bakeries there, you know, Ukrainian and Russian bakeries, they were so wonderful. Anyway, I got here, and there was a sign, handwritten sign in a convenience store that said, "We now carry Wonder Bread." And I said to my hus-- I was really upset. I said to my husband, "How could you bring me to a place that's so backward?" (laughter)

Jody Beck: They thought that was great.

Judith: Right, but things have changed.

Jody Beck: They have, haven't they?

Judith: Yes, so much. You wouldn't know it was the same thing.

Jody Beck: You can now get a decent loaf of bread here, right?

Judith: Oh, yeah.

Jody Beck: You're close to the --

Judith: Bread Furst is up the street, yeah.

Jody Beck: Yeah, I was going to say, I couldn't think of -- yeah, yeah.

Judith: But at this point, mainly, I make my own bread, so --

Jody Beck: Oh, so that's even better.

Judith: Yeah. Yeah, right.

Jody Beck: Okay. So you were at 15th and U, and then how did you end up here in --

Judith: Well, my husband had cerebral palsy and his mobility issues became, you know, really hard. And we tried to stay in our house, because we loved our neighborhood, but decided we just really had to get into a place that was accessible. So I looked at 41 apartments before I found one that was suitable, because I had made up my mind -- well, first of all, we had to be near transportation. And the other thing was, I had made up my mind that my husband was going to go into a building where he went in the same door that everybody else went in. Some of the buildings I looked at, you know, you had to go around the back, or looked at a wonderful building on Columbia Road where the doorman would have to go and get the little rampette, you know, for him to come in each time, so he'd have to, you know, stay there. So, you know, we moved up here, and everything was really, really, you know, accessible and easy.

Jody Beck: And you got transportation and services right here.

Judith: Oh, my transportation is fabulous.

Jody Beck: Yeah. Yeah, so that was important for him. When did he die? What year --?

Judith: He died in 2015..

Jody Beck: Okay, so just recently, yeah.

Judith: Yeah. And he was -- I met him at the Conference Board.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: Yeah. He was an international economist.

Jody Beck: And so he worked for Treasury when he first came here?

Judith: No, when --

Jody Beck: Or, you did?

Judith: No, no, no. I'm sorry, you're right. He came down here -- well, he had left the Conference Board and he had a consulting business. And they lost their anchor contract, which was the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and there wasn't enough business to support both of them. So he was looking for something, didn't find something in New York, and so that's how he ended up in Treasury here.

Jody Beck: And when you came here, where did you work? Or were you taking care of the kids, or --?

Judith: No no, the kids, at that point, were way gone. No, when I came down here, I decided that I was never going to work a 9:00 to 5:00 in an office again. I was tired of managing people, I was tired of being, you know, responsible to the whims of, you know, the higher ups in the business. So when I came down here, I actually had a contract with Blue Cross Blue Shield to write a marketing letter for them, so I did that for a while. And then some people that I had hired to do presentation skills and writing skills for my staff, asked me to come aboard, and, you know, with them. And so I did, you know, workshops, teaching people to sit down and write, stand up and talk kind of thing. And then I was volunteering at the Smithsonian.

Jody Beck: Which one, which --

Judith: Well, I was primarily assigned to the Museum of African Art, but I was a floater, and so I could go to any of the museums that they sent me to. And I watched people coming in, you know, with their tour guides, and people -- of course, you know, when you move to Washington, all your friends want to come to visit. And so I got familiar with taking people around. And so somebody said, "Well, why don't you become a licensed tour guide, which I did. And that was, you know, a fascinating time.

Jody Beck: What year are we talking about when that happened?

Judith: That would have been, I guess, about maybe about '94 or so.

Jody Beck: Okay. Okay.

Judith: Yeah. So, you know, that -- I really loved that work. And I, you know, I freelanced, and was lucky enough to get on board with several organizations that brought in mainly older people, and so that was very pleasant to do. And then, you know, the kids -- but the kids that I worked with from these organizations were what I call the "yes ma'am, no ma'am" kids, you know? The teachers had given them stuff they were supposed to learn on the trip, and you know, they had homework to do, and whatever. So that was really great.

Jody Beck: A friend of mine is doing that now, and she's -- she's just getting a different experience with some of the younger kids, but that was good.

Judith: Right.

Jody Beck: And working with older adults on the tour would have been great fun, I think, yeah.

Judith: Yeah. So I had great experiences. You know --

Jody Beck: And you know everything there is to know about DC as a result.

Judith: I thought I did. And then I got involved with -- well, they don't call it "Cultural Tourism DC" anymore, but that was what they called it then.

Jody Beck: That's the name I remember, yeah.

Judith: Yeah. And so I worked with them to do the walking tour of the U Street area, and we also did some work in Anacostia. So after 9/11,] I just did not want to work downtown anymore, you know, the security was so awful and

everything. So I ended up just doing mainly walking tours of the U Street area.

Jody Beck: That's cool.

Judith: So that was it. And then that got me involved with the DC Humanities group, and, you know. So -- who titled me a "local historian," so --

Jody Beck: Cool! (laughter)

Judith: No more "tour guide," I'm a "local historian," you know.

Jody Beck: So the city has changed as a whole. You mentioned 9/11. What are some of your other observations about how the city has changed from when you first came here to what it is now?

Judith: Well, it's certainly more lively. You know, I remember in terms of restaurants, you had the really expensive French restaurants, steak places and whatever. And then you had a few Ethiopian, Guatemalan kinds of places, if you knew where to go. But it's not like it is now, I mean, you know, this is destination place for people who want to eat. So that's, you know, exciting. And the clubs are different, you know, so there's a lot more entertainment. I think the fact that The Kennedy Center, you know, again, when we came here, we had been real theater people, dance people or whatever -- I'm going to tell you about my dance life, by the way.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: You know, so New York theater, whatever. We came down here and got a subscription to the Kennedy Center. You know, the plays were done nicely, but they just were not New York quality. So then we started going to Studio Theater, and places like that, you know, which were a lot more inventive, kind of thing. So that's, of course, changed, because there's so much more now in terms of theater. For a while, I was kind of in theater, and I think at that time we had 43 independent theaters here. And I'm sure are a lot more than there are now. There are a lot more now, I'm sure.

Jody Beck: And about dance?

Judith: No -- oh, dance, okay. Well, I have major heart disease, and in 2002 I had my first stents placed. And then for the next five years, I was in and out of the hospital. And they finally -- I have nine stents.

Jody Beck: Wow.

Judith: And they finally told me, the next time it was going to be, you know, crack the ribs open. And I said, "No, that's not happening to my body." So I hired a personal trainer with whom I worked for 13 years, by the way, until the pandemic started. But his idea was that I should take dancing lessons to round out our program.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: And I was fortunate enough to find people who -- I was 70 at that point -- I was fortunate enough to find people who really were interested in helping me learn how to dance. So I guess Michelle Eva, who started Joy of Motion, was one of my real supporters, and got to be a great friend. She died a couple of years ago in the midst of the pandemic. And then so, you know, we formed a troupe there called Improvolutions, which was a multi-generational group, based at Joy of Motion. And then somehow I got introduced to Dance Exchange, and Dance Exchange is pretty much my life these days. So I took classes there for a long time, and then they began getting me into the facilitating part. And now I am the lead artist for the Dance On program, which is the program for senior dancers. And I also teach classes occasionally for the family groups, or multi-generational groups, I should say.

Jody Beck: That sounds very cool!

Judith: Yeah, right. So it's very cool, and I'm, you know, very much involved there. I also am a core member of a group called M.K. Arts, which is mixed dances devoted to the life experience of Black women and girls. And, yeah, so those are my primary things.

Jody Beck: Where do these groups perform? In sort of small theaters, or bigger ones, or --?

Judith: Well, Dance Exchange has a -- you know, it's a major program in Takoma Park, and they have, you know, we have studio space, and so there are people in a studio. And also performances do arise there. But, you know, one of the things that we say, "Where does the dance happen?" Everywhere. So there's a lot of movement around. I have, let's see, I'm also -- Arts for the Aging, I'm very much involved there. I've been a member of Quicksilver, which is their senior dance company. You have to be 60 at least, before you can join. And I also serve on the board for Arts for the Aging.

Jody Beck: So you are busy with dance, that's great.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: You probably never envisioned that early in your life.

Judith: No, I didn't. And one of the things that is sort of, you know, on my -- shall I say it's on my radar now, is that I've had a couple of -- well, I've had three mini-strokes. And I know I have to cut back, because I can't do all that I've been doing so far. So what I'm trying to figure out is what my next thing is.

Jody Beck: Tough choices. (laughs)

Judith: Yeah. Yeah. Next thing. But dance is my -- is, at this point, is my life. You saw my cane?

Jody Beck: I did. Yeah.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: So do you dance with your cane?

Judith: Well, you see how glammed up it is?

Jody Beck: Yes, I do.

Judith: Yeah. Well, we had a two-year project with M.K. Arts, sponsored, or I should say commissioned, first of all, half of it by Dance Place over in Brookland, and half by an organization in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, the Alhambra Theater there. And two years, we made a piece that debuted there. I was, at that point, using a cane sometimes, but I didn't necessarily dance with the cane. But we had to walk up this long theater aisle that wasn't even, and so I needed the cane to do that. And our costume designer said, "Ms. Judith, would you like me to glam up that cane?" And I said, "Yes." And he put over 300 individual pieces of rhinestones on that cane.

Jody Beck: And you know, canes have a long history in dance. They're props and -- props.

Judith: Exactly, yeah. Two of the women, both of them now dead, but who were in Quicksilver, had a stick they did with canes and hats, both of them had been in the USO.

Jody Beck: Okay, wow. (laughs)

Judith: Yeah, yeah. So they were, you know, just great with that.

Jody Beck: So you've talked about neighborhoods. Is this building a good neighborhood? Or do you -- you socialize with a lot of people here --

Judith: It is.

Jody Beck: -- at their events here? Yeah?

Judith: Yeah. It's referred to as an NORC, a naturally occurring retirement community.

Jody Beck: Okay, yeah.

Judith: Yeah, because for a long time, that was true of the building. People had moved in here in the early days, you know, when it was still a rental, and became a co-op. And they were sort of known for the services they provide. Like, there's still a -- what did I say -- an opportunity closet, where there are, I guess, canes and things that you can get. And they're, you know, very much into being good neighbors. So people do look out for each other.

Jody Beck: That's nice, yeah.

Judith: Next Friday, or this Friday, actually, we'll have a floor party.

Jody Beck: Oh, that's cool!

Judith: Yeah. We have two people on every floor who are kind of the ambassadors, I don't know what, exactly, they call them. And so, you know, you get welcomed into the building. When I moved here, it was in the midst of the pandemic, so we couldn't do what normally would be done. But the ambassador came and gave me information about the building, and some postcards with the building on them, you know, I could send to friends. So, you know, Friday night there was a gathering in the lobby, you know, bring your own bottle, you know, whatever, and there will be on the 19th, I think it is, a pre-Thanksgiving gathering, and, you know, and sort of a potluck kind of thing. So there's always activities here.

Jody Beck: Sounds great.

Judith: So it's a warm place.

Jody Beck: Because it could be the other way around, and it's wonderful that that's the way it's evolved over the years.

Judith: It's very warm. And now, of course, the demographic is a little bit different, you know, as we older people age out, however we do it. You know, younger people are in, so there are children in the building.

Jody Beck: I think that's great most of the time, yeah.

Judith: It's great. We had a little family across the way, and I just loved it, because the little girl would make -- you know, she'd make little drawings or whatever, and stick them under your door. You know, she'd write books, little drawing books, and they put them on the outside and ask you to stop and read them. It was so much fun. And their little voices as they went through the hallway. And they moved. But they moved into the father's house, and he moved into the apartment, because the house was too big for him, and they needed more space.

Jody Beck: That's funny. (laughs) Well, to each his or her own.

Judith: Right, yeah.

Jody Beck: So I'm going to switch a little bit, back to the Village. So how did you get involved in the Cleveland Park Woodley Park Village [Cleveland & Woodley Park Village]?

Judith: Well, it was really through my husband. He had learned about the villages, and actually the director of the Northwest Neighbors came and spoke to us at AVA Van Ness East, where we lived. And, you know, as I think I may have mentioned, the programs there were mostly taking place in single family houses. My husband was using a scooter at that time, and so that didn't work out for us. And we have two friends who had been -- who lived out on Devonshire Place who were active in the Cleveland Park-Woodley Park Village. And so, you know, we just joined down there. And it was interesting, because when my husband died, I got a call asking me, well, did I want to not continue in the Village? And I said, "No, I need the Village more than ever now," you know. So I haven't been as active as I wish I would be, but, you know, until the pandemic, I loved the Wednesday -- first Wednesday -- second Wednesday lunches, going up --

Jody Beck: Which they're doing again.

Judith: Yeah, today is actually one of the lunches --

Jody Beck: Oh, okay.

Judith: -- up the street here at Rosemary's [Rosemary Bistro Café]. Yeah, Rosemary's.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: Have you been there?

Jody Beck: I have not. Is it good?

Judith: It's really good.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: It's French-inspired, and it's really, really good.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: Yeah. So I used to do that every month. And I've had -- we've had people come in and help with computers. That was what my husband was really interested in. And in the other building, somebody came to hang this painting here, this collage for me, and he was so tall he didn't need a ladder.

Jody Beck: (laughs) That is tall!

Judith: Right. You know, so, you know, we have -- and then during the pandemic, I -- you know, it was a lifesaver, the once a week delivery of soups and stews and things, you know, and chili. And one of the sweet things was that there was a little boy involved, who -- I think it was a little boy, you know, I couldn't really tell from the name -- who used to write notes to put in sometime.

Jody Beck: Oh! How sweet.

Judith: Yeah. It really, really was wonderful.

Jody Beck: What was the name?

Judith: At this point, I honestly don't remember.

Jody Beck: Okay. All right, I was going to say, we could do a shout out, but we don't --

Judith: I did tell the people at the Village about it, and asked them to, you know, pass on the message, or at least be aware of it. And then of course when the kids went back to school, that had to stop. But it really helped me out a lot.

Jody Beck: I'm going to cough. (coughing)

Judith: Okay?

Jody Beck: All right, let's see.

Judith: And I go out to the Village parties, you know, the Christmas parties and things like that.

Jody Beck: We probably have run into each other, because I always -- down at the church, I always -- I've been to those, yeah.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: So you mentioned you're using a cane. Are there other things that have -- and your heart surgery. Are there other things -- has the Village been able to help you out with any of those, like any rides, or anything like that?

Judith: Yes, rides. You know, and I haven't taken advantage of it as much as I could. And I know I have to -- you know, it just is that all of a sudden the date comes up on me that I have to go to the doctor. Well, okay at that point, you know. But when I, you know, thought ahead, yeah.

Jody Beck: That's one of the things I try to do, but they tend to be times when I've got something else going on, and I tell them, you know, I'm good for that once a week on something. I've been doing the oral history, and that's probably it for me (inaudible)

Judith: Well, yeah, that's a great contribution.

Jody Beck: But this is way fun. I really like doing this.

Judith: Right. Sure, I mean, you get to meet people, and, you know, learn lots of things about them.

Jody Beck: Have a conversation, right. Right.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: So you mentioned the date comes up on you, so it's hard for you to ask for help, because you're used to being so independent?

Judith: That's -- yeah, no, that's a great part of it. And one of the things I am learning, and one of the things that the COVID era has taught, is that there is a need to reach out and tell people what you need, because people offer all the time, and first of all, it's hard to accept, and then you learn to accept. And then you learn after that, that if there's something you need, there are people who can help you.

Jody Beck: Like the tall guy hanging your collage.

Judith: Yes, right.

Jody Beck: He was a Village person?

Judith: Right, exactly, you know? And so, you know, I've got a lot of friends in the immediate area who kind of are what I call my "cocoon of care."

Jody Beck: That helps, yeah.

Judith: Yeah. Yeah, who, you know, are very thoughtful, and whatever. So, you know, I depend on them a lot.

Jody Beck: Yeah, that's something that was hard for my mother to do as well.

Judith: Yeah. Yeah. And one of the reasons I haven't taken advantage of the Village transportation options is that I have a friend who's been giving me lots of rides. But, you know, and she has parents in Connecticut that she's trying to take care of, you know, but she's helped me out with a lot of things, you know. But one of the things that's also been helpful was the last time I was hospitalized, it was MedStar, they took me to Georgetown. And they did wonderful follow-up for me; they provided in-home occupational therapy and physical therapy, which, you know, I'm finished with that now, but also introduced me to a lot of the services that are available. One of the things was, I just was not able -- I just couldn't eat, and I was not interested in food, so you know what was happening. And so they arranged for -- I get food delivery from Mom's Meals or something.

Jody Beck: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Judith: Yeah. So, you know, so I'm eating better. You know, so, you know, so, you know, there's so many things out there that can be helpful. We're lucky we

live in DC, because, you know, for elders, there's a lot more than there is in most places.

Jody Beck: Yeah. Cities are great when you're older. You know, I'm from Nebraska, and my family's from Lincoln and some in Omaha --

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: -- but some way up in the very little-populated areas. And there aren't doctors and there aren't hospitals, and I'm just thinking cities, you've got the hospital and you've got the services they provide.

Judith: Right, yeah. I mean -- yeah.

Jody Beck: I mean, the Village has experimented with what they call a "care team," which I was part of for a member who had a health aide for a while, and then didn't.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: And so three us kind of rotated in doing errands for her and dropping in.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: It sounds like you got that through the hospital, but the Village has at least experimented with it.

Judith: Yeah.

Jody Beck: I need to ask Frank if that's an ongoing program, because --

Judith: Right, right.

Jody Beck: -- we could have shopped for you, and stuff like that.

Judith: Right. Well, you know, when my husband was alive, you know, Iona -- provided somebody who helped us with the shopping. She did her shopping and she did our shopping, and we just gave her a list, and she brought it.

Jody Beck: Iona is great, yeah.

Judith: That really was helpful during that period --

Jody Beck: Yeah.

Judith: -- because, you know, people that Iona came to visit said to me, "You can't do everything." So we began to try to have more help at that time.

Jody Beck: So are there things that you would envision, new programs for the Village, or something that you would like to see the Village do that it isn't doing at this point?

Judith: Well, let's see, I know Frank is calling about dances.

Jody Beck: Oh, that's what he's calling you about, okay.

Judith: You know, because I've told him about some of the stuff that we have on Zoom that's really inexpensive, and, you know, it happens regularly for older dancers.

Jody Beck: I might want to do that.

Judith: Yeah. And it's not, you know -- everybody can dance, and there's no judgment. Also, what's happened with our Zoom group is they, again, have formed a community, you know? I mean, they dance together each week, they know each other, because my approach has always got something to do with storytelling, and because they've shared stories over time, you know, you get to know each other a lot better. So, you know, that's all part of it.

Jody Beck: That sounds great. Let's see, anything else that I have not asked you about that you'd like to talk about, your story?

Judith: See, I'm trying to think about whether there are programs that the Village might have. I mean, they seem to respond very well. And this -- the new thing that all the Villages, you can sign up for anything, is really, really helpful. Let me see, what I was doing Feldenkrais for the longest while, until things had to shift. We didn't have enough people. And that was from the Dupont Circle group [Dupont Circle Village]. And I was also doing a meditation group from -- what would you call it, down near Eastern Market, that area. Capitol Hill, I guess it is.

Jody Beck: Yeah, Capitol -- Lincoln Park, Eastern Mar-- I used to live at 12th and Constitution, so that was --

Judith: Oh, okay.

Jody Beck: -- so that used to be my area.

Judith: Right, okay. And so, you know --

Jody Beck: Yeah, they were forming that Village when I was living there.

Judith: Oh, okay.

Jody Beck: Not ready for it yet.

Judith: Right.

Jody Beck: But I knew what was going on, yeah.

Judith: Right. And, you know, I haven't told you about my involvement in my church.

Judith: Okay, well, tell me about that.

Judith: Yeah. Yeah. When we came to Washington, and we had been really in search for a church in New York, and it hadn't really worked out for us. And then we were introduced to All Souls Unitarian. And I guess the first -- my first thing was, my husband wanted to have a recommitment ceremony. And I said, "Well, I did the wedding, this is up to you." (laughter) And one of his buddies said, you know, "Well, come to All Souls." You know, it was just a small family gathering. And on my way out, I said to the receptionist, you know, "Thanks for all the support we had gotten." And she said, "Well, why don't you come to church here?" Okay. Big news. And I did. And I've been there now for, let's see, it must be 25 years or more. And it's, you know, it's just, again, a great community. Some of the friends that I talk about who are my cocoon people are also members of the church. You know, I've been very active. Of course, now I'm older, and I've stepped back a lot, but still, it is a great part of my life. My husband and I used to go to California a lot, and we always had this thing about, maybe we'll move to California, because we had so many friends. We even looked at apartments in Oakland. And then at one point, we looked at each other and said, "We're not moving, because we're not leaving All Souls."

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: Yeah, right.

Jody Beck: That's great. You've done a good job of finding your intersecting circles of communities, it sounds like.

Judith: Yes. Yes, that is true. And I've been very fortunate, in the people who've looked out for me. So, yes.

Jody Beck: That's kind of one of the things the Village will do. And you know, I'm glad you come to the parties. I always give people rides to the parties, because I basically live half a block from the church.

Judith: Yeah, yeah.

Jody Beck: I say, I can park at the church, or I can park at home, but I can give people rides. So if there's a Christmas party this year, we'll probably see each other.

Judith: Yeah. Yeah.

Jody Beck: So I realized at the beginning of this recording, I was supposed to ask you if I had your permission to record. So I assume I have your permission to record. (laughs)

Judith: Yes, you have my permission to record. Yes.

Jody Beck: Okay. Well, I'm through with my questions.

Judith: Okay.

Jody Beck: If there's nothing else, I think we're good.

Judith: That's it.

Jody Beck: Okay.

Judith: Okay.

Jody Beck: Let me put a pause on it.

END OF AUDIO FILE