

Buckhead Heritage Oral History Project

Interview with Harriet Ellis

May 15, 2011

Interviewers: Chad Wright, Bob Helget, Lewis Nix

SPEAKER: This is an interview with Mrs. Harriet Witham Ellis of Atlanta, Georgia, a native Buckheadian who's grown up and lived in Peachtree Heights West her entire life. We are privileged to hear her litany of stories and memories today, May 15, 2011, at Harriet's home, 2804 Habersham Road. The interviewers are Chad Wright and Bob Helget of Buckhead Heritage Society and Mrs. Ellis's good friend Lewis Nix, representing the Buckhead Heritage Society of Atlanta, Georgia. And, I can tell you right now that we're in for a good one, because this is the first interview we've had that started with champagne and brownies.

HARRIET ELLIS: Well, I grew up on Andrews Drive. We lived with my grandmother, or she lived with us, and they came out, of course, before my time, about 1920, about the same time this house was built, about 1920. It was really the country. My uncle lived next door. I think they built their house about 1911, where the Moores live now. My aunt lived across the street, and she was mother's sister, and mother's brother and his family lived next door. They were already there when we came out. My grandmother brought with her her servants that she'd had all her life since she was a young married lady. Of course, when I came on the scene they were elderly people. Her favorite person in life was her, she called him her "man." He had been a coachman, and his wife came and they lived on the place in a pretty little house in the garden. I heard this story, this too was before my time. When they made cars they sent him to Detroit to learn to drive a car. Isn't that the cutest thing? And he never drove very well, but that didn't matter. He

and Grandmama would go steaming out and have a good time. They were devoted friends. Oh, he and Grandmother thought it just wasn't nice not to have a cow, so we always had a cow.

SPEAKER: And this was over on Andrews.

MRS. ELLIS: Over on Andrews. We had a cow and lots of bird dogs. Chickens and ducks and pet raccoons.

SPEAKER: Would they just roam through your yard, through the front yard?

MRS. ELLIS: We kept them penned in. The cow grazed in the front yard. I told Lewis that we'd meet new people and they would say, "Now how do we find your house?" And I'd say, "Well, you'll see the cow in the front yard."

SPEAKER: And what year was that?

MRS. ELLIS: That was, let's see, when I was in high school, about '50, a little before.

SPEAKER: It sounds like your whole family was in and around Buckhead, a lot of them, so tell us how a lot of your family ended up in the neighborhood.

MRS. ELLIS: Mama's family lived on Fifth Street downtown, and they all lived around there and then gradually moved down here to Andrews, Cherokee.

SPEAKER: What do you think lured them out here?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, it was pretty country then. And Mrs. Manry lived just a block away.

Habersham was a dirt road. She bought the first lot in the whole neighborhood. She had a choice. And she walked around and liked the lot because it was on the hill. But it was someone's farm then.

SPEAKER: What was the address on Andrews?

MRS. ELLIS: 2922.

SPEAKER: And who was the architect for the house?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, Neel Reid. I can tell all about Neel Reid. A lot of, in case you don't know . . . ladies of that era, in the 1920s, all were in love with Neel Reid. I'm in a garden club and when I first got in the garden club I was real young, and the older ladies, all they talked about was Neel Reid. He was a very romantic figure, very handsome, dashing.

SPEAKER: Was he married?

MRS. ELLIS: No, he never married. He died young, very young, though. He lived, he and his mother lived in a gorgeous house in Roswell. I can't think of the name of it. Ned Hansell lived there. I think it was built originally by Ned's grandmother, great-grandmother, and then the Reids lived there and then Ned bought it back. Or his father did.

SPEAKER: Do you remember your dad working on plans with Neel as far as how to design the house?

MRS. ELLIS: No, I never heard much about that. They never talked about it much.

SPEAKER: So, Harriet, who was it that was your cousin that built the wonderful Shutze house on West Paces? Where Pinestream Road is now. That's one of the great houses in Atlanta.

MRS. ELLIS: Another aunt. That's to me one of the most beautiful houses I've ever been in. When I was a little girl it was really gorgeous, because there were no houses around it, and you

came down a sweeping driveway through the pines, and you could just see it through the pinetrees, like Rome. It is an Italian villa.

SPEAKER: This is the pink house. It's up for sale right now, isn't the house? On Pinestream?

SPEAKER: Right. That, to me, is the most authentic looking, Mediterranean-style house in Atlanta. It looks like it could be 500 years old.

MRS. ELLIS: Well, a lot of the, my aunt and uncle built it. At the same time, that was the golden era for Atlanta, for Buckhead, about 1920 or so. And Neel Reid at that time would go to Italy and bring back the furniture and a lot of things like doors and mantels. He furnished Mrs. Manry's house here, too. And isn't that a pity that we don't have any of the furniture. I heard in latter years she sold it, some of it, when she moved a second time. But we didn't know about it. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have the originals.

SPEAKER: What about the Phinzy Calhoun house? Neel Reid didn't design that one too, did he?

MRS. ELLIS: No, that's completely, isn't it, unlike Neel Reid, it's an English hunting lodge, I guess. My uncle said, "I am the king here, and my wife Marian is the queen." Wasn't that cute? They lived there I don't know how many years. Sixty or seventy, something like that.

SPEAKER: And that's the house right across the street from here?

MRS. ELLIS: On Andrews.

SPEAKER: On the corner, right next to the one Harriet grew up on.

SPEAKER: So growing up in Buckhead. It sounds like you moved to Andrews from downtown also?

MRS. ELLIS: Not me. It was before I was born. They had the house considerably before I was born. I'll tell you one more interesting thing about Buckhead, though. I was afraid I'd forget this. I love it. They had, my family had a summer home way back, out way out Peachtree. They lived at Tenth Street and would go out for the summer. It's kind of where Phipps is now.

SPEAKER: How about that.

MRS. ELLIS: It would take them all day. My father said it would take them all, he was a little boy. It would take them all day to go out for the summer from Tenth Street. And they'd ford the creek at Peachtree Creek. And they'd bring two or three wagons. The servants would go out for the summer too. They had lots of buildings. The place, of course, is torn down now. I used to go out there as a child. It was a wonderful place. And they'd, they'd take their cow. They'd tie up the cow and take the cow out Peachtree.

SPEAKER: Harriet, did your aunt end up living out there?

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, Aunt Laura ended up living there until they developed all that.

SPEAKER: So that was near the Ottley estate.

MRS. ELLIS: It was right across from the Ottleys. We were big friends with the Ottleys.

SPEAKER: Do you remember being entertained at the Ottleys' place?

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, we were good friends with them. A lot of going back and forth across Peachtree out there.

SPEAKER: They were there full time, once they built the house out there.

MRS. ELLIS: I suppose that was a summer house too. You know, a lot of the houses right, even in here, on Habersham and all, not lots, but I can think of maybe two that were actually summer houses way back, when the people would come from town.

SPEAKER: So, I've interviewed a lot of guys and have gotten their growth and history in Buckhead. What does a young girl do, growing up with a cow in the front yard in Buckhead?

[laughter]

MRS. ELLIS: Well, I had a wonderful time. I peaked in high school. I just loved it.

SPEAKER: Tell us about that peak!

MRS. ELLIS: Well, it was just loads of fun in high school. I noticed you have an interview from Harry Gilham. There's no telling what Harry told you. We started first grade together, at E. Rivers and we've been friends all this time. High school was just, in Atlanta at that time, was just the most fun in the world. We had sororities and fraternities. People decided we had too much fun and they stopped all that. Fortunately, I was in the thick of that. It didn't die until just after I finished with it.

SPEAKER: And you went to Washington Seminary, which is now Westminster, correct?

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm.

SPEAKER: You mention Harry and the fun. Some of the fun he mentioned was there was an old abandoned house, I think up on West Paces Ferry. He said everyone would go park in the front yard and hang out at that house. Does that ring a bell?

MRS. ELLIS: I didn't do that! I heard people did. People were arrested and things like that. I always tried to not do anything I'd be indicted for.

SPEAKER: You still have, those Washington Seminary friends are still your very close friends.

MRS. ELLIS: Well, yes, the people I started first grade with at E. Rivers are still my friends. My grandson lives in California. They've got some kind of history project. And he asked all kind of questions. I guess I bored him to death. I wrote him such a long letter telling him about what fun I had in grammar school, because he's just a little teeny boy. And the people I was friends with then still are.

SPEAKER: Why was it called Washington Seminary? Was it all girls or all boys?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, it was all girls. And it was in a beautiful, beautiful house on Peachtree, before they tore it, there were beautiful houses all along there.

SPEAKER: So that wasn't a regular school building. It was in a home.

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, in back they built some buildings, but it was a gorgeous white-columned house.

SPEAKER: It was right there near the Brookwood Station. Very beautiful.

MRS. ELLIS: There are apartments there now.

SPEAKER: How many girls were in your class?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, about 40, maybe. 30, 40.

SPEAKER: All girls.

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm. All girls.

SPEAKER: So, was North Fulton the closest high school to you?

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm, lots of my friends went to North Fulton. But the nice thing for us with the sororities and fraternities you knew people, you had dear friends that weren't just at your school but were all over town.

SPEAKER: So how would the North Fulton guys come calling on you?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, they'd meet us at school. The boys, that was the big deal when I was in high school. You would hope down at the bottom, the driveway of the house was long, at the bottom of the driveway if you were lucky they'd be some attractive guys down there, waiting to take you somewhere for hamburgers, like the Varsity or the Pig 'n Whistle or some other eateries that were around there.

SPEAKER: Growing up on Andrews, where would you guys get your groceries? In Buckhead?

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm.

SPEAKER: Or were they brought to your house?

MRS. ELLIS: Some people had them delivered.

SPEAKER: Who were some of the grocers? Do you remember?

MRS. ELLIS: Somebody named Kampers had very fancy groceries up there. I'm trying to think, there's a Chinese restaurant there now.

SPEAKER: Grand China?

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, that's where Kampers used to be. Oh, and then we'd walk through, my nurse and I when I was a little girl, we'd walk through the woods. There was a footpath everybody went through to Buckhead. We didn't, nobody would drive us anywhere so we had to go walking. And there were gypsies that lived in the woods. Wasn't that fun?

SPEAKER: Really. Whereabouts?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, well, across from, I'm trying to think where it came out. It comes out at the Publix now, around there.

SPEAKER: Gypsies?

MRS. ELLIS: It was a family, a huge family. I always tried to play with the gypsy children. My nurse would say, "Come on, come on."

SPEAKER: What about the safety of Buckhead? It must have been like a very small town.

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, it was. You knew everybody. Never worried about anything. We never locked up. It was fine. Perfectly safe.

SPEAKER: On these trips to Peachtree, how would you interact with your neighbors? Was it a formal interaction with your neighbors or was it more a communal . . . would you have to announce yourself before coming over?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, yes. It was very formal. You wouldn't think of dropping in. I used to decide when I was a little girl that I was going to run away and go live with my uncle next door. I used to drop in on them. I wished I lived with them. We had a wonderful time over there. The children were older but very sweet to me, and we had a good times.

This was something that was fun. It sounds so quaint now. We'd go to the, after dinner we would go, we never went out to eat, but we'd go to the watermelon parlor. You know where Peachtree Battle Shopping Center is now? There was a fruit stand, and in the summer they'd have sawdust over the floor and big electric fans and you'd go in and eat. Have you all heard of that?

SPEAKER: Fred's Fruit Stand or something like that?

MRS. ELLIS: Fred's Fruit Emporium. And that was quite a social event. You'd see your friends there eating watermelon. You know, at night, you'd do it after supper. I guess from an agricultural society we ate supper, I like Madrid hours myself, but then you'd eat supper about 6 o'clock. So that was about 6:30. At 7 you'd go to the fruit stand. All that was fun.

SPEAKER: So, Harriet, what do you remember about Peachtree Road? Because it's been so changed now, but weren't there beautiful mansions all along Peachtree Road?

MRS. ELLIS: There were, and people lived all up and down in gorgeous houses. Big gardens in back. You know, it was beautiful.

SPEAKER: And you're a big garden fancier.

MRS. ELLIS: That's right.

SPEAKER: What were some of the best gardens that you've been in or remember?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, my aunt that lived next door, Aunt Marian, the ones that I kept trying to go live with, they had the most beautiful garden. It was spectacular. You just don't see anything like that anymore. Maybe up east people still have them, but my aunt loved to create new camellias. What do you call it when you put the camellias, splice and graft them. People often came to see

her yard. I mean, really, botanists came, not just garden fanciers. She had a fabulous rose garden. She was famous for her camellias.

SPEAKER: Was it an English-style, formal garden?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, she had, no, it was all different kinds. She had a woodland garden that went way, way back. I think the Moores still have all that property. People kept buying it and someone saved it. And then the Moores, I guess, you'd have to say they saved it too, but for what? I hope big profit, I guess. It's enough back there to subdivide.

SPEAKER: Well, Harriet, tell us about when you were growing up in your, the typical path that a girl like you would take. Didn't your aunt take you to Europe?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, yes, she sent me to Europe. It was wonderful. Changed my whole life, going to Europe.

SPEAKER: She sent you, she didn't take you?

SPEAKER: She went with you, didn't she?

MRS. ELLIS: No, she sent me on a girls' trip with my cousin. We had a wonderful time.

SPEAKER: And how long did you stay?

MRS. ELLIS: All summer. People didn't go for a week so much then.

SPEAKER: And did she know people that she put you up with, or was there a program you went to?

MRS. ELLIS: She knew the lady that took us, and she tried to show us everything, the lady did. We missed the Doors of Paradise, in Florence I think they are, because we'd gone to get our hair done. She made us, the lady made us get up the next morning, because we were leaving Rome, at six o'clock . . . Is it Florence or Rome?

SPEAKER: Florence.

MRS. ELLIS: Florence. And go see them. I'm glad I saw them.

SPEAKER: But, Harriet, didn't it create this love you have for England so that you're nearly British but you're still . . .

MRS. ELLIS: I think what made me love England is that, certainly, but, my first trip to Europe I thought there was nowhere like Italy, and I'm not sure there is. But I think why I love England, I just kind of grew up that way. Mama read Dickens to us all the time, and Sir Walter Scott. In those days, when I was a child, there was no television and that was our entertainment. Sitting around for hours and hours and reading English novels. It was wonderful.

SPEAKER: And how many, do you have brothers and sisters?

MRS. ELLIS: I had two brothers, but they were a great deal older than I.

SPEAKER: Did they go to North Fulton?

MRS. ELLIS: They went off to boarding school. I think they went, each went for a year. One came back and went to Marist. He was expelled. Expurgated and expelled, from his boarding school. And so he came back. He was accepted at Marist and he loved that. Finally we got him through high school. But I never saw much of them because they were so much older than me.

SPEAKER: And Marist was a military school at the time.

MRS. ELLIS: It was. It was a military school. That's right.

SPEAKER: Was this your brother Calhoun?

MRS. ELLIS: No, Calhoun did what he should have done. This was his brother Stuart, his older brother.

SPEAKER: Calhoun became a well-known doctor.

SPEAKER: Did he live in the Atlanta area after he finished school?

MRS. ELLIS: My brother Stuart lived around here, but my other brother lived in . . . he kept marrying people from Augusta. So he lived the rest of his life in Augusta.

SPEAKER: Did he serve in World War II?

MRS. ELLIS: Yes.

SPEAKER: Tell us a little about Buckhead and service. How did it change life in Buckhead, and who all your brother served. Do you remember any war heroes or any stories?

MRS. ELLIS: No, they weren't war heroes. My brother that was near my age was in medical school, so he just got to stay in medical school. He was in Maryland at Johns Hopkins. Isn't that in Maryland? That's where he was. So he spent the war happily there. And then my other brother, he was in the Coast Guard and he had a terrible time. Certainly safe, but he was at some awful beach with a lot of high seas. In New York, Manhattan Beach, he spent the war there. We had no heroes.

SPEAKER: How was life in Buckhead during the war? Did it change much? Or did it kind of keep moving at the usual pace?

MRS. ELLIS: No, I remember the blackouts. We all thought the blackouts were lots of fun. But no, nothing changed much. It was sort of the same. The rationing and all that. But none of that was a bother. I mean, we never worried about it. You had old cars and not much sugar, but we didn't care, didn't care about the sugar. All the old cars were great.

SPEAKER: And was your husband from Atlanta? How did you meet your husband?

MRS. ELLIS: I knew him slightly, but when we both were in Athens at the University I met him, really met him. I mean, I just knew him, when I saw him I knew him, but we got to be friends there.

SPEAKER: And I understand you moved to Boston after Athens. You got married. He was in law school. And then you came back.

MRS. ELLIS: Yes.

SPEAKER: And tell me where did you all move when you came back to Atlanta?

MRS. ELLIS: We lived with his father. I think it's so funny. Lots of families have gone back to living together, like Grandmother and us all lived together growing up. And lots of my friends too the same. And now, I have at least four or five families that . . . we lived with my husband's father for quite a while. He was a widow and had a nice big house, and seemed delighted to have us. I'm not sure he was in retrospect, but we had a good time there.

SPEAKER: And where was that? What street was that on?

MRS. ELLIS: On Peachtree Circle.

SPEAKER: Peachtree Circle. Over in Ansley.

MRS. ELLIS: And then I have some grandchildren that live here in the little guest house out there. Mrs. Manry's yardman's house. It's quite rustic, but they seem to enjoy it.

SPEAKER: I can imagine. And from Peachtree Circle, did you move back into Buckhead? When did you come? Did you move directly to Habersham or did you . . .

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, we had a little house in Collier Hills for a couple of years. And then they built this neighborhood just back of here, Wingate. I was wanting to move back out here because my mother and my family all still lived around here. And so we looked at a house. The guy couldn't sell it. Every day he reduced the price. So we ended up living there for a while. And I loved that. It was lots of fun. The neighborhood, it was a new subdivision, and we were like the second house. Thousands of children and people. It was loads of fun. And I didn't want to ever leave. But my husband never liked the house. And one day we rode by here. My mother at that time lived in one of my aunt's houses, on Cherokee. And we rode by here. And Mrs. Manry had a big For Sale sign. And Ed said, "Oh, I love it! Let's go in and buy it. I'm going to buy it right this minute." And I said, "Don't bother Mrs. Manry, Ed. She's a good friend of mine." Her son and children were my friends at E. Rivers from first grade. And he said, "No, I am going to buy it." And so he came right in and bought it. And she said . . .

SPEAKER: Just as simple as that.

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, it was that simple. And she said . . . they didn't haggle about anything. Mrs. Manry kept trying to talk us out of it. She said, "But, Ed," she said, the real estate people said,

“Don’t you want to look at the house?” We said, “No. We don’t need to look at it.” And she said, “But the real estate people said we’d never sell it because we don’t have a downstairs bathroom.” And we said, “We couldn’t care less!” You know, we’re not buying it for the bathroom, we’re buying it for the molding, and, oh, in the dining room there’s a wonderful little fireplace from London in 17-something. And what she had done with the house . . .

SPEAKER: She was the original owner?

MRS. ELLIS: She built it. She and Neel Reid. I think she was in love with Neel Reid, and he with her. Oh, he used to stay here with her, back in the ‘20s, after she built it in the ‘20s, when he’d go to parties in Atlanta, because he lived so far.

SPEAKER: [asks how long Mrs. Manry lived in house]

MRS. ELLIS: Sixty or so years. From [19]20 ‘til we bought it.

SPEAKER: And you’ve been here how long?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, I can’t remember . . . how old are Andrew and Spalding? We bought it when Andrew was a new baby.

SPEAKER: They’re 36.

MRS. ELLIS: 36 years. We were so happy, because we thought we were old, and we were so lucky. We had a new baby and a new house, and a whole new set of friends, like Lewis. We knew each other but we got to be friends through our children because we lived down the street. The children were best friends.

SPEAKER: So you raised your children at your home on Habersham then? In this house.

MRS. ELLIS: Well, my daughter was 19, so she was already in Athens in school. But my other boy was here.

SPEAKER: Harriet was known as the most fun of all the mothers on Habersham. Because my son would come up here, and Harriet said she had very few rules, but it didn't hurt, your children turned out great. She'd come in at three in the morning and say, "You boys want a pizza?" They just loved staying here.

SPEAKER: Where did your sons go to school?

MRS. ELLIS: Let's see. They all went to Westminster. And one went off to school, a couple of years. I mean, well, they went to Trinity. Two, my boys went to Trinity. And then, my daughter went all the way through at Westminster. My other son came and went to Westminster. Every time we, my son, I better not mention his name. Every time we'd get him back in Westminster they'd call after a year and say, "We think your child might be happier somewhere else."

SPEAKER: Tell them what you said, Harriet, which I love. Harriet would say, "Well, he's just as happy as he can be right here."

MRS. ELLIS: I had been drinking martinis and I did better after martinis. It gives you confidence. And I said, "Thank you so much for your concern, but he couldn't possibly be happier." And I hung up the phone. And I heard them say "But, but. . . ." But they didn't mention it anymore after that. I, of course, got a good tutor, and he did just fine.

SPEAKER: Well, he got a Ph.D. I mean, he's very smart.

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, he is smart. He did get a Ph.D., from Vanderbilt. And he was a Phi Beta Kappa. They should never have said that to him.

SPEAKER: You could tell the headmaster he was just under-challenged.

MRS. ELLIS: I think that's what the polite word is now, challenged.

SPEAKER: Who were some of your, do you remember any good stories growing up, anything stand out, any outrageous cocktail parties, or any good fun story that kind of stands out in your mind?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, nothing printable. As I say, children lived so separately then, you didn't know what was going on.

SPEAKER: Going back to your childhood, did many kids ride bikes through all of this, or typically would they walk?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, walk or ride bikes. People didn't drive you places much. I went all over town on my bike. Enjoyed it very much. Of course, you couldn't do that now.

SPEAKER: And there was the gentleman's, your dad may have been a part of this, but there was a riding club, right? There was some sort of a riding club where the guys could get together and have breakfast and ride their horses, on Tuxedo and that area?

MRS. ELLIS: Really! Some people around here had horses, but, no, my father wouldn't get near horses.

SPEAKER: Harriet, what about the extension of Buckhead to Lake Rabun? Because wasn't it kind of the place where a lot of Buckhead people would go?

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, lots of people.

SPEAKER: The Withams had one of the first big places at Lake Rabun.

MRS. ELLIS: That was 1922. Our house, we built that. I think we had, Mother and Daddy. . . . they built the lake in 1914. And, actually, the Nunnallys, such an interesting family. You all will know the name. Anyway, it's a big family, millions of 'em. They had a Neel Reid house at Lake Rabun. It's still there. They still own it. And it was built about 1922.

SPEAKER: That was a huge part of your life growing up, and then you'd see a lot of the same people, I guess, up there, that you would see here in Buckhead.

SPEAKER: So you would go up there a lot of times during the summer?

MRS. ELLIS: We stayed all summer. We'd go up the day school was out and we wouldn't come back until, August 30th was my grandmother's birthday.

SPEAKER: So the parents organized events for the kids?

MRS. ELLIS: Nobody ever entertained kids then. You had to entertain yourself. Some got in terrible trouble! But isn't that fun. You were very free. Extremely free. And no one cared what we did. We had no supervision at all. It was wonderful.

SPEAKER: What would you do?

MRS. ELLIS: I don't know. Ride in . . . if anybody'd let us have a boat we'd row boats. We'd walk over to friends' houses, just have a wonderful time.

SPEAKER: The days weren't organized, I guess, like they are now . . .

MRS. ELLIS: Nobody entertained us.

SPEAKER: . . . with all these different classes , sports teams, and all that. You just kind of did what you wanted to do.

MRS. ELLIS: I suppose that's good for people. I don't know. I haven't come to decide yet. But I had a wonderful time growing up. But all my friends, we'd laugh and as I say we had no supervision. We did just what we'd want to.

SPEAKER: So it seems like things have changed, and back in that period, it was really the adults' time, and the kids just went along for the ride. Now it seems like it's completely reversed, where whatever the kids' activities are, the adults are going to be . . .

MRS. ELLIS: People are very child-centered. A lot of my friends, though, had, well, we had just fun things to do. Like in the mountains we'd ride horses and then some friends of mine lived way out Paces Ferry, they had horses, and their neighbors had horses. We had a good time. And then we'd ride our bikes for miles, places. That was fun.

SPEAKER: [You enjoyed going to the lake?]

MRS. ELLIS: I loved it. It brings back, my earliest memories are of being a baby up there, and the nurse carrying me up the steps.

SPEAKER: Do you still have the house?

MRS. ELLIS: No, no, no. My mother gave it to my oldest brother. His children, my niece and nephew, have it. But they let me entertain and come all I want to. And my house is right by them. So we see a lot of them.

SPEAKER: What did your dad do?

MRS. ELLIS: He was a banker, and then he was retired a long time. You mean, business wise? He was retired a long time, and then he worked for, something that I hear is still going on. Atlantic Realty Company. He just adored that. It was part of Courts and Company. And they

started it, I guess this was still the Depression but maybe toward the end of the Depression. And they would buy apartment buildings that had gone under, and Papa's company would fix them up, and he just loved it. Enjoyed it so much.

SPEAKER: Had to dust off that business file. It would probably work today too.

MRS. ELLIS: Isn't it the truth.

SPEAKER: Well, Harriet, who do you remember as figures in that generation that were particularly interesting or people that people had a huge amount of respect for? Are there any people that stand out, let's say, in your father's generation?

MRS. ELLIS: No, I'm afraid to say that people who behaved badly are the only ones that I love to remember! A lot of my, this is social history and I won't say the names, but a lot of my mother's friends behaved horribly.

SPEAKER: In what way?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, just in every way. They used to, as a child, I hear this is why southern literature emerged and is wonderful. I would sit there and love to hear these terrible stories about what people did. Some of Mama's friends, oh, lots had houses then, these were the early days of Sea Island, and they were widows and divorcees. And these gorgeous young Cuban men would come in their white linen suits to Sea Island and do the samba with 'em and run off with 'em and try to marry 'em for their money. At least lots of romances were going on, and I loved it. I used to love to hear all the scandalous stories.

SPEAKER: Well, Harriet had the best life and still does. She has here, then she has Lake Rabun, and then Ed's family had a house in Sea Island, so you could just go from mountain to sea.

MRS. ELLIS: We still do. We still go to Sea Island. But we prefer where the Nixes had their houses: Atlanta, Paris, and Charleston.

SPEAKER: Not as much fun as yours.

MRS. ELLIS: My son, Edward, he said, “I wish we could re-think our houses and do like the Nixes.”

SPEAKER: You just need to work a swap with them, and send them to Sea Island for a week while you go to Paris for a week.

SPEAKER: I always said, to Beth, that Harriet must have had the best childhood, because her outlook has always been so positive. She will never let herself get down in the dumps. She always makes everybody feel good.

MRS. ELLIS: I did have a wonderful time. Thoroughly enjoyed every year I’ve had. It’s hard to think of one that’s been all that bad. It’s all been fun.

SPEAKER: You mentioned your aunt on Cherokee. What house was that on Cherokee?

MRS. ELLIS: It’s a small house. Can’t think of the people that live there now. Elizabeth is the first name. Anyway, after my aunt that lived out, way out Peachtree in the old family summer home, for many, many years, it became Phipps and Lenox Square, and she, of course, couldn’t stay there, and sold it. And so my father, it was my father’s sister, he found a lot, from Mrs. McLane¹. They’re long gone. In Mrs. McClain’s garden he built a little house for Aunt Laura. Then after my father died, after a while Mama got tired of staying in the big house by herself, so she moved to Aunt Laura’s house.

¹ The property is now 20 Cherokee Road.

SPEAKER: And did you move with her?

MRS. ELLIS: No, this was after I was married. But it was really neat, because I still lived in Wingate, and I could come through the woods, just walked over to see Mama without having to get in the car. That was fun.

SPEAKER: So, Harriet, what was club life like back then? Because I know you went to all the old clubs here in town? What do you remember from that?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, I'll tell you that Brookhaven was the most glamorous place. Of the early memories of going to Brookhaven when I was a baby, it was like something out of a movie, it was so pretty and attractive. I have early memories of that. They had a sandy beach where the lake is and cabanas, just like on the Riviera. I remember awnings, with awnings, you know. And they would serve refreshments, just like you were in St. Tropez or somewhere, down there on the beach. And, of course, it was an artificial beach, but it was just wonderful. It was so pretty, and so much more fun than a swimming pool. Isn't that too bad, that people don't do that.

SPEAKER: What was the Driving Club like?

MRS. ELLIS: They didn't take me there much.

SPEAKER: That was for the adults.

MRS. ELLIS: That was for more, that was the adults, they never took children anywhere in those days.

SPEAKER: Did they let you eat with them at the table?

MRS. ELLIS: No, I ate with the servants. My daughter-in-law's mother thinks that's so funny. We went to see Mrs. Inman's house. I took my, whatever she is, daughter-in-law's mother from Arkansas. She grew up in the Midwest in another state, I forget where. And she thought, they were telling how the children always ate with the servants. She thought that was so strange.

SPEAKER: So everyone had a house staff when you were growing up?

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm.

SPEAKER: What would that usually consist of?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, I suppose help was so cheap then, and people were glad to have the work. And people love to talk about people being oppressed, but our crowd certainly weren't. They didn't do anything. They were just like, you know, family members, and we all just did together. I can remember as a little bitty child having people over and fixing the lunch because the cook didn't want to, you know. She was, the cook was a dear person. But they really were elderly too, very elderly, so I suppose that's why they didn't.

SPEAKER: So, typically, how big was the staff?

MRS. ELLIS: Let's see. You won't believe this, how many. Well, everybody around had that many, as I say, because help was cheap and people were anxious for jobs. My grandmother's couple lived on the place. And our cook, and Grandmother's, what she called "man" was her chauffeur. And then we had a butler, and we had a maid, and then we had another yardman because Grandmother's "man" was never available. He was supposed to be the yardman. He and Grandmother were out riding around.

SPEAKER: Was there any big crime in Buckhead when you were growing up?

MRS. ELLIS: No. I'm trying to think. I always loved crimes and murders. But I was perfectly safe.

SPEAKER: Well, there's the murder in the house over on Howell Mill, the stone house, the French. . . .

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, I remember that, that murder. They never, never knew. . . .I don't think the French fellow did it.

SPEAKER: He ended up killed himself after all the scrutiny.

MRS. ELLIS: Did he really? He eventually went back to France, I guess. Maybe he came back and forth.

SPEAKER: I think he committed suicide because of all the scrutiny.

MRS. ELLIS: Is that right?

SPEAKER: From my understanding.

MRS. ELLIS: Fascinating story. Someone wrote a book I bought about murders in Atlanta and that one was in it. And then I remember my aunt had a friend whose husband was murdered out near Emory, in a beautiful house out near Emory. My aunt always thought his wife was behind it. A man climbed in the window and shot him. They said a burglar. And then they were going to, this is awful, the family asked that the man be not put in jail. Who knows what happened.

SPEAKER: Interesting.

SPEAKER: And what bank was your dad with? You said your dad was in banking, what bank did he work with?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, I don't know. You know, there was the Depression, and then he was with, my grandfather had some banks, and he retired, and someone else had the banks, and they went, they all would be different banks. And Daddy was, and then my father-in-law too, later, was with the Georgia Savings Bank, which was just a small investment bank. And he enjoyed that very much. And then he was retired, well, I guess a long time, ten or fifteen years, and then started with his friend at Courts and Company, got in to do the real estate thing.

SPEAKER: So these were more like private investment banks than something like C&S.

MRS. ELLIS: Yes. It wasn't anything like C&S. It wasn't like SunTrust or anything. Just small investment.

SPEAKER: Well, how do you like Buckhead now?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, I think it's very exciting.

SPEAKER: Are there some things you miss about it, do you wish it had stayed the same?

MRS. ELLIS: No, you can't do anything about life. It was wonderful then, but I'm just glad to be alive and able to enjoy all the exciting things that are going on. I mean, there are so many fun places to eat and go, and French bistros. What's the name of the Middle Eastern place you took us to?

SPEAKER: Cynthia's. [?]

MRS. ELLIS: Cynthia's, yes.

SPEAKER: I think, don't you miss just the real kernel of downtown Buckhead? I wish that could come back as more of a village.

MRS. ELLIS: I do too. I don't know what's going to happen to it now. We just need to see.

SPEAKER: Do you remember at all the Buckhead Symphony?

MRS. ELLIS: No!

SPEAKER: Apparently, for a few summers, there was a Buckhead Symphony. And there was an old auditorium that was back by the old Sears building on Paces Ferry. We've seen some pictures of it as well. And one of our board member's stepmother was actually a violinist in the Buckhead Symphony. We're trying to find some folks who actually went to it and can tell us a little bit more about it.

MRS. ELLIS: No, I've never even heard of it. See, we missed out on that. We were gone all summer so we never took part in anything that happened in the summer.

SPEAKER: How about church? Did you attend church in Buckhead?

MRS. ELLIS: No, we went to, I went downtown to church, where my family had gone, way back, on Fifth Street, where Mama grew up. St. Mark's.

SPEAKER: And a lot of your friends you mentioned from your first grade class, was it Mrs. Bloodworth's kindergarten?

MRS. ELLIS: No, I didn't go to kindergarten. People didn't go then, but lots of my friends went to Mrs. Bloodworth's kindergarten.

SPEAKER: And who were some of your friends still from that first grade class you keep in touch with? You mentioned Mr. Gilham. Anybody else?

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm. Joe Hamilton and Tish Jennings and, oh, there's millions of 'em that all still live right around here I still see all the time.

SPEAKER: Well, are there any other questions you can think of?

SPEAKER: I think Harriet's covered them pretty well.

SPEAKER: You know, just one good nugget, Harriet. We may have to give you a couple more glasses of champagne.

MRS. ELLIS: I don't know! As I said, I have a terrible time being funny when I'm supposed to be funny!

SPEAKER: Are there any thoughts that you want to add to what Chad has asked you?

MRS. ELLIS: No, I just think it's great what you all are doing.

SPEAKER: Well, thank you. It's wonderful to meet folks like you.

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, do you know, the Historical Society at, I always call it Mrs. Inman's, the Swan House, they got our butler, our elderly butler, to come over and tell what it was like.

SPEAKER: Really!

MRS. ELLIS: . . . to be a butler in the era we're talking about.

SPEAKER: Is he still alive?

MRS. ELLIS: No, he died, in his nineties, just a few years ago.

SPEAKER: Was that Harold?

MRS. ELLIS: Harold. You remember. He was a prince. Just a prince.

SPEAKER: He was a prince. I mean, he was an elegant man.

MRS. ELLIS: He was an elegant man.

SPEAKER: He was as refined as anyone could ever be. He really was.

MRS. ELLIS: He was mainly Cherokee Indian. Very proud of his Cherokee heritage. And then, obviously, a Burns from South Carolina. He was very aristocratic-looking. His last name was Burns. And he was from South Carolina.

SPEAKER: And where would he live? Like, where would your house staff typically live?

MRS. ELLIS: Well, as I say, Grandmother's crowd lived on our place, they lived where we did. But he had a lovely house in another part of town. He had a wonderful car that he kept shined up so that it hurt your eyes. He'd come steaming over every day. He'd had an interesting life. I wish he was here to tell about his life. He was one of eighteen. And in a little hut in South Carolina. He went to Florida in the boom. He said he made fifty dollars a day building golf courses. And that was a fortune then!

SPEAKER: That would have been a couple of thousand a day.

MRS. ELLIS: I know it. He couldn't believe the money. Anyway, we were lucky we all got him to be one family. He was with us until he died, I guess sixty years.

SPEAKER: Are any of his, did he ever marry?

MRS. ELLIS: He married. He had no children, but he had a lovely wife. She had an Eastern Seaboard accent. She worked for very grand people, and she picked up the accent. She didn't put

it on, she just had it. Very, she talked like, very graaand, like this is the way she talked [with accent]. She was a cook for some very grand people around town. Mrs. Thornton, Mrs. Kennedy, lots of the grandest, grandest dames.

SPEAKER: Is she still alive?

MRS. ELLIS: No, she died.

SPEAKER: So, Harriet, who were the grand dames when you were . . . Mrs. Thornton, Mrs. Inman, I guess.

MRS. ELLIS: Yes, Mrs. Inman, Mrs. Thornton, Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Draper.

SPEAKER: What about Mrs. Haverty?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, certainly. Mrs. Haverty was very grand! And, your grandmother-in-law, cousin Maureen Spalding.

SPEAKER: Well, by the time I saw her she was not grand.

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, she was always grand, very funny.

SPEAKER: When we'd go to see her, she'd say, I'd be standing by the fireplace, and she'd say, "Get off my Aubusson!" She had an Aubusson rug right in front of the fireplace.

MRS. ELLIS: Lewis, tell about how she had so many grandchildren that . . . she was always witty and beautiful and attractive, but she had notes because she had so many grandchildren.

SPEAKER: I married one of her grandchildren, and she really was a very funny woman. She'd open this little drawer in this table by her chair, and she'd go, "Now, Lewis, tell me . . ." So she was a very funny person.

MRS. ELLIS: Imagine having twenty-seven grandchildren. Wouldn't that be fun?

SPEAKER: How many do you have?

MRS. ELLIS: Seven.

SPEAKER: Are they in Atlanta?

MRS. ELLIS: No. Two in California, and one lives here, that's three. Two live at the duck pond across Peachtree, no, three live there. Two, three, four, five. There are two more. One lives in New York. I've left one out. I need Cousin Maureen's notes!

SPEAKER: Well, thank you so much for your time and your hospitality today. We really enjoyed it.

MRS. ELLIS: It's been loads of fun. I've enjoyed it. It made me . . .

SPEAKER: You've set the bar awfully high, with brownies and champagne!

MRS. ELLIS: It made me remember lots of good times and what fun I've had. And I'm still trying to have it, aren't you all? Trying hard.

SPEAKER: Harriet says that she doesn't like to waste her time sleeping because if you're sleeping you're not living. She lives it to the fullest.

MRS. ELLIS: I've gotten in quite a few extra years by not sleeping much. And then, if there's anything I hate it's eating dinner early like we used to, at six or seven. I like Madrid hours. When I went to Madrid I just adored it.

SPEAKER: Eating around 9 o'clock.

MRS. ELLIS: 10,12. Ed and I, my husband and I loved to go out to dinner. And he'd work and we'd stay at Lakemont most of the week, and then he'd come back and he'd try to do the week's work in about three days and we'd go out to dinner at ten. And we just loved that. We had a good time doing that.

SPEAKER: Is there anyone else from Buckhead that has your passion in England, is there anybody you took trips with, or . . .?

MRS. ELLIS: No, my cousin that liked to go so, she died young, and so anyway, I'm sorry about that.

SPEAKER: You know, there's another Harriet that looks exactly like Harriet, but she's just twenty years younger.

MRS. ELLIS: That person loves England too!

SPEAKER: That's her daughter, she goes to England, she loves to go to England with her. And it's just, it warms your heart because, Harriet and little Harriet came up to see us in Charleston. And my wife and I were saying, "Isn't it wonderful?" You could hear them in there just yak, yak, yakking, in the bedroom. They were up talking until eleven o'clock at night, enjoying each other so much.

MRS. ELLIS: Well, we do have fun. And it's terrible, you have to be careful. I hope we didn't say anything indiscreet at your house. But a neighbor told me, my daughter lives in Macon, and my neighbor said, down there on Wesley, she said, "Harriet, it's the strangest thing. The wires are twisted somehow, and I hear you and your daughter talking every day." I thought, "Oh, God, what have I said."

SPEAKER: Harriet's daughter is beautiful and funny and wonderful.

MRS. ELLIS: My children all love England, and all, all of us have tried to live in England, and one thing and the next has kept us from it. My son that lives at the duck pond, he and his wife, who was then his girlfriend, they stayed in London when they finished school, until his green card gave out, and then they were driven out of England. And then my next son, when he got out of law school, he must have applied for them, he was asked to be in a couple of, well, two, good New York-London law firms. I knew he'd take it. I knew he'd take that. And, do you know, his wife wouldn't go. She's from California and she wouldn't go. So he lives in California.

SPEAKER: And your husband, what law firm did he work for?

MRS. ELLIS: Alston and Bird.

SPEAKER: Was he an early partner with that?

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm.

SPEAKER: So you've seen the growth of that firm, obviously.

MRS. ELLIS: Mm-hmm. It changed, it was different names, but anyway, ultimately it was Alston and Bird.

SPEAKER: And one of the nicest men that ever lived. He and Harriet were the perfect team. Because Harriet was the funny one, Ed was more of the straight man. [laughter] I've loved being with them.

MRS. ELLIS: Ed was hard to make have fun. I mean, he was very Presbyterian, Calvinistic. My mother was that way too. I think that's why I've had such a good time in life, because I've had to demoralize people.

SPEAKER: I'll tell you a funny story about Ed. When Harriet and Ed went up to Boston because Ed went to Harvard, he, we, now I'll go back. They had some friends who lived in Charleston across the street from us. And so Harriet was telling us that the first couple she ever had for dinner when they went up to Boston . . .

MRS. ELLIS: In our married life! I'd been married a week.

SPEAKER: In their married life. She didn't know how to cook. So Ed came home one day and said, "I've invited this couple over for dinner. I met him at the bus stop and he's in my class at law school."

MRS. ELLIS: No, he didn't say that. He said they're people I met at the bus stop.

SPEAKER: So Harriet said, "We don't even know these people and I'm supposed to cook dinner for them. We don't even know if they're nice people or not." He says, "Honey, of course they're nice people. They're from South Carolina."

MRS. ELLIS: That is what he said. And they still are among our best friends. They live across the street from Lewis.

SPEAKER: What did you cook?

MRS. ELLIS: I don't know. I didn't know how to cook anything. I'd never cooked a meal before. And I had to even run out and buy plates before they came. I didn't have any china. But we made friends and we've been fast friends ever since. And I recommended Beth and Lewis to them, and vice versa. I knew they'd like each other, and they do. They do.

SPEAKER: You know, Harriet is a person that you're very proud to know. Everybody loves her.

MRS. ELLIS: Well, we must all keep on having fun.

SPEAKER: Right.

SPEAKER: Well, thank you so much.