

Transcript

Interview with Sarah M. Driscoll

Date of Interview: April 11, 2021

Interviewee: Sarah Driscoll

Interviewer: Uchenna Evans

Location: Private residence, Riggs Park, Washington, DC

Interviewer: We are here with Sarah Driscoll, who is moving out of the neighborhood in Riggs Park, so thank you for joining us for her farewell party. We're just going to have a quick 15 minute interview with her just to talk about where she's from, how long she's lived in the neighborhood, and what she likes most about the neighborhood and her hopes for the future. So can you just start by telling us your name and your age?

Ms. Driscoll: Yes my name is Sarah Maria Driscoll and I am 93 years old.

Interviewer: Wonderful. And where are you from Ms. Driscoll?

Ms. Driscoll: I am from Conway, C-o-n-w-a-y, North Carolina

Interviewer: And what your childhood like in North Carolina?

Ms. Driscoll: We was, I was born on a farm and we did everything on the farm. We had chicken, horses, cows, pigs. My father killed his own hogs to have our pigs to eat. Most of what we had to eat was pork and chicken. Beef was a very rarity for us. They went hunting, they killed wild turkeys and squirrels and all of those things. We had a big farm. We picked cotton, shaved peanuts, dug peanuts, and that was year round.

Interviewer: Wonderful. And did you go to high school, college? What was your education like?

Ms. Driscoll: I went to high school in Scranton, North Carolina. I did not go to college. I took some courses at UDC and I also didn't graduate in North Carolina because I got sick at the age of 19 for three years that I wasn't able to do anything. No doctor could figure out what was wrong with me for three years. I had. Now I know what was wrong with me, but they didn't know then. I had a blocked intestine and I had two operations at the age of 19.

Interviewer: Okay, when did you or your family move to DC? When did you and your family to DC?

Ms. Driscoll: I moved to DC in 1950.

Interviewer: And what neighborhood did you move to?

Ms. Driscoll: Northwest

Interviewer: And when exactly did you move to Riggs Park, here in Riggs Park?

Ms. Driscoll: In 1963

Interviewer: And what prompted your move to Riggs Park?

Ms. Driscoll: I had married and I married a Marine. And I moved to North Carolina at Camp Lejeune and when my husband retired and we moved to back to Washington, DC. We lived in an apartment and we saved our money and we was able to look for a house in wherever. And we found one in Southwest that almost given to us, but my sister said “You can’t go to Southwest,” so we looked around in here for somewhere to live. And I had a girlfriend who lived on this block in the 200 block. We were very good friends and we happily found this house that was available. And that’s how we got here.

Interviewer: So, why did your sister say you couldn’t go to Southwest?

Ms. Driscoll: We was too far apart. My family was very close and all of my family lived in Northwest and she said I can’t go to Southwest, who’s coming to visit me. And she was my oldest sister and what she said was law.

Interviewer: How many siblings do you have?

Ms. Driscoll: I had 8 sisters and 3 brothers. And I am number 11

Interviewer: What was the neighborhood like when you first moved here in 1959?

Ms. Driscoll: It was very nice. It was mostly White. And as a matter of fact, the people that was still living here when we put in for the house, they was white. But they was nice. And the people that I met was very nice. I wanted a, somewhere that my daughter could go to school. And they told me the LaSalle School was very nice. So I wanted to be in this neighborhood for her.

Interviewer: How many children do you have?

Ms. Driscoll: One

Interviewer: So when you moved in, was there a racial covenant in the deed to the house?

Ms. Driscoll: Yes

Interviewer: How many Black families were on the block when you moved in Riggs Park?

Ms. Driscoll: It was quite a few. My next door neighbor was here. She was Black. Next door this way was Black. Cross the street I think was one. And there were a couple more. They was moving in at all times.

Interviewer: In 1959. So did your children, you said your daughter attended LaSalle?

Ms. Driscoll: Yes

Interviewer: LaSalle-Backus?

Ms. Driscoll: Yes. No, it wasn't Backus then, it was LaSalle.

Interviewer: What was your experience like for your daughter in attending LaSalle?

Ms. Driscoll: Well my main purpose was her. And I wanted her to go to a good school. And she went there and then I wasn't quite, I couldn't keep my eyes on her as much as I wanted to, so I put her in a Catholic school.

Interviewer: Where did people in the neighborhood shop at that time, for groceries, other items?

Ms. Driscoll: It was another store at where Giant is, but I don't remember the name of it. There was a store where Giant is now.

Interviewer: So what did you like most about this neighborhood?

Ms. Driscoll: It was nice. It was nice. I could walk. They had two buses. There was a bus and then they had trains that you had to get in on the front or the back. And we could get on the trains, go where we wanted to. Everything in those days was prejudiced. You couldn't go to anything white, but we didn't need to because we had everything that we needed.

Interviewer: In this neighborhood?

Ms. Driscoll: In this neighborhood, yes.

Interviewer: What was your involvement in neighborhood life? For example, civic association, block parties, any membership groups?

Ms. Driscoll: Well, I did join the block party in this neighborhood. I went to church. And the civic

Interviewer: Civic association?

Ms. Driscoll: Uh-huh

Interviewer: So did you attend civic association meetings?

Ms. Driscoll: Yes

Interviewer: Okay. And where did you all gather for these activities?

Ms. Driscoll: At LaSalle School

Interviewer: Were there any other focal points for neighbors to socialize and gather and have conversation?

Ms. Driscoll: I don't know

Interviewer: Okay. What memories do you have, if any, about events in Fort Circle Park which is on South Dakota & Galloway?

Ms. Driscoll: What's the question?

Interviewer: What memories do you have, if any, about events in Fort Circle Park on South Dakota & Galloway? People have said back in the day there used to be parties and they would have music. They would have a stage.

Ms. Driscoll: No

Interviewer: Turning to specific events, you moved here in 1959. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in the 60s. How did that affect the neighborhood?

Ms. Driscoll: I think, okay as far I can remember.

Interviewer: What do you remember when Metro opened up in the neighborhood?

Ms. Driscoll: Oh that was exciting, yes. I went, I was lucky enough, when they were putting Metro in, I was lucky enough to go to see them build underground. And I went one time and I went underground to see how the trains would be.

Interviewer: Did you ride the Metro often?

Ms. Driscoll: No

Interviewer: What do you remember of when the neighborhood library was built in the 1980s?

Ms. Driscoll: Exciting, I was right there.

Interviewer: Were you involved in the effort to get a neighborhood library? Can you tell us about that?

Ms. Driscoll: Well, I sign everything they brought out that was given to help. I signed [*gesturing to signing paper*]

Interviewer: What do you know about efforts to prevent a freeway from being built through the neighborhood?

Ms. Driscoll: I don't.

Interviewer: How have you seen the neighborhood change since you moved here?

Ms. Driscoll: You know, I don't think it had changed that much. Different groups of people that had come in, the older people had moved or died or whatsoever. The group that has come in is not quite as friendly as the older people. They didn't meet us or we didn't meet them and they didn't pass you in the street and say hello. Or the older people, they'd wave at you and say hello and all of that. But the younger people today, even the little ones, they walk right by you and don't say anything.

Interviewer: How do you feel all of these changes?

Ms. Driscoll: Well, [*shrug*] I don't know what the answer is there.

Interviewer: What are some of the fondest memories you'll have of the neighborhood once you move out?

Ms. Driscoll: One of the best things is my daughter. When she left from LaSalle, we moved to Prince George's Plaza, but it wasn't a plaza, [*inaudible*] and we got an apartment and we moved from this house and we moved to Prince George's Plaza and I stayed there three years, and then I came back. In the meantime, she went to school in I can't remember the name and she was very active in school. My main memory was she was very smart and she went to school and took everything and I was constantly running with her, "Mama I'm going here and I want to go here." And we, when we moved to Prince George's, just she and I, and it was money all the time. "Mama I want this and I want that." And one of the things that I must say, going to that school, they have a trip to go to New York City and they had to meet at Union Station like 5:00 in the morning. We overslept. And we missed the train. And it was the saddest moment of my life to see her come back crying because she couldn't go.

Interviewer: Just a couple more questions. What did you do for a living Ms. Driscoll?

Ms. Driscoll: Well I did a lot of things. I waited tables. I got a job at the Washington Cathedral in Northwest Washington. I worked there 25 years. I was the first Black in that department. In those days, Black people didn't go to Washington Cathedral unless they was professional. And we, how I got the job, Washington Cathedral used to make Christmas cards and they made them. They ordered the Christmas cards and they came flat and they had to hire people to fold them perfectly. And they came to the church and asked some church people, asked our pastor, did he have someone that they could hire. And I was one of those, I think it was six or seven of us was hired to work three months a year folding Christmas cards. All of us was Black then.

And when the time was over, I worked there three years, three months, and the last month the manager, Mr. Bailey, came to me and said, "When you are finished here, I want to talk to you." And I did. And he said he wanted to hire me. All of the rest of the people was there and I'm the only one he asked to hire. And I went back to see him and he took me to this office that never had a Black person in it. And he said, "She is coming here to work." And he said, I remember this. He said, "It's time for you to be here." And he said, he told them that, "Teach her what to do and be nice to her." Well some of them didn't like it. One lady quit. And she told me I had no

business there, and I told her I had just as much business there as she did. A lot of them left, wouldn't work with me because I was the only one in the office. And I didn't know nothing. One little girl, she was young, bout the youngest one there. She was nice to me and she taught me what I learned. I ended up being a supervisor to all White people. That's a story, isn't it [*laughs*].

And one particular. Can I tell this? And one particular lady, older than I was, white, she didn't have to work. And by the way, these people volunteered to work. They was wealthy. And most of them was volunteers. This lady was married to a four-star general. And when her husband died, she didn't know if she had a dime or not, so she came there, she worked for money because she didn't know she had money. She was trying to find her way because her husband took care of everything so she didn't know anything. So when she found out she had money, she started working free. And she told me, told us that when she was in the navy, I guess it was navy, but I know it was four-star, she said she had two stewards, one to cut her orange in the morning and the other one to pull her chair out. Now I don't think she told it to brag, but that was just the way it was. But over the years, 25 years later, I got to tell this, 25 years later, I had somebody to pull out my chair and cut my orange. Now that's a story isn't it. [*laughs*] And how did that happen? My daughter was overseas and her cook come by, "Good morning" and pulled my chair out. And I never forgot that. 25 years later.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Well we know you have many guests to entertain, so thank you for giving us this short interview.

Ms. Driscoll: Thank you, thank you. This has been so nice. This has been so nice. Thank you, thank you.

Applause

END OF INTERVIEW