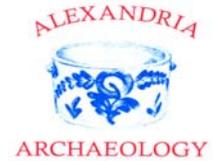




City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies - George Washington High School Alumni*

Title: *Interview with Ralph Mills:*

Date of Interview: *Nov. 10, 2009*

Location of Interview: *Alexandria, Virginia at Ralph Mill's home*

Interviewer: *Gillian Chen*

Transcriber: *Gillian Chen*

Abstract: *Ralph Mills was born in 1926 and has lived in Alexandria since 1938, after spending his early years in Washington, D.C. In Alexandria, Ralph has lived in the Rosemont neighborhood and recalls ice and milk deliveries, his paperboy route, sleigh riding down Walnut Street and playing 'pick-up' football with his fellow "Rosemont Eagles." Ralph also discusses how he got into the printing business and stories of his ancestors with Kansas roots.*

This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.

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*Ralph Mills, 2010
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

Background

Ralph Mills:	...Florida....My father moved down there and he worked as an electrician for a while, but I knew very little because my mother never talked about him except that some time after I was born he was in a TB asylum and the idea of her spending winter in a tent with two babies was more than she could anticipate so she came back up here...
Gillian Chen:	This is Gillian Chen and I'm interviewing today Mr. Ralph Mills: for the Alexandria Archaeology Museum Oral History Project. I'd like to thank you for giving us your time. I have a set of questions here, but I don't mind wandering that's what this paper's for; any wandering that we need will be as a back-up for the tapes.
Ralph Mills:	Okay.
G.C.:	How long did you live in Alexandria – in the City of Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	Well, I would say actually began in 1938; prior to that my mother had moved back home with me and my brother, probably sometime in 1928. She'd gotten a job with the Veterans Administration in May of 1928, but then my brother and I lived in a home in Washington D.C. for about 10 years and then we moved in with my grandmother for a year.
G.C.:	This was a children's home?
Ralph Mills:	Yes, it's still there. They're working with handicapped children.
G.C.:	So, you lived with your grandmother for one year?

Ralph Mills:	Yeah.
G.C.:	Where was your mother living?
Ralph Mills:	She lived with us there.
G.C.:	At your grandmother's?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah.
G.C.:	When you were in the children's home?
Ralph Mills:	Yes. She would come over twice a month to visit us.
G.C.:	So, she lived with her mother?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah.
G.C.:	So, your mother was born here in Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	No. She was born in Evanston, Wyoming in 1903
G.C.:	How did she get to Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	Well, my grandfather was a railway engineer and, apparently, he had taken a job with Southern Railway so they came to Alexandria.
G.C.:	Do you know why they decided to settle in Rosemont?
Ralph Mills:	Well, Rosemont was just being started and they bought the property and built the first house out there. Prior to that it was farmland and I believe part of it, at that particular time, was under the Arlington County. I'm not sure what time Alexandria annexed that part of it.
G.C.:	If I remember from my reading yesterday, it was about 1915. So, where was your grandfather actually working on the railway? Was that in Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah, he'd go over to Potomac Yards and take a train somewhere; I think it was primarily a freight train and on his way home -as he came to Alexandria Station- he would blow the whistle. I guess he had some kind of signal and that was a signal for my grandmother, mother and sister to get ready and, you know, get supper ready or something like that. Then he would take the train into Potomac Yards and hitch a ride back to Alexandria station.
G.C.:	How would he get back? You said 'hitch a ride'.
Ralph Mills:	On another train, I don't know for sure. Probably hitch a ride on a train if one was coming along at that time.
G.C.:	How long did your grandparents stay in the house?
Ralph Mills:	Well, he wrote the final payment in May of 1919 and died the next day.
G.C.:	Did your grandmother stay in the house?
Ralph Mills:	She stayed there, as far as I know, until 1947.
G.C.:	Were you still living in the area then?
Ralph Mills:	Yes.
G.C.:	So you must have quite a few nice memories of living around there.
Ralph Mills:	Yes. My grandma was raised in Kansas and she would tell some stories. Her Pa died when she was very young, before her sister was born, and she would tell about going berry picking with her brothers and having to hide from the Indians. But her mother kept them on the farm and, from what I can figure out on this part, my Grandpa was an engineer and a train came through this town called Caldwell, Kansas and, apparently, that's how he got to meet my

	Grandma and at some point they were out there in Wyoming and she would tell stories about how, about the time he was due home, she would go down to the local saloon and get a bucket of beer. And that may sound strange in one sense because, you know, every now and then you hear something about a 'bucket of beer,' but you don't see it anymore.
G.C.:	I know it; I don't think you do, not even at parties.
Ralph Mills:	I have a poem back there then about a girl ... and a bucket of beer. But...



*Ralph Mills' grandmother, Alice, and her sister, Cora Jane (Jennie).
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

G.C.:	Did your grandparents talk to you --or your grandmother especially-- as you were growing up --talk to you about when they first came to Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	Not really, no. Not that I can recall. I know in 1913 their son, who was 13 years old, was going to school at Mt Vernon elementary School and he'd climbed up in the tower to do something with the flag and on the way up or down he scratched his leg on a rusty nail and developed blood poisoning and died.
G.C.:	Wow.
Ralph Mills:	That was 1913.
G.C.:	And he was just 13 years old?

Ice and Milk Deliveries

Ralph Mills:	I didn't hear an awful lot, I heard a few little tales that my Grandma told me, but there wasn't a lot. Then she rented out part of the house for awhile and right next door lived the Hammonds who owned the Mutual Ice Company and the ice-truck would come by occasionally and drop off a block of ice and during the summer, if we were lucky, we would catch them and get a piece of
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	ice.
G.C.:	That was quite unusual then, wasn't it?
Ralph Mills:	Not then, but it's unusual today -- You don't even see an ice-truck driving around the neighborhood.
G.C.:	I mean, wasn't it unusual to have ice then?
Ralph Mills:	No, they made ice out there at the Mutual Ice Company and they loaded it onto the trains and all that.
G.C.:	Was the ice used to keep food cool?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah, they put it into the ice box and one of the things you had to do with an ice box [is] you had to empty a pan under the ice box as the ice melted. And one of the other things that you don't hear that much about today is -- you never kept the door open very long in the ice box because the ice would melt faster. About every other day, the ice truck would come by and you would have a sign out there saying you needed 25-pounds of ice or 30-pounds and that's what they'd bring in and you'd pay for it.
G.C.:	Did you also have milk and bread delivered?
Ralph Mills:	We had milk delivered, yes.
G.C.:	How was that delivered?
Ralph Mills:	The milk was delivered every morning.
G.C.:	A horse drawn cart or a motor?
Ralph Mills:	Well, we had a milk box by the front door and they would put the milk in there. That was when it was pasteurized milk and during the winter time-- if it was cold enough-- it would start to freeze and would take the cap right off the bottle of milk and the cream would rise right up.
G.C.:	That was when there was still cream, right?
Ralph Mills:	When there was still cream, uh huh.
G.C.:	What about bread, was that delivered?
Ralph Mills:	I don't recall bread being delivered. It may have been, I just don't recall. Every now and then, particularly during the summer time, a man would come around with a truck or cart with vegetables and stuff. And, I remember we would get a quart of strawberries for 25-cents.
G.C.:	It doesn't sound much, but actually it was probably quite a lot.
Ralph Mills:	Well, yeah. That was the thing. Along that line, my daughter is coming up for Thanksgiving with her kids and they have been studying about the Depression in 1929 and I think up until I was 11 or 12 years old, I didn't have any money in my pocket. I mean, kids just didn't. My kids went to school up here [and] it was nothing to hear about some kid who had \$20 in their pocket. Things kind of change, you know.
G.C.:	They do, don't they. What about getting groceries? Was the grocery store nearby?
Ralph Mills:	Well, there was one store that was called Howards, and Howards delivered groceries. You could call and order what you wanted and they would deliver it.
G.C.:	Was that how you normally got yours, rather than ...?

Ralph Mills:	I think my mother did quite a bit of that because she was working every day and she ... was close friends with the daughter of the man who had the store. There were two or three stores there in Alexandria that delivered groceries. Now we have ...Giant that has a big truck that delivers stuff. It was not unusual to go in and put together an order, but then sometime, it might have been around 1940, I'm not sure of the timing, the Safeway opened up a store out there near the corner of Commonwealth Avenue. There was a Reed[?] Theater there; I don't know whether you can remember the Reed.
G.C.:	I only moved to Alexandria five years ago.
Ralph Mills:	The Reed opened sometime in the [19]30's and I think it was 1939 they began showing movies on Sunday, but we would a lot of times walk down to the stores. Cedar Street was only a block from King Street and we would walk down to the grocery, to the Safeway, and get stuff...but there was also a drugstore that we could go in and get an ice cream cone.
G.C.:	Were they in Rosemont? I made a map of Rosemont. Do you think you could show where the Reed was?
Ralph Mills:	Well, the Reed was down in this area...Can I mark it?
G.C.:	Uh huh.
Ralph Mills:	And right across the street from there was a... I'm not sure if it was a Safeway or what. And then, up behind the train station...
G.C.:	I didn't go far enough on the map.
Ralph Mills:	Up behind the train station was an A&P grocery store. I was here --and in 1939 we moved right over (my mother, brother and I) moved right over here.
G.C.:	Do you know the address here?
Ralph Mills:	[6 Sunset Drive.]
G.C.:	I had the 15 for ...West Cedar Street.
Ralph Mills:	Now, sometime in the late [19]30's they changed the name of Commonwealth [Avenue]. It was Washington then, Washington Avenue, and they changed it to Commonwealth and there was that little building right there which was...A streetcar track along Commonwealth Avenue.
G.C.:	Right, okay.
The Streetcar	
Ralph Mills:	(This building was) I remember (real little) one time seeing a streetcar. A streetcar ran on a track and I noticed -- I don't know if you can still see it anymore -- but down on Royal Street before you get to King Street you can see a streetcar track. It may still be there. But up here at Walnut Street there was another building and for a while, this building...you could go in there, it was a little store, and buy a penny candy. And eventually it closed and when they widened Commonwealth Avenue, it moved over to the corner. And there was a drugstore on the other side and we used to hang out around here --hang out at the drugstore and this is it. [Asking about the map GC brought.]
G.C.:	I printed it off the computer, off the Internet. I just wanted to get a feel for the area that they said was Rosemont, which they were saying was, basically,

	Commonwealth and King Street and, I think, Russell Road.
Ralph Mills:	Primarily, more Russell Road.
G.C.:	I didn't know whether it was Walnut up the other end.



*Ralph Mills' childhood home at 15 West Cedar Street. The house was built in 1909 – the first house in Rosemont.
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

Ralph Mills:	In this area was East Rosement. This was basically Rosemont up to here. And as a kid, we used to come up here to Walnut Street during the winter time and sleigh ride down the hill; and Walnut Street and King Street was blocked off, it was pretty steep, and we would go up there and down the hill, all the way down to Russell Road.
G.C.:	So you couldn't actually get on -- you wouldn't actually go on to King Street? You couldn't actually get onto the street itself?
Ralph Mills:	At that time we could. I don't know when they blocked off Walnut Street. Primarily, it was to keep traffic from going up and down there. That's one of the things we did in winter time.

Childhood Activities

G.C.:	What other activities did you do? Was there a park in the area?
Ralph Mills:	No, during the summer time we would go to Maury School. We would go up here to Maury School in the summer time and the city would have someone up there from the Recreation Department; we'd play ball, sit around, and talk, and just...
G.C.:	Hang out?
Ralph Mills:	Hang out, yeah.
G.C.:	Did you play any sports?

Ralph Mills:	Other than [inaudible], what we call[ed] 'pick-up'. On Saturday mornings, a bunch of us would get together. We called ourselves, "The Rosemont Eagles," and we'd get together about nine-, ten-o'clock and play 'til noon when the boy who owned the football had to go home. That was one of the things -- and everybody played. When we played football, it didn't make any difference if we had 12 men on each side -- 12 people on each side -- we all played. In baseball, we played a lot of what we called 'two-up.' We had two batters and if the batter hit the ball out in the field and the fielder caught it, he would take the batter's place. And they'd switch places. But we played in such a way that all the kids played and it was none of this organized stuff like you have today. You always hear about mum's taking kids to soccer. We didn't have it. You see, dads were all working. This was back in the early 1940's, primarily, and the dads were [working...]. Everybody --even my mum-- people were working six days a week then.
G.C.:	Yes, long day.
Ralph Mills:	Yes. So we got together and we played. We didn't fight or anything. Just had a good time. Of course, we could ride bikes almost anywhere. And, without helmets. And we didn't have cars. Well, some parents had cars, but didn't have gas.
G.C.:	Okay.
Ralph Mills:	And, when we went to high school we started having dances. Dances were always held in the gymnasium and if we [or] someone was lucky, their parents may take a couple to the school for dancing. For me, I walked.
G.C.:	How far were you from the school?
Ralph Mills:	... [showing on map] George Washington's up here [pointing in general direction]. Where's Mount Vernon Avenue? Braddock Road. Well, it's this way; here's Mount Vernon Avenue.
G.C.:	I know where George Washington [Masonic Temple] is -- right across from the railway station.
Ralph Mills:	Now, one of the dads went before the RF&P and got permission for us to use the field here on Linden[?] Street and we cleaned it up, cut down the grass and that's where we played baseball and football.
G.C.:	That was quite convenient for you.
Ralph Mills:	Yes, but the game was always over at noon on Saturday because there was only one football.
G.C.:	Oh, of course.
Ralph Mills:	You know, when you see the stuff they have today and what we went through.... Of course, I delivered papers in the afternoon. I had one of the largest <i>Alexandria Gazette</i> routes at the time. I had over 100 customers, which was pretty good. And... I'll show you on this map. And I would bike up here - I forget which street it was - up here past the elementary school - to get the newspapers and I'd come down Russell Road to Maple Street, Linden, Rosemont, Cedar, Sunset Drive. And they had built these houses on Commonwealth Avenue ... You've seen them -- you've seen the rowhouses on

	Commonwealth?
G.C.:	I've been in that direction more than in this direction.
Ralph Mills:	There were so many houses [there], that when we first got our papers we could roll them up and put rubber bands on them when we folded them. And we would go up Commonwealth Avenue and 'flip, flip' as I rode my bicycle, but the newspapers had to be at the door --And, if it was raining, they had to be inside the screen door. Not like I have to do today when I have to walk out to the curb to get my paper. And we would go around on Friday and collect for the papers; collect our 15-cents for the week. We had a little bit of money.
G.C.:	For a penny candy store.
Ralph Mills:	Yes.
G.C.:	I'm just going to turn this over. [Side A ends. Side B begins.] What was your favorite subject in school?



*Type set for 'Ralph'
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

Ralph Mills:	Printing.
G.C.:	Printing? Was that in high school?
Ralph Mills:	In high school.
G.C.:	What about elementary school? Did you go to middle school, or--
Ralph Mills:	No. No middle school. We were smarter then. We only went to 11 grades in school. Today they go to 12. When did they start middle school?
G.C.:	I don't know. I think all of my children went to middle school so that would be in the 1970's. It may have been before that.
Ralph Mills:	But when I went to elementary school it was through the 7 th grade. And then the 8 th , 9 th , 10 th and 11 th -- that was high school. And, we'd go to football

	games and after the game, lots of [the] time, we would walk over to the Hot Shoppe. And the Hot Shoppe was a restaurant and a lot of kids would eat there. We walk[ed] up to Monroe Avenue, across the bridge and down to the Hot Shop. And [would] think nothing of it.
G.C.:	Walking was a way of life then, wasn't it?
Ralph Mills:	Yes, uh-uh. We always went to all the football games and once --I guess, probably in my sophomore year, I started going to the dances.
G.C.:	So printing, dances and football – you're favorite activities in high school?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah.
G.C.:	What about other subjects – the math, and the English and...

Printing

Ralph Mills:	Well, I was not a good student. Printing got in my blood. I enjoyed printing, but I didn't do homework and my mother was working so much she wasn't there to make sure I did homework... so, I kinda got by.
G.C.:	Did you work as a printer?



*Ralph's Print Type
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

Ralph Mills:	Yeah.
G.C.:	For a newspaper?
Ralph Mills:	I did for the <i>Gazette</i> for a while until I went in the Army and then I worked for a couple of shops here in Alexandria. One is down at the ... I think it's called the Warehouse Restaurant in the 200 block of King ... Well, at 212- there was a print shop. I worked there for a number of years. And then I worked ... on Royal Street. And I finished up there on Royal Street.
G.C.:	Was that North Royal or South?

Ralph Mills:	North Royal. I finished up there on North Royal. I worked there until, I guess, until I was 75.
G.C.:	I'm impressed. You really did love it. What was it you liked so much about printing?
Ralph Mills:	I'm not exactly sure except that I learned to operate equipment – printing presses – and I just enjoyed doing it. And the printing instructor in high school -- also worked at the <i>Gazette</i> part- time in what they called their 'job shop.' A lot of newspapers -- small newspapers -- had a small print shop where they printed things like envelopes and letterheads and bill headings. So I worked there with him part-time when he needed me. And shortly after they got the shop building open... (It was delayed a year because of the War needing steel for the building) ... we helped move stuff over to the shop and then one summer there -- I'm not sure which summer it was -- they installed a big printing press in there and I would go up there and help the man -- the instructor who was putting it all together -- and help him.
G.C.:	You were hooked.
Ralph Mills:	Yeah, and as a matter of fact, one of the reasons I bought this house was that I wanted a house with a basement because I wanted to put a printing press there. Which I did.
G.C.:	Is it still there?
Ralph Mills:	No, unfortunately. I do have type. When I got rid of the press I wanted to get rid of everything, but the person who bought the press wasn't interested in the type -- the type cases. Eventually, I guess I'll dump them. Type cases are being used now. People will clean them up and hang them on the wall and put little knick-knacks on them. Have you ever seen type-cases?
G.C.:	Maybe when we've finished talking we could go down and get a picture of them.
Ralph Mills:	Okay. There's a couple here who have a photography business and they would go around to these different parties and things to take pictures and they would mount the pictures on a photo mount and I would print (on the photo mount is where they did that) the name of the party and the date and things like that. I set all the type to do that, the printing, and I did that up until I finally got rid of the print press.
G.C.:	Did printing change a lot over the years you were working in it?
Ralph Mills:	Oh yes, it changed a great deal. I mean, the linotype – everything's gone computer actually. When I was working at the <i>Gazette</i> I didn't run a linotype machine, but they would set the type on a linotype machine and I would pull a proof of it and read the proof with somebody and if there were any errors, the errors would be corrected and I'd reset the line into where it went. I worked there for (I'd been working off and on with them) --probably after I'd finished high school --about six weeks. Then I went in the Army.
In the Army	
G.C.:	That would have been about when, about '48?

Ralph Mills:	1945.
G.C.:	So you just caught the end of one War and then the Korean War?
Ralph Mills:	It was the twelfth of March I went in --1945-- And the thing I remember so much during our basic training --I was in a month when Roosevelt died and three weeks later the War in Europe ended, but we were doing our basic training. We had to do so much each day and after lunch -- we came in for lunch -- it was announced that Germany had surrendered. After lunch, we went right on back out and continued training. When I completed my training, I was over here in Fort Mead, Maryland being processed to go to the Pacific... I was on a troop train in the middle of the Chicago stock yards on August 14 th when Japan surrendered and they were celebrating there. And you know, you see all these pictures of crowds going wild and the celebration -- we didn't do that. ...I was on board ship when they signed the surrender terms and ended up in the Philippines. You can imagine 30-some days on a troop ship with about 1500 other guys and... You know we ended up in the Philippines. We were there through the end of January 1946 and then they shipped us up to Korea.
G.C.:	Did anybody who you knew who was living in Alexandria tell you about the celebrations, after the end of the War, that took place in Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	No, I don't remember any. By the time I got back at the end of '46, people were busy working. The changes that occurred after the War was over.
G.C.:	When did you leave the Army?
Ralph Mills:	I got home on my 20 th birthday.
G.C.:	That was nineteen forty-...
Ralph Mills:	1946.
G.C.:	You did a lot in a year.
Ralph Mills:	What's that?
G.C.:	You were in the Army for a year?
Ralph Mills:	Almost two years.
G.C.:	You did a lot in that time.
Ralph Mills:	Uh-uh.
G.C.:	I guess in two years Alexandria really hadn't changed a lot.
Ralph Mills:	No, I don't think it had changed that much. My brother, he'd actually got married. My mother and I shared the apartment, actually for a total of 11 years, and then in 1950 they began building down this way, a couple of miles up, a place called Buckmill Manor. I heard about it and was able to buy a house. At age 23 I bought a house; no money down and 4% interest. We lived there for nine years. In that time, I'd gotten married and, eventually, my mother moved into an apartment in Alexandria. Then I wanted a place where I could put the printing press, so we bought this place.
G.C.:	The printing press keeps coming back, doesn't it?
Ralph Mills:	Yes.
G.C.:	I'd like to go back to the schools, going back into Alexandria. Were the schools you went to, fully integrated?

Ralph Mills:	No.
G.C.:	They weren't? By race or by sex?
Ralph Mills:	They were not integrated by race.
G.C.:	And that was the same for elementary and high school?
Ralph Mills:	Yes.



*Ralph Mills and wife, Libby on wedding day, August 2, 1953.
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

Going to Washington, D.C.

G.C.:	You mentioned the streetcar. Alexandria's very close to Washington. Did you ever go into Washington? Did you take the streetcar into Washington?
Ralph Mills:	No. [But] I went into Washington quite a bit... Well, at first, my cousin's father was stationed in Paris, he was in the Marine Corps, and he was military attaché at the French Embassy when the War started. And, England and France declared War on Germany on Harold's birthday. But they came back -- that was October. So I was about 13 and we would go into Washington and go into the museums and one day we went into the Washington Monument and we walked down to the Capitol and we climbed the stairs to the top of the Capitol; I don't know if they let anyone do that now. It was nothing for us to get on a bus for a nickel and go into Washington... there were three theaters -- one was the Capital and the Capital was a stage show and a movie. Then [there] was 'The Palace.' Both of those, as far as I know, are gone now. Down on 13 th Street was the Warner Theatre -- at the time, it was called the Earl. ...As a matter of fact, in 1939 we went -- not my cousin, but my brother and I and some other friends went over to Washington to see the King and Queen of England.
G.C.:	You did?



*Ralph's grandparents, Ralph W. Goldsworthy and Cora Jane Goldsworthy, 1899.
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

Ralph Mills:	Yeah, and we stayed there at the Old Post Office, up in the building there, watching them drive by. ... A lot of times during the summer we would go down to Haines Point and go swimming. We thought nothing about going into Washington.
G.C.:	How long did it take you?
Ralph Mills:	Half hour or so. Where I lived there on Sunset Drive, I could walk a short distance to the busstop. Just turn down Russell Road towards the Pentagon. That's another thing -- before the Pentagon was built --this would be 1938-- there was a swimming pool, the airport swimming pool and one day the <i>Gazette</i> carried an ad in there, 'Free admission to the swimming pool,' and I went around to some of my customers and collected the coupons and a friend and I would hop on our bikes and ride over there to the airport swimming pool. That was probably where the Pentagon is now. And I don't know how many 13 years old boys would do a thing like that today. Over there at that time there was a frozen custard stand and one of the things you noticed about [the] frozen custard stand was 'the big white polar bear.' They [the custard stand] moved into Alexandria on the corner across from where Wendy's, which is now being torn down, is. That was a Howard Johnson at the time, right on the corner and the Hot Shoppe was the frozen custard shop. They moved to Fredericksburg and there they are very popular, called Carls. If you go down, there there's a long line and lots of time to wait to get their first custard and when my wife's family lived below Tapahannick, Virginia -- about 100 miles from here -- we would stop at Carls' on the way home. The kids always loved that stuff. That

	was when you could get an ice cream cone for 15-cents.
G.C.:	Did they have museums in Alexandria like we do now? I think Gadsbys' Tavern...
Ralph Mills:	Yes, Gadsbys Tavern was one. I went to a dance there one time. And, what's the place there on King and Fairfax?
G.C.:	Carlyle House.
More Childhood Memories	
Ralph Mills:	A number of times I would go up to the museum at the Temple. I got chased away from there so many times.
G.C.:	That's when you were sledding, right?
Ralph Mills:	No, we actually didn't do any sledding there. We were going down Walnut Street Hill.
G.C.:	I can see you going down the street and up the other side.
Ralph Mills:	The thing to do, I figured --considering that we only had one-speed bicycles -- was to be able to pump up the Temple Hill on the bicycle -- all the way up the hill -- cross the front up to the parking lot and we would rest up there for a little bit and then we'd start off down the hill -- no handle bars -- all the way down. Getting all the way up there was something... we rode bikes all over.
G.C.:	What was the craziest thing you ever did as a child?
Ralph Mills:	I want to say that I skipped school and went over to the Castle to see Frank Sinatra.
G.C.:	I have a feeling that a lot of people at that time would not have considered that crazy.
Ralph Mills:	No, it probably wasn't. I don't know that I did anything real crazy.
G.C.:	Nothing that you really got into trouble for -- apart from going down without your hands on the handlebars?
Ralph Mills:	I don't recall anything.
G.C.:	I can't believe that you were that well behaved.
Ralph Mills:	What was that?
G.C.:	Never got into trouble?
Ralph Mills:	Well, maybe somethings you forget. We were sort of on our own. Mother worded so much and my brother and I didn't get along too well, so... He would go his way and I would go mine, you know. I played with kids across the street. One of the boys I played with lived in his grandfather's house there on the corner of Maple and Russell Road, across the road. And well, I wouldn't say this is crazy, but on Thansgiving when I turned 14, that evening I went out to the drugstore on Walnut Street and a bunch of guys I hang around with, they were there. You know we didn't have TV or anything so we'd go out like that. And they said they were going to a party and to go along [with them]. So, I went to this party with them, met this girl. We hung out all through high school and I would go to her uncle's farm down near Culpepper. But there wasn't anything crazy about that.
G.C.:	Did you have a telephone when you were growing up?

Ralph Mills:	No. My grandmother had a phone, but we didn't have a phone.
G.C.:	So you went to hers, or did you use...
Ralph Mills:	Well, the family upstairs had one and then I'd go up there. But we just didn't make the calls like we do today. And the family who lived upstairs, he was a printer and he and I would pitch horseshoes in the evening. It's been one of my things for some time to write to the health section of the <i>Post</i> and explain to them that pitching horseshoes is a great way to reduce the size of your hips. But only two people can do it because you throw the shoes, you walk 40-feet, you pick them up. So you're walking and bending over to pick up the shoes and the summer that I really did a lot of that, I did lose weight in the hips.
G.C.:	Did your apartment complex have a playground or did you go to the park?
Ralph Mills:	Well, there was, right next to the apartment building, a vacant lot and we set up the horseshoe pit there. He liked to pitch horseshoes and I would go up to ask him to come out to pitch and his daughter didn't care anything for pitching horseshoes. That's what we did.
G.C.:	What's your favorite memory of elementary school? Your favorite teacher or...?
Ralph Mills:	I guess my favorite teacher here in Alexandria was my seventh grade teacher. I did pretty well in her class.
G.C.:	What did she teach?
Ralph Mills:	She taught the whole class. Everything, math...
G.C.:	Was that the last year of elementary school?
Ralph Mills:	Yes. And then, I guess, when I got into printing instructor became my second favorite. When it came time to get my diploma, I almost didn't get it as I'd printed my name wrong!
G.C.:	Do you remember their names?
Ralph Mills:	Mrs. Noland was the seventh grade teacher, and Mr. Jury was the printing teacher.
G.C.:	J-U-R-Y?
Ralph Mills:	Drury, D-R-U-R-Y.
G.C.:	What's your favorite memory of growing up in Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	I don't know. I think about, what you might say, the freedom we had as teenage boys. We didn't have any parental guidance ... parental guidance come from my friends' parents – their mothers. But then we [?]. And we just played on Saturdays. Usually, during the school year, I delivered the papers during the afternoon. Oh, one of the things on delivering papers -- This one boy who lived down Commonwealth Avenue, Willard Scott, is a weatherman. His dad always gave me a hard time.
G.C.:	Willard Scott?
Ralph Mills:	Willard Scott. I knew Willard when he was seven years old and his dad would always --when I go by to collect for the paper -- give me a hard time.
G.C.:	Why?
Ralph Mills:	It was just his nature.

G.C.:	Was it a real hard time, or kind of a jesty hard time?
Ralph Mills:	[unclear]
G.C.:	What type of things did he say?
Ralph Mills:	“This paper would really make good toilet paper.” Or some derogatory remark or something, but I remember it. And, one time after I came out of the Army, I got in the car and I started driving and I came to the Avenue and I saw him come out of his house and I stopped and went to talk to him. It was nice to have the paper route and get to know all the people.
G.C.:	With your Mom working all the time, who did the cooking for you? Was that your grandmother?
Cooking	
Ralph Mills:	I did a lot.
G.C.:	You did the cooking?
Ralph Mills:	Yes.
G.C.:	Are you still a good cook?
Ralph Mills:	Well, I think I do pretty well. Back in 1990 my wife had to move her mom here to a nursing home. And her mother was there about three years, she would go over there every day around five o'clock to make sure she had her supper and by the time she got home I would have supper ready. After her mom passed away she never asked for her job back! One of the other things I never realized that I realize now is how much I benefitted from it -- was that when my kids were growing up, I read stories about how these girls could make cupcakes and brownies or something like that and that was all they could do. I said, that's not good enough, you have to put a whole meal on the table. Well now, whenever my son asks me up for supper, I don't hesitate for he'll put a good meal on the table. They all can and we made it fun for them to learn to cook.
G.C.:	What type of food did you cook -- back in the days? And how did you cook it? What did you cook it on?
Ralph Mills:	One of the things I cooked [was] green beans and potatoes in the pressure cooker. I guess we got round steak and made hamburgers. I don't know if back then they had the tenderizer that we use. I know we used to, when the kids were young, make a round steak with tenderizer and pan fry it ...[unclear]
G.C.:	So, is there any real difference in diet from when you were young?
Ralph Mills:	I don't think there's that much. I don't eat as much vegetables as they say I should and I make up for it by drinking V8 juice. The reason is that I have to cook -- I do have a vegetable garden, green beans and tomatoes, zucchini -- but I don't do pepper plants... I did that primarily for my son. He's a good cook and likes to do all that stuff. I find that I eat a good deal when I go out -- he always gives me delicious meals. It's so much fun to be out there among all the kids.
Family Member Memories	
G.C.:	What [are] the favorite memories you have of your mother, especially of when you were younger?
Ralph Mills:	I felt that at times ...[unclear]... how difficult it must have been for her with

	two kids an hour and a half away, had to take the bus to Washington [D.C.] and had to do it twice a month. Having kids of my own, I realize that must have been very difficult.
G.C.:	What did you do when she visited you?
Ralph Mills:	We just stayed together...hard to remember. Some time ago, a couple of years ago, my wife --she had 25 to 30 hats that she knitted – [and we took] them over there and we went into the building [the former children’s home]. A person showed us around and the way they do it. The dining room looked so small. I went down to the auditorium and it was small. My memory was back in 1935-36 and the perception has changed somewhat. It’s strange how...
G.C.:	...you said Washington.
Ralph Mills:	It was up near Silver Spring, northwest Washington. I think it’s called the National Children’s Center now. And they collect the clothing.
G.C.:	What about when you moved back to Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	When we moved in to my grandmother’s at the time.
G.C.:	You said that was for about a year?
Ralph Mills:	[19]38, I think it was. And, that I actually remember that my grandmother and my brother didn’t get on too well, so we eventually found this apartment around the corner from her. We were able to pay the rent.
G.C.:	What did you do on her day off?
Ralph Mills:	That was Sunday.
G.C.:	Did you do anything on Sundays, occasional Sundays?
Ralph Mills:	We didn’t do an awful lot. But at one time I was working at the retailers[?] [inaudible]. That was one of the things. When I got that job, I would have supper ready when she got home. But, she’d just keep the dishes cleaned up, get the laundry done, clean the deck, that sort of thing. It didn’t give you a whole lot of time to do a lot of things.
G.C.:	What about memories of your grandma?
Ralph Mills:	Well, memories of some of the stories she would tell growing up. She’d tel about her brothers, how her mother kept her five brothers and her sister [name??] and, she’d had a couple of school books. I don’t know why she’d kept them all, but about three years ago I went out to visit my daughter in Texas and I took the books and returned them all to Caldwell in Kansas. My daughter and granddaughter went with me and we found the elementary school. It wasn’t the one that my grandmother had gone to it was a new elementary school, and we took the books there. One of them was an arithmetic book copyrighted in 1864. And with these books they can show the kids what was done a long time ago and it was nice looking around the town. [In] the town (there was) one road we drove down and on one side, on a hillside, there was a silhouette of a cattle drive with chuck wagon and horses and the cows, and there was a trail – I don’t know whether you have ever heard of the Chisholm Trail, but that was the Chisholm Trail. And I jut assumed that that was where my grandfather brought the train in and stopped there in Caldwell when he’d come to meet my

	grandmother. Unfortunately, he died just before my mother's 16 th birthday... She'd gone to high school in Alexandria high school and I think she left there and went to Strayer secretarial school, so she could get a job.
G.C.:	Your mum didn't tell you stories about growing up in Alexandria?
Ralph Mills:	No. Unfortunately, I'd have liked to have had more information, but she didn't like to talk about my father. Apparently things didn't work out.
Looking at Photos	
G.C.:	So, it was you and your brother. And you have three children?
Ralph Mills:	I have four.
G.C.:	Four. One son and three daughters or two?
Ralph Mills:	Two boys and two girls. Their picture is on the wall back there.
G.C.:	Are any of them in this area still?
Ralph Mills:	Two of them. [inaudible] On my birthday they came up and...[Looking at a photos.]
 <p><i>Harold and Ellen Goldsworthy, 1903. (Courtesy of Ralph Mills)</i></p>	
G.C.:	Which one went into railroads? [Taking photos of photos in the house – discussion on light, etc.]
Ralph Mills:	[inaudible]
G.C.:	That's your grandmother and granddad, then?
Ralph Mills:	Uh huh.
G.C.:	And from the papers I read that's Cora Jenny?
Ralph Mills:	Uh huh.
G.C.:	[inaudible]
Ralph Mills:	[inaudible]

G.C.:	What happened to the Mills family?
Ralph Mills:	I just don't know.
G.C.:	You aren't in touch with them?
Ralph Mills:	No, my father died when I was eight years old.
G.C.:	And that's 15 Cedar Lane?
Ralph Mills:	15 Cedar Street.
G.C.:	15 Cedar Street?
Ralph Mills:	Yes. And I think this is my mother and her sister.
G.C.:	Wow!
Ralph Mills:	No, wait a minute that's my grandmother, my grandmother and her sister.
G.C.:	[inaudible]
Ralph Mills:	Yeah. That's my mother and her brother.
G.C.:	You can tell I'm a professional photographer, can't you!
Ralph Mills:	[inaudible]
G.C.:	Do you have one of your mother?
Ralph Mills:	My mother, yeah, I have a picture of her.
G.C.:	What about the one of your mother and brother that you had a little while ago.
Ralph Mills:	Yeah, I put it back.
G.C.:	Oh, okay.
Ralph Mills:	Now this was probably taken, I can't make out the writing on the back, but I would say this was taken probably in 1903.
G.C.:	That's interesting; on the back there you actually have their married names.
Ralph Mills:	Yes.
G.C.:	What's the second one – Alice. Actually I can take one of you. Where would you like to have it taken?
Ralph Mills:	This is my favorite position.
G.C.:	It is?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah.
G.C.:	I got two. We were going to go down to take the type.
Ralph Mills:	I just want to show you what I call 'my gang'.
G.C.:	Oh, your grandchildren?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah. This is my daughter Gayle and her husband Steve and my Steve and my son Wes and Wesley's son. And this is Gayle's son, Gabe, and their daughter Meryl. And this girl here is his step-daughter. This is Wesley's wife and her daughter, this is [inaudible]. This is William and Abby. This was my Steve's wife and her younger son, and this is the youngest. But this was done seven, eight years ago.
G.C.:	You mean they didn't do another one like this for your 75 th ?
Ralph Mills:	No, that one was my 70. [inaudible] [Talking about grandchildren visiting.] [Ralph and Gillian go down to the basement to take photographs of the type.]
Ralph Mills:	[Interview resumes.] This is when we got married.
G.C.:	Did you go to church when you were young?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah.

G.C.:	Which church did you go to?
Ralph Mills:	Washington Street Methodist. Here's something else you might be interested in. [Looking at coin?]
G.C.:	Did you actually do the coin?
Ralph Mills:	No, that was an advertisement that came in.
G.C.:	And this was who you were working for?
Ralph Mills:	No, this was, I think they were a paper or something. But somehow they [inaudible] and they managed to get it sorted out.
G.C.:	It's so cute. A favorite memento. You've kept this one around a long time.
Ralph Mills:	My daughter went to Radford Univeristy and one summer, when she was going to summer school, she made this dress. It's in the style of the Civil War, this dress. Unfortunately, I'm not the best housekeeper.



*Ralph Mills and wife, Libby.
(Courtesy of Ralph Mills)*

G.C.:	Where did you meet your wife?
Ralph Mills:	At church.
G.C.:	At church?
Ralph Mills:	Yeah, she had finished Washington & Mary College after February 3 rd [?] and the Church was just getting started and they asked her to teach Sunday School. And she was having trouble teaching ... the boys were kind of disruptive so the minister asked me to sit in to help her keep the boys quiet. And there we are, you know, we were getting together Friday evenings to go over the summer school lessons and stuff like that, you know.
G.C.:	Thank you.
Ralph Mills:	This dress was in the museum down there in [inaudible]. Well, I don't know if

	I've told you everything I can.
G.C.:	You'll be getting a copy of everything, and a copy of the tape so you will have plenty of opportunities to make changes and check that I've got it right. [End]