

Dorothea Peck

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Interviewer: Paula Bruno
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Abstract: Dorothea May (Bliss) Peck (1904-1980), the daughter of Rev. Audley Janes Bliss and Mary Arabella (Goodwin) Bliss, was the oldest of three daughters born in Bloomsbury, New Jersey. Her father was pastor of several churches in the New Jersey and he was appointed as pastor of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church in 1934. Ms. Peck graduated from Middlebury College in 1926, married Earl Wilson Peck (an accountant from Jersey City) in 1927, and had two sons in 1928 and 1930. Ms. Peck subsequently divorced and moved with her parents to Metuchen in 1934. The family briefly lived in the parsonage on Home Street until Rev. Bliss suddenly passed away in 1935. Following her father's death, Ms. Peck and her mother moved to 217 Midland Avenue in the Radio Section of Metuchen.

Ms. Peck was a substitute teacher for the Metuchen and Edison school systems and an administrative assistant for the New Jersey Home for Disabled Soldiers in Menlo Park. She was also a dedicated member of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church and worked on the local Veterans Service Committee. Ms. Peck is buried at Hillside Cemetery. Her eldest son, Major General Earl Goodwin Peck, was an accomplished Air Force pilot who served as chief of staff for the Strategic Air Command at Offutt Air Force Base. Her younger son, David Wilson Peck, served in the United States Naval Reserve as an electronics technician.

During this interview, Ms. Peck primarily discusses her family, which includes her father's life as a pastor and her children's experiences in the military service. She also talks about her time at Middlebury College, her various occupations including working briefly at the *Metuchen Recorder*, her recollections of moving to the Radio Section of Metuchen, her involvement with the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, and her hobbies.

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P. Bruno: Today is March 29, 1978 and this is Paula Bruno and I'm interviewing Mrs. Dorothea Peck of Metuchen, New Jersey. I first would like to start by you telling me a little bit about your parents and how they met.

D. Peck: My father [Rev. Audley Janes Bliss] grew up on a farm in New York State and he felt that he wanted to be a minister. So in order to save money to go to college, he worked in a paper factory in Troy [New York]. I think that when he finally took off for college with things that he needed, he had about twenty-five dollars in his pocket. When he got there, he made fudge, he cut hair, and he took care of some of

the dormitories. In fact, he took care of a dormitory where my mother [Mary Arabella (Goodwin) Bliss] lived. That's the way that they met. She was an Alpha Chi [Omega] and he was the janitor in that building.

P. Bruno: Was an Alpha Chi a sorority?

D. Peck: Yes, yes. My mother graduated in 1897 from Middlebury College in Vermont and they had only been admitting women since 1880 at Middlebury. Middlebury was founded in 1800. In my mother's class, there were sixteen people. My father graduated in 1898 and then he came to New Jersey and went to Drew University where he graduated in 1901. My mother had lived all over the New England states. I think she lived in Vermont, and New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, Connecticut. At any rate, my father graduated from Drew in 1901 and they were married [on September 16, 1901]. He was a member of the Newark Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as it was called then. It has later changed. But he was sent to a little place in the western part of New Jersey that I used to hear them refer to as "Junction." What it is, is actually Hampton Junction and they call it Hampton now. I think they were there for about two years and then they moved to Bloomsbury. I was born in Bloomsbury.

P. Bruno: New Jersey?

D. Peck: New Jersey. And I believe that the doctor who took care of my mother and my father built the steps in front of the church [Simply Grace United Methodist Church] in Bloomsbury. [laughs]

After Bloomsbury, I lived in Rahway (I don't remember much about that), Somerville, Hasbrouck Heights, Union Hill (which is now called Union City), Sussex. In fact, I went to high school in Sussex. We were in Sussex for five years, so I completed high school in Sussex.

P. Bruno: Now were these all different churches that your father worked in?

D. Peck: Yes, yes. In those days, the Methodist ministers moved about every three years whether they wanted to or not.

P. Bruno: Oh, I see. Are you an only child?

D. Peck: Oh no, I had two sisters. I was the oldest. But I went to high school in Sussex [Borough], which was a small place at that time. The high school was on top of the hill. There were twenty-two people in my high school class. I graduated in 1922. We had twenty girls and two boys. [laughs] After that, my father was sent to Jersey City. And it was while he was in Jersey City that I went to Middlebury College.

P. Bruno: Did you choose that college because your parents had gone there?

D. Peck: I guess so. Maybe they helped me to choose it. [chuckles] In those days, people who are less, guided their children.

P. Bruno: Yes, I think they still do it today. [laughter]

D. Peck: At any rate, I graduated from Middlebury in 1926.

P. Bruno: Can you tell me a little bit about college life when you were there? When you were at Middlebury?

D. Peck: Well, Middlebury had been a men's college for so long that so many of the people who gave things to the college, gave things to the men's college. I think probably there were twice as many men as there were women. I believe in 1926, there might have been something like 600 people in the college. It was a small college, but there were more men than there were women. In the Class of 1926, I think we had a bigger proportion of women.

P. Bruno: And that was your graduating class?

D. Peck: Yes. I think there might have been 120 in our graduating class, and maybe fifty of them were women.

P. Bruno: Well, that was an awfully small ratio.

D. Peck: Yes, yeah.

P. Bruno: What did you major in?

D. Peck: French. And after I graduated, I was the complete French and Latin Department in the school in New Hampshire. I taught all of the Latin and all of the French in Hinsdale High School in New Hampshire.

P. Bruno: Was it a small school?

D. Peck: Yes, I can't tell you any of the numbers. But the principal taught math. The seventh-grade teacher taught the English in the high school--no, the eighth-grade teacher taught English. The seventh-grade teacher was the manual training teacher. And then there was one girl who taught home ec [home economics], and another girl who taught commercial subjects. The home ec teacher and the commercial teacher and I lived together in a house that belonged to some people in the town. The man was more or less disabled, so they took in teachers as a way to make a living.

P. Bruno: Oh, so you helped around the house?

D. Peck: No, no, no. We paid board there.

P. Bruno: Oh, I see.

D. Peck: But each of us had a room and we lived there.

P. Bruno: Oh, that worked out quite well then.

D. Peck: Yes. You might like to know that in those days, I thought I had to read the New York paper. I had the *New York Herald Tribune* sent to me. I would pick it up Monday afternoon after school. Can you imagine picking up the Sunday paper on Monday afternoon?

About the only activity in the town was the Grange¹. The Grange had a dance every Saturday night and the PTA [Parent Teacher Association]. Those were about the only social functions in the whole town.

P. Bruno: Wasn't very active.

D. Peck: No. [laughs]

P. Bruno: Now the Grange was sort of a community center?

D. Peck: It's an organization that you find in farming towns. I think they still have granges in rural areas. But the Grange was the center of activity. Oh, the three of us sang in the choir in the [First] Congregational Church [in Hinsdale, New Hampshire], and there was some activity there.

P. Bruno: Just getting back to Middlebury a minute. Did you know when you went to college, when you first started out, that you wanted to be a language major?

D. Peck: I wouldn't say that I knew it, but I had studied four years of Latin in high school and I had had three years of French in high school.

P. Bruno: Oh, so you were well—

D. Peck: So I started—I took Latin and French my first year there.

P. Bruno: And you liked it and just continued with it.

D. Peck: Yeah. The interesting thing about my freshman year was that at the time that I went there, Henri [Pierre] Williamson de Visme was the director of the French School at Middlebury. And Middlebury is one of the schools that pioneered in conversational French rather than learning French out of a grammar [book] exclusively.

P. Bruno: It's still known quite well for its language departments.

D. Peck: Is it really? At any rate, Henri Williamson de Visme was the director of the French School and I found out from my father that Henri Williamson had been in his class in college. And he went to France and he met Mademoiselle [Alice] de Visme, who was of the nobility. So Henri Williamson became Henri Williamson de Visme. And later after he left Middlebury, he came to Rutgers [University] and he taught at Rutgers for a while. And I believe his wife taught conversation classes even after he died.

Another professor that I remember was a Professor [Frank William] Cady. He was our Shakespeare professor. He had been in my father's class in Middlebury. And then he had gone on to Oxford [University in Oxford, England] and gotten a master's degree in English. My [maiden] name was Bliss when I was in college, so whenever Professor Cady would see me, he'd say, "Hello, Blister!" [laughter]

¹ The Grange, known as The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, is a national fraternal organization that encourages families to band together to promote the economic and political well-being of the community and agriculture. Founded in 1867, it is the oldest American agricultural advocacy group.

P. Bruno: Did you enjoy college?

D. Peck: Yes, yes. Middlebury is a beautiful place, and a lot of the buildings are made of marble. There was only one, I think that was Hepburn Hall at that time, had been given by one of the Board of Trustees and that was made of yellow brick because that's what he wanted. There were three original buildings there when my mother and father were there, and they were of irregular blocks of marble.

P. Bruno: Oh.

D. Peck: There was the Old Chapel, and there was Starr [Hall], and there was Painter [Hall]. There were three buildings; that's what it was. And they were on the lower part of the campus and then New Chapel on the top of the hill. We used to love to walk out the west road and see the sunsets. Over beyond in New York State, there are some iron mines. So they were gorgeous sunsets because you get the particles of metal in the air that gives you beautiful, beautiful sunsets. It's a gorgeous location and it's right in the midst of the Green Mountains [range in Vermont].

P. Bruno: Oh, it must be beautiful.

D. Peck: And if you went out on a date, you walked up Chipman Hill, which is—oh, maybe it was a mile or a mile and a half to the top. But that was the place where you went.

P. Bruno: Were there strict regulations about men—?

D. Peck: My goodness, yes! We had to be in at ten o'clock every night. And when you went out, you had to sign out and sign in again.

P. Bruno: Was it later on weekends? I hope so.

D. Peck: If there was an informal dance, there were less restrictions. You could stay out until eleven, I guess, or eleven-thirty. [chuckles] In my junior year, I lived at the French House [La Maison Française], which was an old building. There were some rooms on the ground floor. And there was one gal in our wing who was a pretty fast stepper. So she used to leave her window unlocked. If she came in, if she got back after ten o'clock, she'd just crawl in the window! [laughter] We had separate rooms; they were small rooms. But my roommate and I lived across the hall from each other.

P. Bruno: Oh, but you had private rooms?

D. Peck: We each had a separate room. We were at the end of the hall, but our doors were opposite each other. My roommate used to close her door, and she'd open the window and she'd hang her head out the window and have a cigarette before she went to sleep at night! [laughs]

P. Bruno: That was pretty taboo too, wasn't it?

D. Peck: It certainly was! [laughs] When we lived there, there was a man in charge of the French School, who had his wife and daughter with him. His daughter was about

eight years old; she went to the school in the village. Her name was Yvonne. She would come down the end to our rooms—she lived on the first floor and she'd come down to our room—and she'd see a box of candy on the table and she would say, [mimicking a French accent] “It is yours? Give me some!” [laughter] So we used to keep our chocolates—if we got chocolates from boyfriends—we'd keep them on the top shelf. One day she came home from school. She came down to our room, she said [mimicking a French accent], “It is raining cats and dogs!” [laughter] Another day she came down to our room when she came home from school, she said, [mimicking a French accent] “[unclear] so long on the ground. You come with me, we catch him. [unclear] long on the ground. You come with me, we catch him!” [laughter] So we knew we had to keep candy locked up when she was around.

P. Bruno: Let's see. Let's get back to your parents now and when they came to settle in Metuchen.

D. Peck: Oh well, I taught school in New Hampshire for a year, then my father was sent to a church in Phillipsburg. And so I took a job teaching French and Ancient History in Phillipsburg. And then I was married the next year and I didn't live at home anymore. From Phillipsburg, my father was sent to Netcong. Netcong and Stanhope are two little towns in North Jersey. The church is in Netcong, but the parsonage is in Stanhope. I was married [to Earl Wilson Peck] in 1927, my older son [Earl Goodwin Peck] was born in 1928, and my second son [David Wilson Peck] was born in 1930. That was the beginning of the Depression. And about that time, I was left alone with two small children to bring up. So my mother and father took me in. The parsonage in Stanhope was large, and we had a great big room on the second floor in the front of the house. And it was—worked out all right. My older son started school there. Then in 1934, some people from the Metuchen [Centenary] Methodist [Episcopal] Church came to Netcong and asked my father if he would come to their church. So he did. We moved, all of us. My mother and father and my two boys and I moved to Metuchen in April in 1934. We lived in the parsonage. In those days, the church furnished a parsonage and they furnished furnishings (furniture) for the house. They are trying to get away from that a bit now because when people are retired, they don't have any furniture because it's always been supplied. But at that time, they furnished the parsonage. My mother and father and my two sons and I lived in the parsonage on Home Street.

P. Bruno: Now the church was the Methodist church where the Venture Theatre is now?

D. Peck: That's right. It's the old white stucco building on the corner of Main Street [and Middlesex Avenue] diagonally opposite from the Borough Hall.

P. Bruno: Did you mind when you were growing up moving around so much?

D. Peck: Oh, I guess I just took it for granted.

P. Bruno: Did your mother ever mind picking up and moving [unclear]?

D. Peck: No, I don't think so. My father was good at helping with things. I think he did most of the packing when we moved.

P. Bruno: Yeah. It probably was educational in that you got to experience a lot of towns and a lot of different people.

D. Peck: At one time when we were getting ready to move, my two sisters and I decided that we were going to be called by our middle names instead of our first names. [laughs] I don't remember whether that ever worked out. [laughs] You know we were going to tell them our middle name were our first name.

P. Bruno: Okay. What did you first think of Metuchen when you came?

D. Peck: Oh, my father had grown up on a farm in upstate New York and he just loved New York City. So that to be near New York just thrilled him. You might like to know that when we would go to New York, if he got turned around, he wouldn't say, "Oh, we're going in the wrong direction." He'd say, "Oh, I guess we don't want to go there. We'll go this way." Because I have always lived around New York, when I come out of the subway, I walk one block in the wrong direction, then I turn around and go where I want to go. But my father because he was from a farm, he wouldn't admit that he didn't know about New York. [coughs] He loved the Pennsylvania Railroad and he loved the people in Metuchen. He said the people in Metuchen were the most intelligent audience that he had ever spoken to. We really liked it. Metuchen was a town of about 6,500 people perhaps at that time. When you walked downtown, you knew three out of four people that you met on the street. It isn't like it is now, whom you say hello to somebody, they look at you as if you are off your rocker. It was a delightful place in those days and the people were very friendly.

P. Bruno: I suppose there were still a lot of open spaces when you first came to Metuchen too?

D. Peck: Yes, there were, there were.

P. Bruno: It really has built up.

D. Peck: My older son went to the [Mildred B.] Moss [Elementary] School for one year. My father died the following February very suddenly, and my mother and I were left with my two children to bring up. We had no house, no furniture. We had no roots anywhere. But the people in Metuchen had been so nice to us that we decided to stay in Metuchen. Everybody had just been marvelous. I had been substituting in one of the schools just before my father died and there was scarlet fever around. I came down with scarlet fever the night before my father was buried.

P. Bruno: Oh my.

D. Peck: Oh, Dr. [Carlyle] Morris was our doctor. He quarantined us for a whole month and he kept me in bed for a whole month. So my mother and the president of the Women's [Ladies' Aid] Society [of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church] went out to look for a house for us to live in because we had to find something. They found a house in what is now where I live now [at 217 Midland Avenue]. They called it "Radio Section" then.

P. Bruno: The Radio Section of Metuchen?

D. Peck: Yes! A man who was connected to a radio corporation, I think, had built these houses about 1927 or [19]28. But when the stock market crashed, he lost his shirt. And the Franklin Corporation in New York (the Franklin Bank in New York) took over all these houses. Now they referred to the Radio Section as the space between

[West] Chestnut [Avenue] and Plainfield [Avenue], between Main Street and Central Avenue.

P. Bruno: Oh.

D. Peck: And so there was a real estate office on Main Street that rented these houses. At that time, there was one house on the corner of Columbia [Avenue] and Midland [Avenue]. My mother and the president of the Ladies' Aid rented the house at 217 Midland, which is on the other side and one block away. There was another house that was occupied on the other side of the next block, and I think there were about two or three down the street. So on the whole street, there were about six houses. When you'd look out, all the houses would be bright and there'd be about five or six houses that were lighted up. I think that we rented that until I got a permanent job in 1942. We bought the house for \$4,200 in 1942. Now it is assessed at the tax office for \$23,000. And one of the real estate people that I know said that she could get \$39,000 for it any day.

P. Bruno: Oh, property value constantly goes up.

D. Peck: But can you imagine a whole street with about six houses that are lighted up? And now it's solid.

P. Bruno: Well, let's get back to the thirties and during the Depression and when you had to work and support two children, and your mother as well, after your father died. Did your mother work at all?

D. Peck: No, no. I had a perfectly good college degree, but I couldn't get a job. So whenever there was a chance, I substituted. I substituted in all the schools in Metuchen. I substituted in every grade from kindergarten to senior in high school, Latin and French. I substituted in all the schools in Edison and in Piscataway. And when there wasn't substituting to do, I used to iron shirts. I got twenty-five cents apiece for shirts. There was one friend that liked the way I ironed shirts. I used to make chocolate cakes and angel cakes and coconut cakes. I made dresses. I hate sewing, but I used to make dresses. I used to babysit; that was a good source of income. There were some people that I knew that liked to go away for the weekend and I'd go and stay, say, from Friday afternoon until Sunday night. So if my mother hadn't been with me, I wouldn't have been able to leave the children.

P. Bruno: Your sons.

D. Peck: Um-hm. I had one sister [Marjorie (Bliss) Putman], who lived up in Denville. She and her husband [Howell Putman] lived in Denville and they used to come down and see us once in a while. They did lots of things to help us. And then I had another sister [Isabelle (Bliss) Bedle], who was married and lived in Keyport and they came up and helped us out. I never could have made it without all the help I had from friends in Metuchen and my family.

P. Bruno: But you really had to work to make ends meet?

D. Peck: Yes, I did. Yes.

P. Bruno: Wow. And then you got a job at the Soldiers' Home [New Jersey Home for Disabled Soldiers at 132 Evergreen Road in Menlo Park]?

D. Peck: Oh well before that, I was in the newspaper office, the [Metuchen] Recorder office, one time and one thing led to another and somebody said, "Would you like to write personals?" In those days, they had little blabs about things that people did. So I said, "Sure." And I guess I got paid ten cents a line for every one that I brought in. At that time, there was an old Mr. Kelly [phonetic], who lived on Graham Avenue. He would be downtown, and he'd see somebody standing on the platform waiting for a train and he'd say, "Mrs. So-and-so was a New York visitor last Thursday." [laughs] He'd always come in with about a half a dozen personals every week. But I was so enthused about writing for the paper that they offered me a job working for the Recorder. So I took care of the office. I wrote up anything that came in that wasn't in form to be published in the paper. I covered the Defense Council meetings and wrote those up. Towards the end of the week, I think Tuesday nights and Wednesday nights, it would be quiet after ten o'clock. I'd write from about ten o'clock until about four o'clock in the morning. [laughs]

P. Bruno: When it was nice and quiet.

D. Peck: Yes, but then I'd have to get up nine o'clock and go down and open the office. In fact, I taught myself to type while I was at the office because I had to type all this stuff that went down to the printer. I would send out an envelope full of material every day, and then on Thursday I would go down and put the paper to bed, as they say. You know tell them if there were headlines that weren't written, I ... [recording ends]

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P. Bruno: Okay, so this is what your days [were] at the Recorder—how long did you work there?

D. Peck: I think it was from about June until March of the following year. And then Major [George] Geiger, who was the superintendent at the Soldiers' Home and who was also the head of the Defense Council, found out that I was looking for something that was a little bit more permanent than the job at the Recorder. So he said, "Why don't you come out to the Soldiers' Home?" So at that time, I didn't have a car. Somebody came down from the Soldiers' Home and picked me up and took me out there. I was interviewed. When I went to work there, I went to work as a bookkeeper. I had never studied bookkeeping in my life. I couldn't add two and two and get four. [laughs] Anyway, they showed me how to do it, and the state has their own system of bookkeeping, so it was not too difficult to come on to. At that time, I think there were three people in the office at the Soldiers' Home. There were about eighty members. There was one girl, who answered the phone and did typing, then I did the bookkeeping, and then there was a chief clerk who gathered the strings together.

P. Bruno: How many soldiers stayed at the home?

D. Peck: About eighty at that time.

P. Bruno: Oh, about eighty, yes. Were these disabled soldiers? Or was it a hospital?

D. Peck: No. It's not a hospital, it's a home. At that time, there was an infirmary with room for about twelve people, and the rest of them were all ambulatory. At that time, they might have had maybe four or five who couldn't get out of bed. But the rest of the space was for emergencies; if somebody came down with a cold or pneumonia or something, there was room [unclear].

P. Bruno: Now your bookkeeping job was a full-time job?

D. Peck: Yes, from nine to five. In those days, we worked Saturday mornings and then one day a week we'd work all day Saturday and all day Sunday because they wanted someone to be there all the time. Then the following week, you'd work Saturday morning and then the week after that you were off Saturday and Sunday. It was in 1965, I believe, that they built the new addition (the new building) at the Soldiers' Home and I think it was in March that we moved into the new building. The new building has an infirmary that holds eighty people and there is room for a total of about 120 in the ambulatory end. Now that's in what they call the main building now, where the phone is, where the switchboard is.

P. Bruno: Did you like bookkeeping?

D. Peck: Yes, it fascinated me. I might not have done so well if it had been strictly bookkeeping, but it was the state's system of keeping books. Since they built that new addition in 1965, they built another nursing care unit where most of them are pretty disabled. Some of them can get around in the daytime. That holds a hundred, and they built a second nursing care unit that holds another hundred so now the Soldiers' Home would accommodate 400 people. I don't think they fill it up completely because they want to keep a few infirmary beds in case of an epidemic of some sort. Two or three times they haven't allowed visitors in because there were epidemics of flu or things of that time.

P. Bruno: So you left the Soldiers' Home in 1965?

D. Peck: No! No, no. I worked there from 1942 until 1974.

P. Bruno: Oh!

D. Peck: I retired at the age of seventy.

P. Bruno: Good for you!

D. Peck: In 1974.

P. Bruno: Oh, I didn't realize you were there so long.

D. Peck: Um-hm. So it was when I retired that I began swimming at the Y [YMCA; Young Men's Christian Association]. [chuckles] Before that time, every time I was out anywhere, I looked all over the state of New Jersey, I wanted to buy a lake or maybe just a little bit of land on the edge of a lake. But since I've started swimming at the Y, I've decided it's a lot easier to swim at the Y and a lot cheaper than it is to go out and buy a lake. [laughter]

P. Bruno: So you swim whenever you can at the Y? That's great.

D. Peck: Yes, the first year that I was retired, I did very well. I swam sixty-five miles in that first year.

P. Bruno: Fantastic!

D. Peck: I try to swim a quarter of a mile. I should swim a half a mile every day, but a quarter of a mile is eighteen lengths of the seventy-five-foot pool. That's quite a bit.

P. Bruno: That's quite a distance.

D. Peck: Yes. [laughs] But it's always good to go to the Y on a rainy day or a snowy day because then you have the pool all to yourself.

P. Bruno: Can you tell me a little bit about your sons?

D. Peck: Oh yes! They went to Franklin School [Metuchen High School]. [Earl] Goodwin [Peck] graduated in 1945 as the valedictorian of his class. He had a scholarship to Rutgers, but somewhere about the time he was seven or eight, he began to have asthma. And the second year he was at Rutgers, he would wake up about three o'clock in the morning and couldn't breathe. He used to deliver specials for the post office, so he had to be up early anyway. But he was so bad that he and a friend of his, who had graduated from Metuchen, decided they were going out to Arizona. And I said, "Fine." At the last minute, the other boy backed out and Win [nickname for Goodwin] said he was going anyway. I said, "Okay." So I think he was eighteen. My sister and I took him down to New Brunswick and put him on a bus with a little zipper bag. When I see eighteen-year-old kids these days, I think how did I ever have the courage to send him off by himself all the way to Arizona? But it was marvelous because when he came back, he said, "I want to enlist in the Air Force." I said, "Fine." But I said, "I don't know whether you'll make it." And he had an examination and the year in Arizona had healed up all the dilutions from the asthma.

P. Bruno: Oh, that's good.

D. Peck: And then of course he went back to Texas for his basic training. And every time there was a chance to go to school, he went to school. And finally, the Air Force sent him to the University of Texas. And I used to think that the only colleges that amounted to anything were the ones in New England and New York and New Jersey. But I was very impressed when I went to Texas. They really have some good professors there. He graduated from there Phi Beta Kappa, and then later he went to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in Washington [DC; District of Columbia]. I always liked it when he was stationed in Washington because I could drive down there and see them once in a while. But he got a master's degree from the Industrial College in the Armed Forces. And since then maybe, oh, one time maybe five or six years ago, he was Base Commander at Offutt Air Force Base [Nebraska], which is the headquarters for SAC. From the time he went in, first he flew fighter planes. He went to Germany and was flying an [Republic] F-84 [Thunderjet], which is a fighter plane. The pilot is everything; he's the pilot and the bombardier and the navigator. He's the whole business. And he met his wife

[Margaret (Raymond) Peck] in Germany. Her father [Colonel Allen D. Raymond Jr.] was stationed there. Her father was regular Army. They were married in Heidelberg [Germany] and my oldest grandson was born in Germany. So they came home when my grandson was about two months old. But it wasn't too long after that that the Air Force sent my son to SAC and he flew B-47s [Boeing B-47 Stratojet].

P. Bruno: I don't want to interrupt, but what is SAC?

D. Peck: Strategic Air Command.

P. Bruno: Okay.

D. Peck: One time he was stationed in Pease [Air National Guard Base] in New Hampshire. That's right at the edge of Maine and New Hampshire. I always get a charge out of that because there's a Navy base there, and two, I think, of my grandsons were born in the base hospital. But the address is Portsmouth, New Hampshire, but it's really in Kittery, Maine. The naval hospital—the Portsmouth, New Hampshire Naval Hospital—but it's located in Kittery, Maine. I always got a charge out of that. Then from there he went to Homestead [Air Force Base in Miami, Florida], and he started flying B-52s [Boeing B-52 Stratofortress]. And the 52s are what they are still—

P. Bruno: Flying today?

D. Peck: Their latest thing. But then after, he was promoted to General; he was in charge, I think. Then they sent him to Washington and he was in the Department of History in Washington. Then he went back to Omaha [Nebraska]. He's been at Offutt Air Force Base, I think, at least three times. This is the third time. Then he was in charge of Personnel for SAC. And somewhere along the line, he was in Saigon² [Vietnam] for a year.

P. Bruno: Wow.

D. Peck: But when he came back, he was promoted again and he is now charge of operations [chief of staff] for SAC Headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base.

P. Bruno: And he's a General?

D. Peck: Yes, he's a Major General. Early this spring, there was a documentary on *The Today Show* and they showed Offutt Air Force Base and they showed him flying what they call the Looking Glass³. The Looking Glass is a plane that takes off—one takes off at eight o'clock in the morning, comes down at three. Before that one comes down, another takes off and that comes down at eleven. Before that lands, another one takes off and comes down seven in the morning. But if anything should happen to Offutt Air Force Base, to the SAC headquarters, all of the duplicates of

² In 1969, Earl G. Peck served as chief of special air operations at Headquarters Military Assistance Command Vietnam in Saigon. During his tour of duty, he earned the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal, and the Joint Service Commendation Medal.

³ Operation Looking Glass is the code name for an airborne command and control center operated by the United States. It controls the United States nuclear forces in the event that ground-based command centers have either been destroyed or rendered inoperable. In such an event, the general officer aboard the Looking Glass serves as the Airborne Emergency Action Officer (AEAO) and assumes the authority to execute nuclear attacks.

all the records—everything is on this Looking Glass, as they call it. They can talk directly with the President. They can talk with any SAC base anywhere in the world. So the Looking Glass would have charge of defense of the country if anything happened at Offutt. But it [the documentary] showed him on the Looking Glass when they showed that.

P. Bruno: Oh, you must have been very proud of him.

D. Peck: Yes.

P. Bruno: How about your other son?

D. Peck: My other son [David Wilson Peck] graduated from Metuchen High School in 1948. And since I still wasn't making too much money then, I had told them that I would do everything I could to help them, but I couldn't finance college for both of them. So David decided that he wanted to study electronics, so he enlisted in the Navy. When he went down to New Brunswick to take an examination down there, I think they said that he did the best on the examination of about, I don't know, 500 or 600 kids that had taken the same examination.

So he went out to Chicago [Illinois] to the Naval Station [Great Lakes] out there where they were teaching electronics. And after he—he must have gone somewhere for basic training—maybe he went there to the same place in Chicago. At any rate, after he finished his training, they sent him down to Annapolis [Maryland] and he was instructing the “middies” [Navy midshipmen]. You know the “middies” are the ones who were in there studying at the [United States] Naval Academy to be officers. David was not an officer; he was an electronics technician. So he goes down to Annapolis and he is teaching the “middies” long-range navigation. All these little kids outrank him, but he is the teacher, yes. While he was down there, I think they said there was an old Navy ship that had been in the Civil War (the [USS] *Reina Mercedes*⁴) and that was where they lived; that was their barracks. [laughs] Then after that, he went to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute [in Troy, New York]. He didn't finish there. He came out of the Navy because he wanted to get married [to Betty Jane (Anderson) Peck]. After he came out of the Navy, he took a job with a small electronics company somewhere down near Morganville, in the middle part of New Jersey. Then he had an offer from Westinghouse [Electric Corporation] and he worked there for quite a while, but it was—Westinghouse sold out to another company, to the White [Consolidated Industries].

P. Bruno: Right.

D. Peck: And things were getting more difficult there. He worked every weekend and didn't get paid for it. Whenever there was an emergency, they would call him and he got tired of it. And just recently he has taken a job in St. Peter's [University] Hospital in New Brunswick. It's up to him to maintain the x-ray machines, and the electrocardiographs, all of the electronic equipment, as well as to supervise the ordinary maintenance of the building.

⁴ The *USS Reina Mercedes* (IX-25) was an unprotected cruiser of the Spanish Navy that was captured by the United States Navy in Cuba in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. The ship was refurbished and used by the U.S. Navy as a receiving ship at Newport, Rhode Island, and subsequently as a detention vessel and barracks ship for the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland until 1957.

P. Bruno: That's a lot of responsibility.

D. Peck: Yes. He works one weekend every month, but he is reimbursed for it. When he was at Westinghouse, he was working every weekend and didn't get paid for it. So he says it's very different to be working for an organization like St. Peter's Hospital where everybody is very nice to you and they appreciate what you do. It's not the rat race that a big company is, and I think he is going to enjoy that very much.

P. Bruno: That sounds good. You must be proud of both of your sons.

D. Peck I am. I am. My son David has four daughters. The oldest one [Janice (Peck) Fisher] is married and lives in an apartment in East Brunswick. The oldest one went to Glassboro [present-day Rowan University] and graduated and she's teaching. The next one [Marjorie (Peck) Forgang] went to Jersey Shore [University] Medical Center [in Neptune City] and became a nurse. And while she was in Jersey Shore, she used to work in the pharmacy across the street. And she met a young man, who was the pharmacist. He was from Edison, she was from Edison; they had never met up here. So they got married about three years ago and they now have a small daughter, who's almost a year old.

P. Bruno: So you have a great granddaughter?

D. Peck: Yeah, yes. And then the next girl, Patti [P. (Peck) Stokinger], went to Northeastern [University] in Boston [Massachusetts]. And she got tired of being held up on the street in Boston. One time they went out—she and a girlfriend and the boyfriend went out to get something to eat—somebody held them up with a gun on the steps of the Philharmonic Hall [Symphony Hall] in Boston. So while she was there, she met Peter Forgione. Do you know the Forgiones in Edison?

P. Bruno: No, I don't.

D. Peck: Peter's grandfather [James Forgione] built the Forum Theatre, or was involved in building the Forum Theatre. At any rate Patti met Peter up in Boston. They were both from Edison and they had never met here. So they're married and they live out near—oh, out in I guess the address is Piscataway—Royal Palms [possibly Royal Gardens Apartments] or some such place out near Nedesi's [phonetic].

The youngest one [Victoria (Peck) Casey] is still in high school. She's applied to two or three different places, but I don't know whether she's really settled as to where she's going.

My other son has seven children. You don't want me to tell you about all of them!

P. Bruno: Oh, my! I don't think we'll have time for all of them. [laughter]

D. Peck: The oldest one [Allen G. Peck] graduated from the Air Force Academy and he's now in Germany where he was born. [laughs] He's married and he's the only one in that family that's married.

P. Bruno: So your sons both have large families, wow! Changing the subject completely, when did the [Centenary] Methodist Church build its new church?

D. Peck: There was someone by the name of Jay Shupe, who was one of the members of the official board. He was an officer in the bank in New Brunswick. Now I would say somewhere around the late fifties, the church had already put an addition on. Parking was a problem on Sunday mornings because it's on the corner there. We needed more room. There was no place to build any further, there was no place for a parking lot. And Jay Shupe thought that we should relocate and build a new church. I wouldn't say that he's the only involved, but I think he was the one that first talked about it. And that must have been going on for a number of years. But the church was completed, and we moved into the new church [on] December 20, 1964. And that's at the top of Hillside Avenue [Centenary United Methodist Church at 200 Hillside Avenue].

P. Bruno: Yes. How big is the congregation?

D. Peck: I think that they say we have perhaps 700 or 800 families.

P. Bruno: Oh, and how many families were in the congregation when your father first came?

D. Peck: I don't even remember, but it was much smaller. At that time, there was only one service at eleven o'clock. But now we have two services because we have maybe 250 [members] at the first service, and the second (the eleven o'clock service) is not nearly as well attended.

P. Bruno: As the seven o'clock?

D. Peck: As the nine-thirty one.

P. Bruno: As the nine-thirty?

D. Peck: Yeah.

P. Bruno: I think we have a little time left. Could you just briefly tell me what you do to keep busy today?

D. Peck: I don't think there's enough space on the tape. [laughs] Let me see, about once a month I go out on Meals on Wheels. Do you know what that is?

P. Bruno: Yes, it's a senior citizen program.

D. Peck Yes, for people who can't furnish their own meals. The meals are prepared at Kennedy [JFK Medical Center in Edison] and people go out in teams (two together) and deliver meals to maybe ten or twelve people who aren't able to get their own meals.

Another thing I do occasionally, I take people for cancer therapy at Kennedy Hospital. I arrange the programs. They call me the president of a Monday Noon Club, which is a group of retired people at the [Centenary] Methodist Church. But really Ted Perry [Rev. Theodore B. Perry], who is the associate minister, the minister of visitation, he really does a lot of it. But I get the programs together; I make sure they have a program for every meeting. For our next meeting, we're going to have a choral group from Trinity Christian School. One of the women in

our group has a granddaughter who sings in that group, so they're going to sing for us the next time. Last time we had your friend, Odana Kajama [phonetic]; she told us about some of the programs at the Y. And then we also had a film that the Public Service brought us about the nuclear power plant down at Salem.

P. Bruno: Oh, that must have been interesting!

D. Peck: Yes, it was. Then among other things I do various things at the church. I'm in charge of the Worship Committee and that means that I have to make sure that all the different committees under that are operating. And I help the flower chairman because I don't want her to give up the job. I go and encourage her on Saturdays. If I have time, I swim between twelve-thirty and one-thirty.

P. Bruno: I think it's so refreshing that you are so active, and you know you're in such good health.

D. Peck: [laughs] You know I think perhaps to be well is more important than being young. Don't you think so?

P. Bruno: Oh, definitely!

D. Peck: [laughs] I hear so many of my friends complain. They say, "Oh dear, my back is killing me." I say, "If you'd go and swim, you'd forget your back."

P. Bruno: Swimming is great exercise.

D. Peck: It really is.

P. Bruno: Well, I think we're going to end the tape here and I want to thank you very much for doing it.

D. Peck: I have enjoyed it.

P. Bruno: I've enjoyed it too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]