

AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

JAMES V. BENNETT

Civic Leader

by

Mrs. Evelyn Asrael

for

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## OUTLINE OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with James Bennett

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James Bennett

Interviewer - Evelyn Asrael

ASRAEL: This interview is taking place on March 13 at Jim Bennett's home, 5840 Marbury Road in Bethesda, Maryland. Mr. Bennett and I, Evelyn Asrael, the interviewer, will talk about Marie Bennett, her life, her times, and her role in the League and the community.

We don't know a great deal about Marie's background. Let's start that way. I know she wasn't born in this country--and just do a biography. Ok?

BENNETT: All right. Perhaps that's the best place to begin. All biographies begin with where a person was born, and Marie was born in Budapest, Hungary on December 20, 1896. Soon after she was born, her father came to this country and found employment as an aide in some art gallery or sculptor's studio. He had been here about two years, I think, and sent for his wife and family which consisted of Marie's mother, Mrs. Ettl, whose maiden name was Horvath. They came over here. I think Marie's brother, Alex Ettl, also came at the same time although I'm not sure. He may have been born in this country.

At any rate, they came over here, and they settled in Fort Lee, New Jersey. They moved into a home with some friends of her father, and they lived in Fort Lee, New Jersey for several years. People that she lived with are still alive, some of them. When Marie was alive, we used to get Christmas

cards from them. Their names were Szabo, Adele and Erna Szabo.

She went to grade school there. It was a German community largely, and she had a lot of German friends and learned to speak a little German and, of course, learned a little Hungarian. She was never very fluent in Hungarian, but she, nevertheless, could make herself understood. She kept up some knowledge of Magyar until she died. She and her brother used to talk about it together.

But at any rate, soon after, or maybe when she was about ten, twelve years of age, perhaps, she moved to Leonia, New Jersey, in a little house, which, I suppose, is still there. I haven't been up around there for a long time. [She] went to high school in Hackensack, New Jersey, where she graduated. It must have been in 1914, so she must have moved to Leonia in, maybe, 1911, or 12, or 10. I don't know exactly, and I don't suppose it's very important.

But at any rate, she graduated from Hackensack High school apparently with quite a good record, especially in mathematics, algebra, trigonometry and that sort of thing. The superintendent of the school, the principal of the school, was a graduate of Brown University. In those good, old days, universities, particularly women's universities, had to recruit students, urge them to come, point out the virtues of their particular college, and the then Dean of Pembroke, which is the women's division of Brown University, came to Hackensack and talked with Marie, apparently, and with her father, and granted her a scholarship, how much I don't know, but it was

something. She came to Brown in 1914, and that's where I met her.

ASRAEL: At Brown?

BENNETT: At Brown, yes. I met her, she always claimed, or she got acquainted with me, at a fraternity initiation party. What do you call those parties that fraternities used to have some years ago?

ASRAEL: Well, they used to have house parties.

BENNETT: Well, these were parties where they would go and make the. . . . What did the fraternities. . . . Well, anyway, you went through this hazing period. I was dressed in pajamas. I can remember them. I had to tell why--I can remember this--I thought that women should not be permitted to vote.

ASRAEL: Oh, my. [Laughter]

BENNETT: And these Pembroke girls were there. And also, I had to push a peanut across the floor or something like that, the way they did in the presence of the rest of them. At any rate, that's the way we got acquainted.

When we were all through in college. . . . Oh, well, we had a lot of good times together. I've put some of it in a book I've recently written called I Chose Prison. Have you read that book?

ASRAEL: No. I have it home, and I wanted to bring it for an autograph. I rushed out of home so fast.

BENNETT: Well, I'll give you one before you leave, and autograph it for you, and then you can send me the one that you have.

But anyway, to get back to Pembroke College. . . . Let's see if this thing is working all right. Let's just play back a little.

[INTERRUPTION]

ASRAEL: There. Now we can start.

BENNETT: That has a light on it when it is recording?

ASRAEL: It has numbers, and I noted where we stopped.

BENNETT: Some of them, my dictating machine, for example, has a light on it, that clicks on and off when you get the voice. You can tell when it is working.

ASRAEL: Well, I can do this by monitoring. I can open up the speaker as you are talking, and I can hear what was said, and I know that that is recorded.

BENNETT: To get back on the trail of this recording machine, we were talking about good, old college days. Marie was a good student. She took, as I said, a good deal of mathematics, trigonometry, calculus, and other things of that kind that were completely bewildering to me. I had to take trigonometry three times before I passed it. In those days, they were required courses. You couldn't graduate if you didn't pass certain required courses. One of them was credits in mathematics, which in my day, included trigonometry. That just goes to show how things have changed. You had to pass a course in English, which included theme writing. You had to write a theme every day on some subject, and if you didn't write it, and you missed a certain number, you got flunked. So you had to pass it.

Incidentally, I took--well, I had, all told--six years of Latin and Greek, too. That just goes to show how things have changed. Those language courses were compulsory. You had to pass. I took German. That wasn't so hard for me, but you had to pass those language courses, English courses, a science course, or two science courses, and a mathematics course. I don't know whether that was a good thing or not. I think it wasted a lot of time, as a matter of fact, because the skills, your learning abilities in learning to translate Horace's Odes were not necessarily transferable to some other skill, as the old psychologist used to contend.

Well, incidentally, Marie and I took some of these courses, but never together. In those days, the women had to be strictly isolated from the men. No courses, even the higher grade science courses in biology, for instance, were not co-educational. Women were not allowed in the same classes with the men for some stupid reason.

But nevertheless, we took the same courses, and we used to exchange information and talk about them. I was working all the time. I had to work my way through college, and I got to see Marie on weekends, that is to say, Sundays, because I worked Saturday.

ASRAEL: What kind of a girl was she? You said she was a good student, but what other characteristics did Marie have?

BENNETT: Well, she was quite popular, if that is what you mean, with the other girls in her class. She held some class office or other. I can't remember what it was. She was

quite a good piano player, always was, so she played the piano. She also played either the guitar or the mandolin or something. She was quite a good singer. She was good company around the dormitory, I'm sure.

She didn't have much in the way of sports. She played basketball. She would go skating and things of that sort. Frequently in the summer time, we would go canoeing on the Ten Mile River, which is a little creek, really. You could get around it with a canoe, and of course, it was a good excuse to go off in the bushes and do a little loving. That hasn't been changed.

ABRAHAM: Not a bit.

BENNETT: That hasn't been changed much. It went on in those days although not quite as hot. It used to be that I would go away with Marie on weekends and disappear for the whole Saturday afternoon or something like that. That used to distress the woman in charge of the dormitory in which she lived. You had to sign out whenever you went out with anybody. You signed a register, where you were going and who you were with. There was some supervision, shall I say, by the dormitory mistress or housemother, whatever you call her, to see that she kept appropriate company. Now what that meant, I don't know, but we didn't like it.

Later on a woman who was in charge, a Miss Danielson, who is still alive and who is married to a professor, Davis, who is now out at Stanford, kept a pretty close eye on where Marie was, and there was no chance in those days, if you wanted to remain in college, of not complying with the



somewhat strict New England mores of the time.

ASRAEL: What did Marie think she would major in? What did she think she would do by the time she finished college?

BENNETT: Well, I'm not sure how much she thought of it, but she took a good deal of sociology and social work, and that's what she went into when she left college after she graduated.

In 1918 she went to New York and got a job with the charity organization society as a case worker. She went around various parts of the city mostly in the area that, I guess, is now Harlem, and looked into these cases and referred them to head of the society for possible financial help or for solving some of their problems in the family. They didn't have so much of it (money) as they do now. She did that even after we were married until we came to Washington.

But at any rate, after I graduated, or even before I had actually graduated, I went into the Army as a cadet aviator, and Marie went to New York and got this job in this social case work agency. Then I came out in November, 1918, was discharged, and went home for a while, decided that I didn't want to stay in Providence and so I went to New York.

I suspect that one of the reasons was that it was because Marie was in that area, and so then I went to work down there. We used to meet together and so on.

ASRAEL: Did she live alone in New York at that time?

BENNETT: No. She commuted back and forth to her home in Leonia. We used to see a lot of each other, particularly during that winter, and then the next spring, we got married. Let's see. She continued to work, and I continued to work

for Clyde Mallory Steamship Company. But I hated New York with a vengeance. I can tell you that.

ASRAEL: Did she like New York?

BENNETT: I think she didn't mind it too much. At that time, I found an ad in the New York Times for a Civic Service examination for an assistant investigator for the United States Bureau of Efficiency. What a beautiful name that was. I filed the papers, took the examination, and darned if I didn't get appointed.

I moved to Washington alone for a while--I don't know--three or four months, and then she came down. We finally found a house after much trouble and . . . .

ASRAEL: In Washington?

BENNETT: Yes. At 3205 38th Street. It was not a house in the sense that we rented it. We answered an ad. We put an ad in the newspaper, and the National Cathedral School for Girls saw the ad, and because I put in it, we were college graduates, Protestant, all those things, why the dean, head mistress of the National Cathedral School for Girls, called me up and wanted to talk with me to see if we might be interested in occupying this house which they had rented to take care of girls who might get infectious diseases of one kind or another. It was a sort of a quarantine for girls at the National Cathedral School for Girls who got measles or mumps or whatever else in those times was looked upon as being infectious.

ASRAEL: What year was this?

BENNETT: This was in 1919. This was in the summer and fall.

Well, luckily, nobody ever got sick. We lived in the house by ourselves rent-free. That's about the only way we could do it. Well, that, of course, was too good to last and so the school closed it when the school closed down in the summer of 1919. We had to hustle around and find an apartment. We found an apartment with the help of one of the stenographers in my office in the old Victoria at the corner of 14th and Clifton Streets. That was a dim flea bag, but that was all there was available.

Washington in 1919 had housing problems more serious than they do now because we still had all the war workers here. The boys hadn't come home from abroad.

People were living on top of each other. When I came down here alone, I lived in a boarding house up on 15th Street, and there were double-deck and triple-deck bunks. I'm sure that in the room where we were, which was no bigger than this living room which is about fifteen by twenty feet, there were, I think, six or eight young people like me, young boys. We were all working around the government someplace or they were servicemen here working in one of the departments. And boy, was it hot in that place, and boy, was it buggy. Every conceivable type of bug, including body lice, we had to contend with.

ASRAEL: What an introduction to Washington.

BENNETT: Yes. Well, fortunately, we found a place on 38th Street, and that solved our problems, and then we moved into the Victoria which is a dark, grim, old place, if ever you saw one. But it was in a white neighborhood, and it was all part of the establishment--school teachers and young couples

like us lived in it. Well, that's it.

ASRAEL: Did Marie work?

BENNETT: No. She didn't work. No. She was pregnant at that time. Let's see. We're in the Victoria. Well, we lived there, and I was going down to work every day. Eddie was born. That's my son--in 1920, in January, 1920.

Marie was pretty busy. She didn't know much about children, taking care of and bringing up children, and she was certainly scared. They didn't have any homemaker services in those days. You just had to work out your problems through asking your friends and reading a few books they had. They didn't even have that childrens. . . .

ASRAEL: They didn't have Dr. Spock.

BENNETT: They didn't have Dr. Spock, and they didn't have that free book that the Children's Bureau gives you now.

So that was quite a struggle. Make no mistake about that. I was getting the grand and glorious salary of \$1,800 a year, \$150 a month, and trying to care of a wife and pay doctor's bills and so on, and our rent was \$65 a month. Food prices, relatively, were very high. People think nowadays that they have a hard time, but it isn't as hard time as we had in those days, and there wasn't any place you could go for help. You had to tough it out. I walked at least five blocks to go to where I could find the biggest hotdog for a nickel. That's literally true. And you had to. Oh, well, so much for that.

Well, we stayed there, and I continued to work in the

Bureau/<sup>of Efficiency</sup> and got a number of promotions. We moved from there over to Webster Street and stayed there for two or three years, which was a much better apartment. That's over near the Soldiers' Home.

Marie was busy taking care of the kids. She made a lot of good friends around there. I think, probably, her greatest accomplishment at that time was learning to drive a Model T Ford. Boy, was it a job trying to instruct her on how to drive a Ford, but she was determined to do it. She didn't like my instructions, you know. I suppose I was a little sharp, and I was nervous about it because I had all my savings invested in this Ford which cost me \$300, and that was a hell of a lot of money. But she was determined to use it, and I used to take her out driving in it in the evening.

One day I came home at night, and it was parked in an alley near our apartment house, and the front wheels had been pushed back to the middle of the car. While I was away, she had gotten in the car, and--didn't know how to manage the brake. In those days, you had to push your foot in the clutch, you know. You ran the gear shift with your feet, and you used the brake. There were three pedals. What had happened--she thought that she was putting the brake on, and instead of that, she was putting the thing into high gear and she had run into this post. Well, fortunately, it wasn't too much of an accident, but that was her great accomplishment for a while. She learned to drive it after a while.

Oh, yes. Let's see. Was that the time? Oh, yes. She began going to American University about that time, taking courses in various things, politics and government and so on. She began going to school then.

In 1926 we moved out of there and moved over on to Leland Street where we first came into Montgomery County. That's when she first became interested in Montgomery County women's affairs. All the rest of this is just junk, what I have given you, but this has to do with her relationship with Montgomery County.

Well, I don't know just how she got started in it. We lived in Section Four of Chevy Chase. That was a little town by itself. We used to have two or three meetings a year of its citizens, and we argued about sidewalks, who should pay for them, what the local section rate should be, problems about the schools. We were both interested in the Parent-Teachers Association. I was president of the local Parent-Teachers Association.

ASRAEL: Of which school?

BENNETT: The Rosemary School in Chevy Chase. Then later on, I became president of the county section and president of the junior high school. We always were interested when our kids were going to school in the Parent-Teachers Association. We used to raise money to buy motion picture machines and that sort of thing.

But at any rate, about that time--let's see, that must have been, let's say 1927 or 1928--why, Marie got interested in the Chevy Chase Women's Club. She went around to that

fairly regularly.

ASRAEL: Why did she get interested in that? What did the Women's Club do? I don't know very much about it.

BENNETT: Well, I don't really know other than that she-- whether it was with the approval of the Women's Club or whether she did it by herself--but in connection with that Women's Club activities, she organized a forum, a Montgomery County Women's Club Forum. This was a discussion group, and she was the president or chairman of it. I don't know what you call it.

About once a month, maybe a little oftener, they would have speakers on various and sundry public issues come out and give a little opening talk. Then there was discussion. It was open to the men. It was open to anybody although it was held in the Women's Club building most of the time, which is now over near the Columbia Country Club. At first they were held in some church forum. Well, Marie continued to run that for . . . .

ASRAEL: She arranged for the speakers?

BENNETT: She arranged for the speakers, selected the topics, and . . . .

ASRAEL: They were on a variety of issues?

BENNETT: Yes, yes. They were on a variety of issues. I can't remember what they were. Whatever the current issues of the time, they were. I can only remember one vividly and that was when Oppenheimer came out. Marie got Oppenheimer to come out to the forum, Oppenheimer, the atomic scientist, you know; later on [his] security clearance/<sup>was</sup>cancelled. It

was at that time, maybe one of his early lectures, that he was skeptical about the whole bomb business. He wasn't sure that he had contributed anything to the welfare of mankind by helping to perfect the development of the atomic bomb. Now I can remember that lecture.

I can remember one or two others. Oh, of course, we were talking about prohibition, too, in those days and the Volstead Act.

ASRAEL:       were these well attended?

BENNETT:       Quite well attended, yes. Some of them we had to pay for speakers too, a small amount in order to pay the speaker's expenses. Yes, they were quite well attended. Marie got a lot of experience in the issues of the times, then.

ASRAEL:       Did she know many of these people through your work, which, I gather, at that time, you had already become interested in the Bureau of Prisons and penology?

BENNETT:       No, no, they didn't relate much to the prison business.

ASRAEL:       No, I just wondered about people that you might have met.

BENNETT:       Oh, yes, yes. At that time, I was working up on the Hill in Congress, and I would help her get some Congressmen. I can remember that we once had Senator Monroney from Oklahoma. He was then reorganizing the Congress with George Galloway. He came out, a very good looking and attractive person. He still is. I was sorry to see that he was defeated.



But yes, Marie ran those all winter, and in the summertime--oh, I don't know--we did the usual things. But it was from this forum business that she got interested in, or was attracted to, the charter movement in the county. Alan Gardner finally persuaded her to get interested in the charter movement. So she used to go around to meetings, and so did I, when the charter was discussed. Fred Lee was the principal. . . .

ASRAEL: Chairman, I believe.

BENNETT: Principal motivator of the charter movement. We went around, and we discussed various provisions of the charter. Oh, my heavens, I passed more petitions around. We had to get petitions to get it on the ballot. That's where I and, I think, Marie first became acquainted with Brooke Lee and the dominant Democratic establishment, although we also got acquainted with Brooke Lee through the Parent-Teachers Association.

ASRAEL: How?

BENNETT: Because we were after him and the other people to give us some real money to improve the school system of Montgomery County. We sure did beat down on him and made the people who were candidates for the legislature and so on go on record with regard to whether or not they were going to support additional appropriations. They would write letters to the candidates, and if he didn't respond, why we would put it on the radio, or we would find some way in order to make him say yes or no.

But at any rate, then we got working on the charter. Marie helped organize the groups to promote the charter, and as I

said, we signed petitions. Now what those petitions were about, I can't recall, other than that it had to get on the ballot, and for that purpose, you had to have a certain number of signatures. Or the thing would be declared invalid. Anyhow, I passed around, and Marie went around, too, passing around these petitions to be signed two or three times.

Well, it was during those days, that she got interested in the League of Women Voters. Now I just can't recall what year it was, but it was during this time we were scrapping about the charter.

ASRAEL: The League, of course, was interested in the charter movement at that time, too.

BENNETT: Yes, but the League was very small at that time. It was a small organization. I don't know how many members they had. I would suppose maybe they had 150 members. This woman was the head of it for so long. You are going to interview her. Well, anyhow I'll think of her name in a minute.

ASRAEL: You don't mean Edith Dinwiddie, do you?

BENNETT: No, but she was one of them. Edith Dinwiddie, and some others. So anyhow, so that's when she (Marie) became interested in the League of Women Voters. About that time it was, wasn't it, I think while the charter fight was still going on, the charter went on the ballot three times, didn't it? Or was it twice?

ASRAEL: Twice, I think.

BENNETT: Well, the first time it was defeated.

ASRAEL: Right.

BENNETT: And the second time . . . I think it was defeated

twice. Maybe not.

But at any rate, there we were working on it and trying to change points of view, holding meetings, sending out notices and so on about the charter. There was always something to do. Long involved telephone conversations. Most of the business seemed to me to be done over the telephone. Most of it, it seemed to me, was done in the evenings and Saturdays, and I confess it annoyed me . . . . I finished my law school about that time and long talks, meetings etc. were not so distracting.

ABRAEL: What a busy household you lived in between law school, Marie participating in . . . .

BENNETT: Yes. I make no bones about it. It was a disconcerting business why they couldn't talk the thing over in the day time, I never could understand. But nevertheless, there it was.

Oh, I've forgotten what all there was, but there was an awful lot of work to do on that charter.

ABRAEL: Didn't the fact that the country was at war help to defeat the charter the first time? Do you remember that that was the difficulty?

BENNETT: No, the charter was adopted before the war, wasn't it?

ABRAEL: It was finally approved after the war. I think it was in the '50s that it was finally . . . . Was that right? I don't have the chronology correct.

BENNETT: Well, no. I don't either. We'll have to look that up.

ASRAEL: But I thought that it was an inhibitor for those who worked on the charter. They felt divided about possibly thinking or participating or using their energies on some war effort rather than some local effort.

BENNETT: Well, incidentally, Marie did do various things in connection with the war, various war-supporting activities, raising money, and sending socks, knitting socks, that sort of thing.

Well, at any rate, it was the charter movement that got Marie interested in the League of Women Voters. Our principal enemies were the died-in-the-wool bureaucrats. Brooke Lee represented the opposition, and he was very nasty, very nasty, unnecessarily nasty. He tried to defeat it down at the legislature, and he succeeded in keeping it off of the ballot down there for some reason or other. He was rude and arrogant in almost all of the incidents.

Now I was in my official position. I wasn't too active, but I did participate in certain of the things that he did. For example, they held a hearing on bills pending in the legislature, and one of them had to do with the National Capital Planning Commission or something that was an obvious takeover or protection of some of the land speculators out here. I've forgotten exactly what it was, but I made some remarks about it which I thought was quite objective. Brooke Lee was there, and the delegation was there and so on, and that big fellow that used to be counsel to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. He was a bumptious fellow that made you think he knew all the law in the world, and he

actually didn't know very much, but he said these things with great emphasis. He was the great "I am", and I challenged him on some of these things, and Brooke Lee was there.

But at any rate, what I am getting at is that Brooke Lee was there, and I went soon afterwards to a cocktail party, one of these Christmas cocktail parties, as I recall it. It was a good, fun cocktail party, and there were quite a lot of people there. Brooke Lee was there, and this guy who was then Senator from here. I don't know what his name [is]. I went up and shook hands with this Senator and said "How are you?" and spoke to him. Then Brooke Lee wouldn't shake hands with me. He turned his back on me, and said "I don't want to talk to you" or words to that effect. But I didn't have anything to do with it. I was just on the other side of fence. That was the kind of a rude sort of a guy he was in those days.

ASRAEL: Did Marie have any personal contact with him?

BENNETT: I think probably she did although I don't remember any more what it is. I don't remember anything specific.

But at any rate, we were battling Brooke Lee and the delegation down to Annapolis, our delegation down to Annapolis. You see they would lose their power. Brooke Lee was the dictator of the county, and the legislature would pass anything that the majority of the delegation favored. Of course, Brooke Lee, being Speaker down there first of the House of Delegates and, I think, President of the Senate, what he said went, and there was no thing about it. We were battling him, and he didn't want to lose his power which he would lose under

under the charter. That was the issue.

I had a debate one night over at the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce on whether or not the local officials, including, I think, the proposed members of the charter Council of Montgomery County, were to be elected on a non-partisan ticket. I gathered a lot of information about relative merits of electing local officials on a non-partisan basis, and I argued that case over before the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce. Brooke Lee was there and then this lawyer, Hill, Mr. Hill, I guess. He was a lawyer for the Republican Party at that time, the general counsel. A very nice guy, he was, and he was perfectly objective in stating his point of view, and I stated my point of view.

I don't know that I was right in urging a non-partisan election although I certainly feel the County Manager should be. I did not favor in this last election the County Manager running for office because that is going to inject him into politics. I think it strikes a mortal blow at the underlying fundamentals of the charter movement. We wanted a man, a business manager, a county manager, skilled in county managing things, and we wanted him removed completely from politics. Of course, that's the way the charter was originally.

But I, at that time, wanted the Council members on a non-partisan ticket. They run on a partisan ticket now, don't they?

ASRAEL: Yes.

BENNETT: I wanted the Council members to run on a non-partisan ticket, for them to be nominated by petition. I'm not sure

I'm right although maybe I was. I don't know. I don't think that a member of the Council, that it makes one whit of difference whether he is a Democrat or a Republican. How he feels about the war in Viet Nam or how he feels about income tax or anything else doesn't have a damned thing to do with his ability to serve the county properly, but that's it.

I used to have long discussions with Marie about an elected school board. She favored that. I did not. I thought it was a great mistake. I still think it is a great mistake to inject the school board into politics. It is much better to have them either appointed by the Council or appointed by the Governor upon recommendation of the Council. Let the Council nominate three or four or five candidates.

ABRAEL: Marie, you said, at that time, became interested in the League. Why? Why not a political party instead of the League?

BENNETT: well, I think that might have been due to me to some extent, you see. I was a government employee and a career person, and she didn't want to be affiliated with a political party because it might affect my career. And it might have.

In the days of the Roosevelt administration, it didn't make any difference what your politics were in holding a career, bureaucrat job like I had. When the Republicans came in, it might have made a difference if she had been too active in politics. I don't know.

well, now, let's see. we have to go back. we were talking about how she first became interested in the League. well, I

guess I pretty well described that.

ASRAEL: You say it was really through the charter.

BENNETT: The charter movement, yes. Well, first the forums.

ASRAEL: Yes.

BENNETT: Then the charter.

ASRAEL: And you were talking. . . . I have to go back a little bit now in the chronology simply because I remember Marie talking about it, and it was very important to her-- about the Walter Reed forums that she conducted at that time, too, during the war.

BENNETT: Yes. She was anxious to help during the war, and she took the same format that she had at the Women's Club and frequently the same speakers, the same people, and she took them over to Walter Reed Hospital. They brought these boys into this auditorium, many of them in wheelchairs and stretchers and chairs and all that sort of thing. The speakers [talked.] Many of those forums were related to the war effort in some way, bringing up questions with regard to the war. Yes, she devoted a good deal of time to arrangeing those. I think they were very useful. But, of course, in that case, she had no difficulty in getting speakers. All she had to say was "This is for the boys, the wounded."

ASRAEL: I understand she knew Eleanor Roosevelt.

BENNETT: Oh, yes. That's right. At that time. I guess that was the time she became acquainted with Mrs. Roosevelt. Oh, dear. How was that? I don't remember how it was. But she (Marie) expanded the forum technique and had a number of big meetings downtown on various subjects, and one of the



speakers was Mrs. Roosevelt. I can remember that now.

ASRAEL: What do you mean downtown? Down in Washington?

BENNETT: Down at the Departmental Auditorium. Now what do you suppose that was about? One of those meetings down there. I can't recall. But they were war-related. I can tell you that. They were war-related subjects at the time. She had other speakers come in, but it was all a part of this same format. One thing led to another. She was on various committees and worked on boards of directors of various groups, and they always got her (Marie) to arrange speakers. By golly, I'll have to have my recollection refreshed by going back sometime and see what they were about.

Isn't it funny that we never kept a sort of scrapbook where there was work. I have a scrapbook kept by my secretary, but it all relates to my work in the Prison Bureau. It all relates to crime. There is nothing in it that relates to these other activities.

Yes, that was when she got acquainted there. Well, and so it went on. The League continued to grow. You know what she did then. Her principal interest in the League later on was in the planning business.

ASRAEL: She was president of the League.

BENNETT: Yes.

ASRAEL: When?

BENNETT: Well, now, that's a good question. I have to get you to look it up in your archives. I can't tell you.

ASRAEL: Do you remember how that came about?

BENNETT: No. I think it was just the natural course of events. She sort of rose up through the ranks, so to speak. I don't think there was any contest about it. I'm sure there wasn't.

ASRAEL: Well, she always made so light of it, that they couldn't find anybody else so that they just settled on her.

BENNETT: Well, I don't know. That pretty well capsulizes....

ASRAEL: Up to the time that she became very interested in planning, yes.

BENNETT: Yes. Oh, yes. Then she devoted so much time to this planning business, and there are others who can tell you more about what she did in that than I could because I became increasingly busy and increasingly involved after the war and during the Republican Administration. I was very busy during the war. I didn't have much time to worry about the League of Women Voters. I was holding down two jobs. I was the Administrative Officer of the Office of Price Administration and also Director of the Federal Prison Bureau. I was working every day and every night and every weekend. I didn't have any time to pay much attention to the League of Women Voters.

ASRAEL: I can see now why Marie became so increasingly active. She had to do something to take up the slack.

BENNETT: Yes.

ASRAEL: Did she like being president of the League? Do you remember anything about it?

BENNETT: Oh, I think so. I think she liked it, yes. She used to get irritated about various things. [I] cite you an example. I think that, as time went on, she began to feel like Mr. Moynihan--

"Nobody knew nothing about planning." They had these long conversations and meetings. They used to meet here about wedges and open spaces and tax exemptions for open space things. I think that she and--who is this fellow down at Somerset?

ASRAEL: Oh, Vinton.

BENNETT: Yes. Molly Vinton and her husband thought that they were planning things for all time. I think that as time went on, she (Marie) felt that there just wasn't enough information, there wasn't anybody that could prognosticate what was going to happen, what the growth was going to be out here, that all you could do would be to fight one battle at a time. This long range planning was something of a utopian idea, not possible of implementation.

But she used to go to these meetings with Lathrop Smith and Molly Vinton and so on to work on these things, and they did some good work. I think they prevented a lot of things.

Oh, yes. She used to get mad at the Suburban Sanitary Commission for putting sewers in the wrong place and developers for not paying enough attention to the Master Plan and so on. I really am not skilled in this. She would know. She went to numerous meetings about it. It seemed like there was a meeting every night or every two or three nights.

ASRAEL: And many of them here?

BENNETT: Yes. Quite a few of them here.

ASRAEL: The fascinating thing to me about Marie was her energy in not only the things that she was interested in, but

she did it so skillfully. She'd serve somebody coffee and marvelous cakes that she made while trying to either to feed them information or extract information.

BENNETT: I hope it had some effect in shaping the growth of Montgomery County, shaping its development and so on. I haven't any doubt or question that Montgomery County is probably the most attractive, the best run county, certainly in Maryland, and I think one of the best in the United States. Development has been thoughtfully done, and well managed, and I think it's been the League of Women Voters, perhaps as much as any one group, that has kept the county from being a honky-tonk area, and an area which has superb schools, just no doubt or question but what these schools out here are way beyond what you can find elsewhere.

I went the other night to one of my grandchildren's schools where they had a science exhibit, out at Cabin John High School. Boy, it's a beautiful school. They had more than five hundred kids having a science exhibit, and they were all excellent. Those kids are just so far ahead of me when I was at their age that there is just no comparison, just absolutely no comparison. I wouldn't know a thing about some of those things that are just A B C to those kids with regard to water pollution and with regard to. . . . Well, they had an exhibit there with desaltination plans. They had numerous exhibits on different types of plant growth. My grandson had a physics exhibit on harmonics. I don't know what they are, I can tell you that myself, but anyway he got a medal.

ASRAEL: Well, maybe Marie did have. . . .

BENNETT: But these schools here are excellent, just excellent, and I guess practically every one of our high graduates that succeeds and goes to college, they have no choice and are picked off quickly.

Yes, the only thing that's wrong with the schools in Montgomery County is the degree of segregation. My granddaughter graduated from Walter Johnson High School. I think there were seven hundred kids in the graduating class and not one single Negro. The present high school where my granddaughter Elizabeth is going, Walt Whitman High School here--God knows how many graduates they are going to have, but there are over 5,000 students in the school--and I think they told me about fifteen or twenty colored in the school. I think that is very unfortunate, particularly for the white pupils because they just can't learn to understand the viewpoint of the colored people.

Want to shut that off? I'm off the record.

ABRAEL: No, but I want to ask you some more about Marie.

BENNETT: Yes, go ahead.

ABRAEL: Ok. I mentioned about Marie's social ability which many of us always think of in conjunction with everything else that she could do. For example, I remember Marie zeroing in on someone in her light touch way and then having that person take it, and then she would, in fact, giggle while she was really zeroing in on him, and then feed him a good lunch. Those of us who would watch this technique of Marie, if you can call it that. . . . How would she become so socially adept?

BENNETT: I don't know.

ASRAEL: You weren't aware of this development?

BENNETT: Not particularly. No. We used to give a number of parties socially here for people in my office, friends of mine, judges that would come to town. We would have a cocktail party here and so on. I don't know. It just happens. That's all.

ASRAEL: It was part of Marie's creativity.

BENNETT: It just happens. There isn't any way to. . . .

ASRAEL: Could say that Marie had a particular philosophy?

BENNETT: You mean about politics?

ASRAEL: About life.

BENNETT: Oh, of course, yes. Of course, she had a particular philosophy. She wasn't dominated too much by any religious acclimatation although she went regularly to the Cathedral with me. I'm an Episcopalian. She was baptized a Catholic but never went to Catholic Church after she was married, and I don't think very much before.

What was her philosophy? I don't know. I suppose it was as much as anything to run a good race and be useful, keep interested, I think. I think that was the dominant theme, Keep active. Do something. Don't sit around. She had no use for playing bridge, you know. Playing bridge and time wasting things like that, she had no use for. Is that philosophy? I don't know. I guess it is. It's an effort to make use of. . . .

She herself wanted to do writing. She did do some writing for me. I got a job writing an article for the Encyclopedia

Americana on the growth and development of the prisons. She researched that and wrote the piece which I went over, did some editing on it, changed it some, suggested certain enlargements here, there and the other place. It was printed. We got a little money for it. I don't know what. I don't think it is in the current edition of the Americana. But she did some things like that. She, of course, used to help me with my speeches and criticize them and so on.

But as to having something that you can dignify with the word philosophy, I don't know. I can do no other than say it was just doing your job as you saw it, making the most of it.

ASRAEL: Do you know of people she admired? Who would they be?

BENNETT: Well, she admired Mrs. Roosevelt, I can tell you that, very much indeed. She thought she was wonderful. She admired most of the Attorney Generals with whom I worked. She was a very good friend of Mrs. Francis Biddle, Attorney General Biddle's wife. She and Adele Rodgers, the present wife of the present Secretary of State, were good friends, and she was very helpful with Marie when Marie was in the hospital. She used to go to see her regularly and help her exercise, walking up and down the corridors of the hospital. Mrs. Rodgers is just a wonderful person. I don't know who during the war she had any special admiration for although she was a strong supporter of the war effort. She jumped into anything that had anything to do with Hungarians. When they had the liberation of the Hungarians, I forgot what year that was, and they all

came over here, she was downtown working with the committee that was trying to place them. We had some of them stay with us. She used to go around to Hungarian Society meetings and so on. But that was like the fire bell to the fire horse if there was anything about the Hungarians that came up.

ASRAEL: She, seemingly, was always so energetic and optimistic. Did she ever get discouraged?

BENNETT: Oh, yes. Sure, we did. Of course, we did. Oh, yes. I don't know what it was about--various things.

ASRAEL: For example, when she so often came up against the same forces in the county. Did that ever discourage her or did she. . . .?

BENNETT: No, not in a real sense of any feeling of defeatism about it. She would get mad about it but not in the sense of defeatism, or discouraged about it to the point where she abandoned the idea. I think there were other things that she was interested in that she felt were lost causes, completely lost causes. I think she got discouraged, again I say, with the planning business. I don't know. I didn't know enough about it to be involved really. She used to get mad at me about that, but I just had too many other things to do, or at least thought I had.

ASRAEL: That's interesting. Do you remember anything, Jim, about the way Marie would get along with people. She worked with so many groups of women. Do you remember any ways she would get along with people that she felt were ineffective? How she handled people? Managed people?

BENNETT: No.



ASRAEL: She worked with so many different groups, people that you met from your work, people that you met in the community?

BENNETT: I don't think so, other than that some of them she felt were hopeless and darned near gave them up, that's all, not try to get them to do anything. No, I don't remember there was any special technique. All these people, all you League of Women Voters, you all flock together. All do the same thing. How do you keep going? Let me ask the question of you. How do these gals keep going as long as they have? Girls like Elaine Friedman, for example. How do they keep going? Why do they do it?

ASRAEL: I guess that they feel that there's always. . . . They're optimistic. It's going to get better.

BENNETT: They want a challenge. They want to be useful. They don't want to sit around. . .

ASRAEL: And polish silverware. That was an expression of Marie's. Sit around and polish silverware.

BENNETT: Yes.