GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

SOUTH VILLAGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

INGRID BERNHARD

By Liza Zapol

Mystic, Connecticut

June 27, 2015

Oral History Interview with Ingrid Bernhard, June 27, 2015

Narrator(s)	Ingrid Bernhard
Birthdate	n/a
Birthplace	Sweden
Narrator Age	n/a
Interviewer	Liza Zapol
Place of Interview	Ingrid Bernhard's home in Mystic, CT
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Order in Oral Histories	20

Ingrid Bernhard at her home in Mystic, Connecticut, June 27, 2015 Photograph by Liza Zapol. More photographs at end of transcript.

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Ingrid Bernhard

"I have a book here written by a fellow, Shaw…There is a picture of this house. He was a friend of Margaret Wise Brown. That was then still clapboard, but then it was enclosed and became almost like a porch area. We called it a 'winter garden.' In the back there is where you have the kitchen. Now, of course, the current owners have added on there, both on the height and on the width.

Originally, they lived upstairs, and the animals were downstairs. The heat from the animals, and the heat from the kitchen stove, that's all the heat you had. When we lived in the house uptown, the first floor was a brick floor, and that brick floor was laid directly on a dirt floor. When we moved the house, you could clearly see the dirt floor under the bricks. That, of course, was where the animals were originally."
(Bernhard p. 14)

"It was warehouses, basically warehouses. Garbage places combined with some beautiful one-family or brownstone houses. Tenements. Many tenements. Even the brownstones were made into several families living there. They were also here and there in nice one-family brownstones, often something from mid-1800s—maybe a professional person, maybe a captain...

So they were very much a combination. But there were enormous traffic by trucks [in the] early mornings because of the warehouses."
(Bernhard p. 19)

"Our lawyer said, 'I thought he was crazy.' The judge said something [like], 'Could I hear this again? [laughs] [Sven] said, 'I wonder, when I move, could I be allowed to take the house with me?' The Archdiocese agreed to that. They didn't want the house. They wanted to tear it down. They wouldn't have to tear it down. I have to say, their lawyer was extremely accommodating. He was given a date. 'You have to move out by this date. You can take the house with you.'"
(Bernhard p. 18)

"The little guy said, 'Does people live there?' I said, 'Well, what do you think I am?'… He said, 'Oh, lady, I'm sorry.'

Then I realized, boy, I'm bad. I said, 'Wait a minute."…I went down, and I invited them for cookies and a soda or something…He said, 'This is a funny house.' I said, 'Yeah, it is. It's not like the house you live in now.' It's small, and they're looking.

I said, 'Yeah, you know this is the way people lived many, many years ago. Long before your grandma was born. Long, long time ago. Animals lived down here, and they didn't have water. They had to walk to 79th Street, Lexington, to wherever the well was nearest. That's where they had to walk and carry their water home, here.'

...Those little guys got very interested…Later on that evening, my husband comes home from work. I told him what had happened. I said, 'You know, those guys were really nice fellows.' I would say, 7, 8, 9—just little boys, three of them. I remember my husband saying, he said, 'It's really a shame if this house would be torn down.' I said, 'How are other generations ever going to know how things were?'"
(Bernhard p. 15)

"Eighty-five men. Singers… They all came after the concert…we provided them with buses from their hotel. They went home, changed into regular street attire from tuxedos and came down to our house.

We just did hot dogs on the grill…They sang in the garden in Swedish, in English, in Italian, or whatever languages. We had told the police of it…People came out and sat on the stoops and listened. All over, windows open…We had dressed the garden in torches all around, a lot of just candles.

The next morning, my husband stayed home to pick up all the empty glasses all over the place, on the wall and all over, and he said, 'So many people came and said, 'Thank you for the concert.' That was also very nice to hear."
(Bernhard pp. 32-33)

"At Christmas, there would come a choir—a local choir—to sing Christmas songs…they always came to our house. The director was a woman, who directed them, learned that if she told us ahead of time, we would have the Swedish Christmas drink, *glug*, ready...

They were standing in the stairs and all over. Sang some Christmas songs. We always thought that they sang a lot better after they left our house. [laughs]"
(Bernhard p. 33)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Ingrid Bernhard

Ingrid Bernhard speaks about the process of relocating her historic home from Upper Manhattan to 121 Charles Street in Greenwich Village.

Originally from Sweden, Berhard discusses her early life and her move to the United States as a young woman in 1956. Berhard talks about initially living with friends of her family in Long Island and then moving to a women's rooming house in Greenwich Village when she found work. She recalls trips to the opera with friends and a sense of community. Bernhard went on to meet her husband, Sven, who lived in a farmhouse dating back the late 18th century.

Bernhard describes the early life and immigration story of her husband, Sven, who loved classical music and obtained work on an ocean liner from Sweden to come to the United States. As a young man, he immigrated around the same time Bernhard herself did.

Bernhard tells the story of her husband's discovery of the house in its original location at 1335 York Avenue, his early years in it before they were married, and the renovation work he contributed. She describes her early memories of kerosene heat in the house and the owner, Mrs. Healy, who Bernhard believes spent part of her childhood at the home.

Bernhard describes the layout of the home, including detail about cobblestones with a dirt floor beneath it. She says she and her husband relocated the cobblestones to 121 Charles Street with the house.

Bernhard goes on to shares experiences that led the couple to relocate the home, rather than allowing it to be torn down. She recalls a visit by three young boys, which she considers part of the impetus leading her to value historic preservation. She then explains her husband's advocacy in court to relocate the house, the process of locating a suitable lot, interactions with attorneys, as well as challenging permitting processes with the city of New York. She recalls local aggression about their preservation effort. She mentions the help of Mayor Lindsay, William C. Shopsin, and Percy Sutton. Bernhard recounts the day of the move, March 5, 1967.

Bernhard explains the renovation work done to the house before she and her husband could move in. She states that there was public interest in the house, which the couple considered in deciding to install a gate that would allow visitors to see their home and garden from the street.

Bernhard turns her attention to the neighborhood atmosphere in the latter half of this interview. She describes warehouses, neighbors (including Judith Stonehill), and hosting social gatherings, including a men's choir from Sweden and Christmas carolers. Bernhard concludes the decision to sell the house and states that she continues to communicate with its current owner.

General Interview Notes:

This is a transcription of an Oral history that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. GVSHP began the Oral History Project in 2013. The GVSHP Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. In this transcript, GVSHP edits are denoted with square brackets[], interviewee edits are made with curly brackets {}. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

The views expressed by the contributor(s) are solely those of the contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or endorsement of our organization.

Oral History Interview Transcript

Zapol: This is the Oral History Project for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. This is Liza Zapol. It is June 27, 2015. I'm here in Mystic, Connecticut. If I can ask you to introduce yourself, please.

Bernhard: I'm Ingrid Bernhard, and I live in Mystic.

Zapol: If we can start, if you can tell me where and when you were born—

Bernhard: I'm not sure I want to tell you.

Zapol: OK, that's fine.

Bernhard: I was born in Karlshamn, Sweden, which is in the southeastern part of Sweden on the Baltic. Karlshamn at that time was the third deepest port in Sweden. My father came from that town. We come from sea people. My grandfather made his living as a sea captain.

Zapol: Did you have any siblings, as well?

Bernhard: Yes, in my family we were one boy and four girls. I'm the next youngest.

Zapol: What was it like growing up on the sea in this seaport?

Bernhard: Well, I didn't grow up there, but I was born there. We lived right on the water, rather high up, overlooking the Port of Karlshamn. I think that is what made me always love the water.

Zapol: Where did you grow up?

Bernhard: I grew up partly in the middle of Sweden. My parents moved quite a bit, and I think that was because my father was really never happy unless he could live and see the water all the time.

Zapol: What brought you to the middle of Sweden?

Bernhard: I think it may have been work or whatever—that my father went there, and I went to school in the middle of Sweden most of the time.

Zapol: What were some of the things that you studied or enjoyed when you were in school?

Bernhard: Well, I went to grammar school and preschool and grammar school, then high school. I was definitely a person. I was not academic, but I loved doing business. I started very early to try to sell anything I could get my hands on. I think that's the reason why my life—my work—has been business.

Zapol: Give me an example of something you tried to sell when you were a child.

Bernhard: [I was] very little, I could barely probably count the money. I would go to the store and buy Christmas cards for a penny each and sell them for ten, right outside the store—that type of thing. Or I went to some kind of a children's fun thing, like an amusement park, where you could try your chances on the Lucky Wheel. I immediately arranged for that in the garden and had a big sign up at the street to try your lucky wheel and took a fee for it.

One year, my dad in the winter made—we all ice skated—an ice skating rink. I learned that you could take an entrance fee on the other kids in the neighborhood, so that's what I did until I was caught.

Zapol: What happened when you were caught?

Bernhard: Not allowed to do that.

Zapol: Tell me at what age and how did you end up coming to America?

Bernhard: For some odd reason, I always wanted to go to the United States. I used to frequently tell my dad, "Couldn't we move to America?" Well, my people came from—sea people, as I mentioned, and so there were no immigrants earlier in my family at all. It was really an adventure, and I wanted to go to the United States. I knew that it was a land of opportunities. I knew that I could work. I wanted to get somewhere, do something in my life. I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to work in a big store as a buyer, buying and selling. That was exactly what I wanted to do. **[00:05:16]**

Zapol: How did you know that that was what you wanted to do?

Bernhard: I couldn't tell you that. I mean it must have been an instinct. That's why I got the job I eventually got.

Zapol: Tell me the story of coming to America.

Bernhard: Well, I wanted to come to the United States, and I wanted to come to that country that had so many opportunities for people of all nationalities and all backgrounds. I also knew I could go back, so when I came here, I came by boat the first time and landed here on the 30th of November, 1956—a long time ago.

My first plan was really that I was only going to stay one year. Not so, but that was the first plan. I think maybe that was a plan that I had told my parents so that they wouldn't be too upset. But I'm still here. I have never regretted that move.

Zapol: Can you describe for me the first day when you arrived in America?

Bernhard: The first day, the people who sponsored me—a Swedish lady who was a sister to someone who lived in our neighborhood and had children my age and the [age of] children in my family, my sister's age—they met me at the pier, Pier 97, which would be west of 57th Street, where the Swedish American Line boats would come in in those days.

They met me, and there was a steamship man strike. Together with the personnel from the ship, you had to find your luggage. The biggest shock for me, at that time—I come from a small town in Sweden—was the street picture of New York, with so many different people with different skin colors that I was not used to. It [was] really almost shocking to me. I might, in my entire life at that time, had seen five people who were not white like me— five total, Chinese or black people. I was absolutely, completely taken aback.

It was so different. I never forgot that. Of course, I was not used to that. In Stockholm I might have seen all those five, except for I remember in Sunday school that a missionary had a guest with him, a black man. That was the first time I had ever seen someone who had a different skin color.

Today that is so different. Today in Stockholm, the street picture is a mixture, just like we have here. But for me, it wasn't so then. For me that was very, very different.

Zapol: This moment of the street picture and your guides sort of taking you—where did you stay then at first?

Bernhard: The people who sponsored me lived in Locust Valley out on Long Island. That's where we drove that first day. It wasn't far or anything. I stayed with them at the very beginning. I came here November 30th, and so I actually stayed in someone else's home for I'd say over

Christmas. Then I went into New York and started to look for a job in retail. I went to Lord & Taylor, Macy's, B. Altman's. I ended up at B. Altman [& Company]. **[00:10:11]**

Zapol: How did you get that job?

Bernhard: Well, many years later, the personnel manager reminded me that I had said that I wanted to be a buyer, and I knew you wouldn't be that right away. I said I just wanted to make sure that the store's policy was such so they didn't hold it against you that you were not educated in the United States—that it would be okay to be educated somewhere else, as long as you would qualify.

He said, "Absolutely. It's up to you what you, how you do. It doesn't make any difference to us." That fitted me well. I started as a clerk in the buyer's office for carpet and rugs, then worked.

Zapol: Then? Sorry.

Bernhard: I remember that my salary was, if I remember correctly, $42 a week before taxes and Social Security and Medicare were taken out, so I had $34 left. On that you paid room and board, and whatever else.

Zapol: Where were you living then when you first had your own job?

Bernhard: At first, I lived and commuted, but not [for] long, because it was too long a commute. This family, which I stayed with, the man in the family had [his] brother's children there from Holland. It was a family and they rented a house in Manhasset. I rented a room there. It was closer to take the train—Long Island Railroad—in to Penn Station.

Zapol: From Manhasset?

Bernhard: From Manhasset than from Locust Valley. Locust Valley you had to change trains in Jamaica [Queens]. Not long after I heard about a place on West 10th Street, right near Fifth Avenue: 11 West 10th Street, the Milbank House, which was a house for young professional women who were alone. There is where I lived for many years.

Zapol: What was that house like? What were the rooms like? What was that environment?

Bernhard: Small rooms, but perfectly fine. You shared a bathroom. You could have simple breakfasts and dinner. If you were home in time for dinner, you could have that there. I remember the total cost was $21 a week.

Zapol: What were the meals like? What was the environment like?

Bernhard: This was a beautiful townhouse—beautiful living room, a library, dining room. The rooms that you had were really small, just your bed and a dresser, a chair. Not much more. Very small. But it was perfectly fine. It was a safe place. There was always somebody on duty, a hostess there. You could have friends come in and use the public rooms. You had to be in by a certain time at night, because it wasn't overnight [that] somebody was sitting there.

Zapol: What were some of the other people who maybe you became friends with—

Bernhard: People from all over.

Zapol: Also international?

Bernhard: Yes, oh yes. Oh yes. There were people from all over—people from Hawaii, people of different colors and different backgrounds. It was actually the Milbank Family—I remember a lady, Mrs. Jeremiah Milbank, I think it was, who lived in Greenwich. She was sort of the person who protected that home. I believe the building had originally been the Milbank Family's New York home. **[00:15:02]**

They were the ones who supported it and hired. Whoever worked there would be under her. [I should say it was] her decision who was hired there. It was a terrific place for a young person to live. I found out about it through other people who had graduated and lived in their own homes that had originally lived there. It was really very nice.

You could do you laundry. [It was] a very good place for somebody who is alone.

Zapol: Can you tell me about a particular friendship you developed while you were there?

Bernhard: Not especially. It's so many years ago. No. I don't remember. I would think that most of them are gone by this time. But there was a lady who was the housemother at the time. It turned out to be that her parents— she was my parents' age—but her parents had come from Sweden. But I didn't know that when I moved there. That was also very nice.

Zapol: Did she take you under her wing a little bit?

Bernhard: Yes, she did. If you got ill, they would look after you. [It was] a very nice place to be for a young person.

Zapol: You were in the Village then. Where was B. Altman at the time?

Bernhard: Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. The entire block. Fifth Avenue and Madison between 34th [Street] and 35th [Street]. That was Altman's. Is that a library now?

Zapol: Yes, I think so. It may be part of—

Bernhard: Beautiful building.

Zapol: It might be part of CUNY or the—

Bernhard: Yeah, it's a beautiful building. Very beautiful building.

Zapol: How did you commute back and forth to the home where you were staying?

Bernhard: Bus. In those days Fifth Avenue were two ways. You took a bus. Sometimes you walked if you didn't have enough money. I even remember skiing up Fifth Avenue.

Zapol: Would you ever go out in the Village—

Bernhard: Oh, yes.

Zapol: —and where were places you would go?

Bernhard: Sometimes if I didn't get home early enough for dinner on 10th Street, closer to Sixth Avenue, there was a little place called Alex's Borscht Bowl. It was a Russian man, an old man, and I think his sister. They had a little restaurant there. You walked down in the basement. You could have a wonderful omelet, two potato pancakes and a salad and a piece of pumpernickel Russian bread for a dollar.

Sometimes Alex would come over with a glass of red wine and sit himself down.

Zapol: Alex of the Borscht Bowl.

Bernhard: Alex's Borscht Bowl. It was under the stoop. It was a brownstone house. Under the

stoop [were stairs]. There were beautiful pieces of art on the walls in that little shed, that little restaurant. Many artists, when they were young, he would give them something to eat. They couldn't pay, so there was a piece of art at some point given to him as a thank you.

Zapol: At that time, did you get a sense of the bohemian Village? You know.

Bernhard: I loved the Village and I got to know it well. There were many wonderful eateries. I remember on West 4th Street, yeah, West 4th. I can't think—Bleecker crosses there, because Bleecker goes very funny—I remember going to the Amato Opera Company. There were all kinds of performances, and you could easily take part. Incidentally, when I lived at the Milbank House, Mrs. Milbank had a loge at the old opera—not Lincoln Center, the old opera. **[00:20:09]**

Zapol: The Met?

Bernhard: The original Metropolitan Opera. I think it was somewhere in the 30s on the West Side. When she didn't use it, she would give the tickets to the housemother, and she would give it to us. I remember sitting there and listening. I loved opera, so for me that was just wonderful to have that opportunity.

I also went to the opera on my own, but I never could afford—in those days, I never could afford anything more than a standing ticket. That was a dollar. I remember standing in line, taking turns with a few friends, outside the old opera—all night, three or four hours each for a standing ticket to see Birgit Nilsson in the *Turandot*. How in this world you can manage to stand after that, I don't know [and then] go to work the next, and then—.

Zapol: Right. I want to get to the house, of course. How did you meet Sven Bernhard?

Bernhard: I met Sven, he was a guide for a group from Sweden. In that group was someone who I knew, or whose friend I knew. I was asked to take this older gentleman that I knew around. I went to the hotel that they were staying at to meet them. As it turned out, Sven was the guide for that group.

That's the first time I met him. I wasn't there for Sven, and I wasn't even interested. But I guess we stayed in contact, and—

Zapol: He was interested?

Bernhard: Yes. Some years later, it became 'us' rather than 'you' and 'he,', but that was the first time I met Sven.

Zapol: At that time, how long had he been in the United States?

Bernhard: He came to the United States the same year as me, but a few months earlier.

Zapol: On the same line? The Swedish American Line?

Bernhard: No, I'm not sure which ship he came on. It could be Norwegian—I'm not sure. He had been to the United States earlier. When he stayed [he] was a student in Sweden. He had been to the United States.

Zapol: What brought him here?

Bernhard: Sven loved classical music. I often used to wonder. Later on in life, I wondered why in this world did he. I didn't know anyone in his family {who did}. He was really, incredibly good with all classical music. Not opera, but all symphonies, orchestras, directors, conductors and all of this. I wondered why. He was then next youngest of several brothers. He told me, he said that when his older brothers either were away in boarding school in Sweden or were already working, he didn't know what to do one summer.

He got into trouble because he did little things that kids do who don't have enough to do. There were no TV, of course, and he wasn't allowed to listen to the radio. That was sort of a punishment, so he made his own receiver and took in BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] London. He couldn't send anything, but he had a cigar box, an old empty cigar box, that he made a receiver and took in BBC London. **[00:24:56]**

I don't think he could have been more than ten or eleven years old—maybe even nine. He would listen to BBC already then {with} all of their classic programs. You listen to these. it was the only thing he could do, he said, so that's what he listened to. He was so bored because he didn't have his older brothers around.

But that is the beginning of a lifetime of loving classical music. He was still in the *gymnasium*, it's called in Sweden, which is like maybe a little higher than high school. Maybe not completely four-year college, but close to it. He then wanted desperately to hear Toscanini conduct. Toscanini had said he would never go back to Italy because of what happened during

the war—Mussolini, all of this stuff. Toscanini was scheduled to, that one summer—when {Sven} was off from school—to conduct in New York, several performances.

Sven tried desperately to get a job on one of the liners over, because he wanted to have a week in New York at least. In those days, the liners would take a week over, then they would stay in port here for a week, sometimes a little more. The people who worked on the liners did their work there. They could live on the boat, and they were free during the day, or evenings.

He of course, was not very old. He was maybe, I don't know, 18, 19? I don't think more. He was trying desperately. There was no way he could afford to buy a ticket or anything. He was told, "No, we don't hire anybody for a week—for a one trip. The people we have are people who stay." I can, well, understand that.

One day he got a call, and they had an emergency and needed a dishwasher in second class—in tourist class. He spoke good English—what they thought was good English in those days. He got the job, came to the United States. If I repeat what he said, he said he spoke such good English that he was asked to serve drinks in the second-class lounge in the evening.

He said, "I worked all evening. I got so many tips, I've never been so rich in my life." Still he did his dishwashing and all, and he said it was fantastic. "And I had so many things," [he said]. He had one sister only, but several brothers. "My sister asked me to buy some things for her, and I knew I could really handle that." He came to the United States that way.

I [unclear] [00:28:30] remember what it looks like at Pier 97, so he came on the Swedish American Line then—worked on the Swedish American Line. When everything was done, he went across the street. There was a newspaper stand even when I came in [19]56 there. He went across the street and bought a newspaper. Opened the paper, it says, "Toscanini has cancelled his performances in New York in favor of the opening of La Scala," [Teatro alla Scala] which had taken a lot of damage {during} the war.

Well, to make the story a little shorter, Sven never heard Toscanini live. But that was his first visit. At that visit, he apparently got to see the little house behind the brick house. It was because they were Norwegian. It was a young couple who lived there. This must have been after Margaret Wise Brown. Needless to say, she was long gone by then. But so he got to see the little house, and he thought, "If I ever come to the United States, which I hope I will, to live, then that's where I'm going to live." **[00:30:00]**

Zapol: How did he know these Norwegians who were living there?

Bernhard: I think he met someone on the boat, some family, who knew someone who was there. I don't know how they connected and how he met them. But he first saw the Cobble Court uptown quite long before he came to live or immigrated to the United States.

In 1956, when I said to you he came here a few months before me, he came as an immigrant. He had the green card. Just like I had.

Zapol: how did he get the green card? What was that for?

Bernhard: He worked in the publicity or the advertising department for The Norwegian American Line in Stockholm. He came here, transferred by them to their office here.

Zapol: I see, I see.

Bernhard: That was the reason when he came as an immigrant.

Zapol: But by the time you met him he was a guide doing other work.

Bernhard: At that time, he was not with the Norwegian American Line anymore. He then worked for a travel company.

Zapol: He was doing tour guiding.

Bernhard: Tour guiding and arranging tours and stuff like that.

Zapol: Mainly for Scandinavians?

Bernhard: {To} this country.

Zapol: Then he must have known New York quite well.

Bernhard: Oh, yes. Yes. He worked also for the Norwegian Information Service. It's hard for me to say exactly what he did, but I know he did some music programs for a person there—must have been a project of some kind, but it was some music program for WQXR—for this person, who was very interested in music. He did Scandinavian music programs for WQXR on the order from this person who worked at the Norwegian Information Service.

Zapol: This music through line continues.

Bernhard: Yeah. Yeah.

Zapol: Tell me how did Sven—I understand that he lived there at the Little House before you did.

Bernhard: Oh, absolutely.

Zapol: How did he come to live there, at 1335 York, right?

Bernhard: 1335 York Avenue. Yes, yes. It was because these friends who lived there, friends of his—Before he came to live up there, he lived at East 25th Street with some other fellows. You know, a couple of other guys. I don't know exactly who or how many. When he took over to live at 1335 York Avenue [it was] because his Norwegian friends who lived there moved back to Norway. He then was able to come and live there.

The woman, Mrs. Healy [phonetic] [00:33:24], who owned the property, she lived on the second floor in the brick house—that beautiful Victorian brick house.

Zapol: He moved in, and were their other people in the house then, or did he lived alone?

Bernhard: I think he was basically alone. He might have had friends who stayed there sometimes, but I think in the very beginning, mostly, it was him who was responsible for the rental.

Zapol: Do you have any stories about his life there before you moved in?

Bernhard: Yes. He restored the house, did all the—a lot of work.

Zapol: What kind of work did he do?

Bernhard: When he lived there, the heating system was radiators with kerosene.

Zapol: With?

Bernhard: Individual radiators with kerosene. The first time I came there, I thought it smelled of that. I didn't like it.

Zapol: The kerosene was really pungent?

Bernhard: Yes. I believe it actually probably wasn't legal to rent that out. I think this is why he didn't have a contract on paper. I don't think it was really legal to do that. Maybe I shouldn't even say that, because I don't know one hundred percent, but I could understand it. **[00:35:08]**

The deal he made with Mrs. Healy was he was to install central heating from the house in front, which had oil heating—regular. Then she was giving him a contract. He dug a ditch in through the cobblestone into there and did this heating system for the two-story little house. He did a lot of other work, restored it and made it nice and {I didn't get a contract} from Mrs. Healy.

Zapol: We were speaking before that your husband was very—though he was an intellectual, he was very handy. He was very capable. You said that his father was an artist, a woodblock artist.

Bernhard: Woodcutter.

Zapol: Woodcutter. How do you think Sven learned to be so handy, to be so capable?

Bernhard: I think they were a big family in Sweden, and he learned it from his brothers probably. Though I think he probably was almost more handy. I know that they were, but I didn't live with them, so I really don't know. I couldn't say, but he was very detail-minded also. He didn't do a sloppy job. He was very good at that.

I think all his brothers became engineers. I think there maybe was something there in the, you know, tendency to do things well and in detail—maybe an engineer's mind. He was good at electric stuff. Very good. Later on in life, I mean if anything broke, all I would do was give it to him, and he would usually fix anything.

Zapol: That's very nice, yeah. You mentioned that he made all of these repairs. It sounded like he was very passionate about the house from the beginning.

Bernhard: He was. Yes. Yes.

Zapol: Why do you think that was?

Bernhard: I—

Zapol: Or how did that start?

Bernhard: I do know actually, he told me that Mrs. Healy had promised him that if she ever wanted to sell, she would tell him first. But that did not happen.

Zapol: Tell me more about her and who she was.

Bernhard: I don't know much about—I met her once, but I don't know her much. In my early days of coming there, she moved and was with a daughter of hers in California. I never got to know her. I wish I had, because I think these Norwegian and Swedish boys who were in this house, she's sometimes sent them notes and saying she 'heard wonderful music, but—'

I remember one where they had had a party. In order to come to the little house, you had to go through the hallway of the first floor of the brick house. One note said, "I couldn't hardly stand there. The place reeked of liquor,"—of alcohol—"as I walked through there."

Zapol: Just even that passageway.

Bernhard: The passageway. She thought that was a little bit too much. I don't blame her. I did have some of her letters, because my husband left them, but I don't know where they are. I might not even have them, or some day I might come across them. **[00:40:03]**

Zapol: How did that family come into ownership of the land, or what's the relationship as far as you know?

Bernhard: I understood that the place uptown was originally a dairy farm. Who built it, if her grandparents built it— I don't know exactly how far back. There was a doorknocker on the brick house that read, "1810." We moved that doorknocker with us. We took it off the brick house and moved it with us down to Charles Street.

However, Suri [Beiler] tells me that they never saw it, so what happened to it in the meantime, I don't know. My impression was always that that doorknocker was for the brick house [and] that the wooden house in the back was older—the one that is now on Charles Street. I understood that she partly grew up there. I thought it was her grandparents, it might have been even older. I don't know if they built it or not.

But I was always told that it was built somewhere around 1780, 1785. That is something I cannot vouch for. I don't know, but it certainly goes way back.

Zapol: This was through conversations with Sven—

Bernhard: Yes.

Zapol: —and then conversations he had with her.

Bernhard: Had with her, yes. There is still a clapboard wall. If you face the house and the door and out, where the stairs goes up to the second floor, that was originally an outdoor wall. I have a book here written by a fellow, Shaw [phonetic—Charles G. Shaw?] [00:42:22]—New York. Oddly enough, I think I have it here. I can show it to you. There is a picture of this house. He was a friend of Margaret Wise Brown.

That was then still clapboard, but then it was enclosed and became almost like a porch area. We called it a 'winter garden.' In the back there is where you have the kitchen. Now, of course, the current owners have added on there, so both on the height and on the width.

Originally, they lived upstairs, and the animals were downstairs. The heat from the animals, and the heat from the kitchen stove, that's all the heat you had. When we lived in the house uptown, the first floor was a brick floor, and that brick floor was laid directly on a dirt floor. When we moved the house, you could clearly see the dirt floor under the bricks. That, of course, was where the animals were originally.

Zapol: Can you take me on a tour of the house as it was uptown in Yorkville? You said you would walk through the passageway in the brick house to get to it.

Bernhard: Through the passageway, you came into a cobblestone garden. The cobblestone garden are the same cobblestones that now are laying in front of the house up to the gate. We took them with us. My husband and I put them back. When we put them back, it was like seeing an old friend, because you could even see some old paint that you had splashed on some of those cobblestones. You'd go, "Oh, I remember this stone."

Those stones are from uptown. I could tell you a story that was very much part of the reason why we moved the house—or why we came to move the house. I was only off two days a month. That was, buyers were only off two days a month—except Sundays, of course, because you were not open Sundays in those days. **[00:44:59]**

I was home [one] day. I'm not sure if it was a Saturday. Maybe. Probably. Maybe not. But it was a weekday. Saturday, probably. I was doing things upstairs. This is uptown now. Suddenly, I'm hearing some noise. I ran to look at the window, and here is the cobblestone

garden. Close [to the] brick house, I see three little boys there. They are doing adventure tricks, and I'm thinking, where did they come from?

It had started a little tearing down some of the houses in the block. Not much. Very little.

Zapol: The Archdiocese had started—

Bernhard: They climbed over from probably pretty high, because I was sort of amazed. How did they get in here? To me, the only way in would have been through that hallway. I opened the window. "What are you doing down there?" I was irritated by them. "What are you doing down there?" They look up. "Is this a house?" one of them said. I said, "Yeah, what do you think it is?" I was still irritated. The little guy said, "Does people live there?" I said, "Well, what do you think I am?"—my answer. "Oh." He said, "Oh, lady, I'm sorry."

Then I realized, boy, I'm bad. I said, "Wait a minute. I'll be right down." I went down, and I invited them for cookies and a soda or something. They are in there, the three of them, with me, downstairs. He said, "This is a funny house." I said, "Yeah, it is. It's not like the house you live in now." It's small, and they're looking.

I said, "Yeah, you know this is the way people lived many, many years ago. Long before your grandma was born. Long, long time ago. Animals lived down here, and they didn't have water. They had to walk to 79th Street, Lexington, to wherever the well was nearest. That's where they had to walk and carry their water home, here."

I said, "They didn't have any other heat then. The animals were here, and the heat from them, they closed the doors and made sure the heat stayed in. They lived upstairs. That's where they slept, and that's where they ate. They had a little kitchen up there."

Those little guys got very interested. It was kind of fun, in a way. Later on that evening, my husband comes home from work. I told him what had happened. I said, "You know, those guys were really nice fellows." I would say, 7, 8, 9—just little boys, three of them. I remember my husband saying, he said, "It's really a shame if this house would be torn down." I said, "How are other generations ever going to know how things were?"

One day he said to me, you know, "How do you think you could handle this," he said, "if we were able to move the house? It's going to have to be in the last minute. You think you can handle it? [There's] going to be stress." That was the very beginning of the thought of moving.

Zapol: Before we go into that story of moving, can you talk to me about how you learned that you were, one way or another, going to have to leave this area?

Bernhard: We got the letter saying that the entire—we had no idea that it had been sold to the Archdiocese. We got the letter from them saying they had bought the entire property. They were the owners, and they would want everyone, including us, to vacate.

Zapol: Now you said, by this time had the destruction happened in the blocks at all around here? **[00:50:04]**

Bernhard: No, I don't think anything. I think this story with the little boys is after we had—

Zapol: Right. I see.

Bernhard: We banked the rent, or whatever. We got a lawyer first. There were many things that happened then. The Archdiocese, they had a lawyer, and I remember meeting with him. They were all very nice. I have no complaints or anything. They were very nice.

We really wanted to see the house moved. I felt very bad for many people in the tenements all around. There were tenements all around there, because there were many people who would have a hard time to afford to find something they could afford. [It] was not the high-class section. Just very regular working people.

Next door to us was a marvelous old one-story church. There was an antique shop on the same side as we were in that block that had a grass roof. I remember the antique dealer's name was Basso—B-A-S-S-O—father and son.

Zapol: What ethnicity, or what background do you think?

Bernhard: I think they were Italian. But they were also many—there were people, Hungarian. Many, many. The church next door, I don't remember what—that, if you stood on York Avenue and faced the brick house, it was on the right side.

I know that the Archdiocese—I can't blame them for wanting the property, and we know that things change. Sometimes people who had been there a long time don't want to see the change. You have to respect who owns it. I didn't like the idea to pay people to leave their homes. I thought it would be much more fair to find them a place to live. I just didn't like the idea that everything can be done for money, if you have money. I thought it was more important

that these people had their homes. What I mostly would have {liked} at that time was that we would have gotten help with finding a place to where we could move the house, because that was huge for us.

Zapol: How did you do that?

Bernhard: We started walking on 96th Street—east, west, east, west. Skipped the 50s and 60s because we knew we couldn't afford it. Anyplace where we found an abandoned house, we would try to find out if it was for sale and who owned it. We learned quickly that a parking lot made so much money that they usually were not interested—they made that much—not to sell.

I remember that we found—it was enormous. I remember on East 10th Street, we found a property that we thought we could buy. The problem was that it was one of these typical New York City lots, twenty-five feet wide and one hundred feet deep. With that new little winter garden, if I so say—not the original, but new winter garden—was twenty-six and a half [feet].

My husband had met a fellow, a young architect, Bill Shopsin. William C. Shopsin. He was a young architect. We told him we really wanted to move the house to save the house. We later on hired him. He is the one who found the property at 121 Charles Street.

Zapol: What experience had he had before working with you that you knew— **[00:54:56]**

Bernhard: He didn't have any. Bill Shopsin was a very young architect. I don't think he had had any experience, certainly none with us. I can't recall how we met him. I know he was interested in old homes and all of that. We did not want to accept money from the church to move and never did. Did not want to do that.

Zapol: I have here, it says in 1965 was when the Healy family sell the property to the Archdiocese. How did you gain ownership of the house? How did that process happen?

Bernhard: Well, the article that I showed you upstairs, the first one before the house was moved, was in 1966. That is probably the time it took between lawyers. What happened is that our lawyer said one day, "You know, I don't think I can keep you here very much longer. You know that eventually you'll have to move," which we understood. It's not our property.

My husband would go to court with our lawyer, and the Archdiocese lawyer would be there. He said it was kind of a strange court system, because the lawyers go to the judge and talk

to the judge. Part of the reason one lawyer was there was because of us. Then they come back to whatever you would call Sven here. One day they, Sven was asked to come up to the judge and was told that he was going to have to {move}—Sven said, "Yep, well, I'll move out, but I wonder if I could take the house with me when I move."

Our lawyer said, "I thought he was crazy." The judge said something, "Could I hear this again?" [laughs] He said, "I wonder, when I move, could I be allowed to take the house with me?" The Archdiocese agreed to that. They didn't want the house. They wanted to tear it down. They wouldn't have to tear it down. I have to say, their lawyer was extremely accommodating. {Sven} was given a date. "You have to move out by this date. You can take the house with you."

We got the paper saying that. We got the date. I have it. I even have it here. When we got all the necessary papers, and the ownership to the house—not the property, the house. They were very accommodating when we needed an extension for being able to get all the permits required. Mayor Lindsay was very helpful. So was Percy Sutton. You saw pictures up there of Percy Sutton. [He] was there with us at the time that we moved the house.

They were very helpful. I have a letter from Percy Sutton asking someone to help this young Swedish couple to get the papers ready for this move of this old house. I have the letter. I know I have one from Percy Sutton and one from Mayor Lindsay. That helped a lot. There were a lot of papers.

Zapol: What was required? What did you have to get together for the move?

Bernhard: We had to get the permits from almost every department—the sewer department, all kinds of departments—to be able to take the house on the street and move it.

Zapol: That's the physical move itself—

Bernhard: We hired a company who had done a lot of house moving. They were out from Long Island. I mean it was not unusual to move a house on Long Island, or in New Jersey. It was unusual to move a house in Manhattan. Yes.

Zapol: Before we actually do the move, the architect had found the site on Charles Street. What made you choose that site and choose to move there? Did you know anyone who lived in that area? **[01:00:05]**

Bernhard: No.

Zapol: What was your impression of that area right there?

Bernhard: It was warehouses. Basically warehouses. Garbage places, combined with some beautiful one-family or brownstone houses. Tenements. Many tenements. Even the brownstones were made into several families living there, but they were also here and there in nice one-family brownstones, often something from mid-1800s—maybe a professional person, maybe a captain, maybe someone—like [Judith] Stonehill's house, for instance was built in, if I remember correctly, 1832.

So they were very much a combination. But there were enormous traffic by trucks [in the] early mornings because of the warehouses.

Zapol: What made you decide yes, this will be the place?

Bernhard: It was big enough, wide enough. We could buy it. There was really not that much to choose from.

Zapol: How did you find the resources for the property? What was the—

Bernhard: Well, I remember going to the bank across—I tried to save some money. It cost money to move the house. We, Sven and I, paid for everything, but we took a loan on the property. It wasn't easy to get a loan, because who wants to—no bank wanted to lend money on a two-hundred-year-old house.

We had to do a home improvement loan, which had higher interest. My husband had saved some money, and I had saved some money. I had—

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Bernhard:—a good job and were making good money. I remember going to the bank and [taking] out my savings to buy the lot. That was in the Bowery Savings Bank across from [B.] Altman. Originally I remember being a person who was always business-minded. I had learned how important it was to always save something. In the days when I was making $42 gross, I saved $1 a week. I didn't go to the bank every week, but every so often I went there and put it in.

Then as I got better jobs, higher paid and well-paid—very well-paid, eventually—I saved my money. That was something I had learned as a business young woman. Save your money. Save it for what you want to buy. I, as a kid, saved for Christmas presents to buy Christmas presents for my siblings. I saved then. We bought a property and could handle it. I can't remember if the property was either $27,000 or $29,000. I just can't remember which it was, one or the other.

Zapol: Then this long process of getting the permits. Was there anything else that happened before the actual physical move downtown? Were there any other stories about that?

Bernhard: Yes, there were.

Zapol: Tell me.

Bernhard: I'm not sure I even want to tell you them. There were some difficult stories. There were some difficult things. One evening I actually, [pauses] I remember we had a late dinner. My husband was clearing up and doing the dishes. I went to bed, and I'm hearing glass. I went to look, and here was a brick, came through the window in our kitchen. My husband got hit here. Now, he wore glasses, which was probably a good thing.

Zapol: He got hit in the head on the side, on the temple?

Bernhard: Yes. It was probably a good thing he wore glasses. I took the phone and called the police. Nothing was found, and the police—I couldn't understand. I thought, "What's the matter with Sven?" He was like almost out. What's the matter with him? Nor could I find the brick.

Well, the brick had turned out to be in the dish sink under the soap, so I couldn't see it until later. I thought the police wondered, what was the matter? There was glass all over. They never found, of course, who it was. But we had that happen. It happened once when I was alone home. It came thought another window, a brick.

We never knew who it was, but it was not pleasant, and it was right before we moved the house.

Zapol: What is your suspicion about what that was about?

Bernhard: Somebody must have disliked something. I think. I don't know. I don't know who it was, but it made it hard for us, or very difficult for us. Our doorbell was outside the front house on the street, and they would just ring. You would run there, and nobody would be there.

These things did not happen until shortly before we moved the house. In other words, at the time we moved the house, almost everything all around was gone.

Zapol: You think the neighborhood is changing, or is this related to the fact that you're getting attention because of the move?

Bernhard: I don't know if some people liked the move very much. But it might be some people who didn't like that we fought it. I don't know. I don't know.

Zapol: Did you ever have second-guess then? Sven had said, "This will be stressful." Was there ever a moment where you thought, "Maybe I'm not going to do this?"

Bernhard: I think we were so far ahead by then that we were determined to do what we had started out to do. We never thought we were going to make any money on it, of course not. We knew that in some towns in Sweden, or in Stockholm, a lot of the old [buildings] then, they were already into saving some of the old. You can't save everything. But so we felt that something should be left of the very oldest in New York. **[00:05:24]**

The one thing I dislike is when I hear—which I did after we sold it. Once I sat across in a restaurant on Charles Street, and I hear a waitress say to some people [who] were asking, "What is that little house over there?" She said, "Oh, that was moved here from New Jersey." [laughs] Maybe that's a reason I'm talking to you, because I really like it if you don't—Let it be true, whatever it is. A true story.

Zapol: Right. There were these moments of difficulty, but then you're approaching the day of the move itself. How did you prepare the house for the move?

Bernhard: We got an apartment on the corner of Charles Street and Hudson, a small apartment. We moved there. Friends helped us to move, and we got there. The company who we hired to move the house had to work on the house ahead of time to strengthen it, to build it. Remember, the house sat on the ground up there. They had to take down the porch area around the staircase.

It had to be moved separately, because it would have been hard both with the trees on the sidewalks—

That was another—we had to get permission so we could go down the street—which route to take when you move a house, so that you don't damage some of the trees that are on the streets and the corners. You had to pay. So this part had to be completely taken down. There was quite a bit of work that that company had to do before that Sunday morning.

Zapol: You had moved out while they were doing all that work.

Bernhard: Oh, yeah. They had to work on it. Of course, electricity has to be disconnected. Plumbing had to be disconnected. We have city sewers in New York. All of that thing had to be done. It was quite a bit. You can't move a house without those permits—to be able to do that.

Zapol: Tell me about the day of the move itself. Where were you? What was happening? It seems there was a lot of press. How did that happen?

Bernhard: We were, in our home. We, of course, went uptown. It was a Sunday morning. It was snowing a little, but it was a big day. We rode with the mover in his car after the house. That was a big day, but there were not many people out.

Each precinct had to be notified and give police escort for the move.

Zapol: Each separate precinct?

Bernhard: Each precinct, yeah.

Zapol: You would have to meet the police—

Bernhard: Then another police precinct took over. I remember that I got the last permit on Friday before the move. That was the sewer department. What made it hard was for the people who work in these departments, they were not used to it and didn't know what to do and how to handle it. I think some were afraid, "I don't want to do something wrong here and lose my job."

It wasn't easy for them.

Zapol: I read something about your difficulty getting a permit for the foundation. Was that after— **[00:09:48]**

Bernhard: That was long after. The contractor who was supposed to and who did the foundation said he couldn't get the permits. I mean we did this move in early March—March 5 was the move—and in August, he still didn't have the permission to do the foundation. We only had the permission to park the house there. We didn't have permission to do the foundation. Everyone expected that you would get it. The contractor [went] back to the Building Department, couldn't get the permission. What do you do? One day, I took a day off. I had to take a weekday, which was rare for me to get. I took a day off and went with the contractor down to the Building Department. I knew I had to have it before I left.

Do you know why? The Building Department didn't know [whether] to consider it an alteration or new. OK? They didn't know what to consider it. That is why nobody wanted to sign the permission. Well, when I left, I had the permission, and immediately the work started.

The house actually was rolled on wooden stock that you put soap on, over to the foundation.

Zapol: Wow. That must be very—it must be terrifying to see.

Bernhard: It rolled over the foundation. The house doesn't lean on the building that is behind it. No. It has its own stone brickwork all the way up. There's probably this much space between our brick wall and their brick wall.

Zapol: Before we go there, the actual day of moving the physical house—what was the route taken? What are your memories of that route? Any particular issues turning corners or anything?

Bernhard: No, we didn't have any problems anywhere. The route itself is actually in *the New York Times* upstairs.

Zapol: Are there particular moments that you remember?

Bernhard: No, not anymore than I was so happy, finally. At least we are starting the end, even if it wasn't over. [pauses] No. Can I—?

I mean you are glad for every step you took, as you came down to Washington Street. Then we went all the way down to Christopher Street, turned left. Then into Greenwich Street, to Charles, which is only one—10th Street—and then to Charles.

There were several people there to meet us.

Zapol: Who was there to meet you?

Bernhard: There were a lot of neighborhood children and other people. I think, and Percy Sutton had—you've probably seen this—

Zapol: The photograph?

Bernhard: Yes, or where he's saying that he was looking for the house, then he stopped a policeman or stopped somebody and said, "Did you see a house come by?" The policeman said, "Well, if it wasn't you, Mr. Sutton, I would think you were wacky," or something. Oh, so it was a lot of funny comments.

The man in charge of the moving company [was there], the architect was there, Percy Sutton was there, several other people. It was horrible weather. Cold. Raw. Snow, a little snow—like big flakes of snow. It was almost at the freezing point there, a raw morning. But it was a good morning.

Zapol: Was there press there when you arrived?

Bernhard: Yes, they were. They were. I don't remember who, but they were. There are so many photographs taken with people from the *New York Times* and all the local papers—from *Daily News*, also from United Press [International], which sends all over the world. **[00:15:05]**

Zapol: What do you think it was about this that captured people's interest and imagination?

Bernhard: No house had been moved for so [long]—who knows when? I was told [it had been] more than a hundred years since any house had been moved in Manhattan. I think that was a big factor and that someone cared to move an old house. It would have probably cost less to build a new one than the move and everything cost. What are you moving? A shell. Everything—a lot of things had to be done. We moved the old fireplace. That's the old original fireplace in there, still today.

There were a lot of things. The kitchen was made new. Instead of being upstairs, we put it downstairs. Of course, all plumbing, new, you know. The main part of the house, is still the old wood.

Zapol: Do you think that this connection to Margaret Wise Brown was a part of the public interest in the house?

Bernhard: It wasn't talked as much about then, and it wasn't our reason for moving the house. I cannot say that it was. We knew of it well, but I probably didn't know that Margaret Wise Brown was so celebrated as she was already then. I didn't know. I don't think it ever would have been our main reason even if we had known more about her.

Even though I like a lot of what she has done—all of it. I don't know anything I didn't like about her when I later on read more about her. But I didn't know enough. That wouldn't have been the reason. It wasn't. It was simply to save something for history that we loved, because we loved New York. I still love to go to New York. I always loved it. I lived there so long, too.

I think it's such a fabulous city. It has everything, so why shouldn't it also have some old things saved. And the three little boys did a good job.

Zapol: So everything had to be made new—the plumbing—not everything, but a lot of these details. The infrastructure had to be made new. How long was it from when the house was moved to when you were able to move in?

Bernhard: We moved in Memorial [Day] Weekend, 1968. We moved the house March 5, 1967. The foundation, it was August before anything could be done there on the property. We moved in, as I said, Memorial Day Weekend. Then everything was not even connected in the kitchen. When you want to make a cup of coffee the first morning, you had to go to the bathroom and get water and put it on the stove. It wasn't ready, but we were dying to move in.

Zapol: What was that first day like?

Bernhard: Well, you find you're getting closer, and you're finally there. Then [we] started to work to do the garden—do things like that.

Zapol: In what ways was this land different? How did you choose the place where the house itself was placed on the lot?

Bernhard: To really answer that, I think that was the architect. That is where the architect, Bill Shopsin came in [and] handled that. I don't know exactly why, why it was put right there. Of

course, we also did that stone wall against Charles Street. Then on the other side, we did a great metal fence in redwood, there.

Zapol: You said that upstairs there had been brownstones, or there had been homes on the site before that had been destroyed? **[00:20:05]**

Bernhard: Yeah, two homes, I was told. I never saw them, but I was told there were two brownstone houses that somebody had bought and was himself renovating. By mistake. he took down a main beam.

Zapol: Everything collapsed?

Bernhard: Collapsed. When we dug the foundation, loads of old bricks were in there. That would have been those old bricks, I guess.

Zapol: Were what you used for the—

Bernhard: We used those bricks for the back wall of our house. You don't see it, but it's there.

Zapol: And your choice to have a gate in front?

Bernhard: Where the cobblestones are, where you have the wide gate, the driving gate, then the walking gate—we felt that a driving gate was important. You know how you walk around some house, and you wonder what it looks like in there, and you want to peek in? You're almost embarrassed if somebody sees you doing it? We felt that people should be able to look in without having to peek.

We also felt that it serves as a security for us to look out. You can pull your shades, which you do. But we felt that it serves both ways to have that drive in gate. We never kept a car there. There was a sidewalk cut and everything on the sidewalk there, but we just felt that it serves as a security for us to be able to look out. Yet we didn't want to have to open a big gate to come into the house—out and in.

We thought it looked better, too, to have it that way.

Zapol: Tell me about the neighborhood at that time. You did speak a little bit about it. What was your impression of who was there?

Bernhard: The police station was on the next block—not where it is now, towards the Hudson [River]. The police station was down there. I think that's apartments now, that building

Zapol: Over on Greenwich?

Bernhard: On the other side of Greenwich Street towards the Hudson River. That block was a police station. Later on, they moved to where they are now. Warehouses. As I said before, loads of traffic early in the morning—trucks.

Zapol: Did you feel safe in this neighborhood? What were the edges of the—

Bernhard: No, we felt pretty safe. We did have burglaries later on. We had several. I was attacked once from the back while walking home. It was light out, maybe six or seven o'clock in the evening. But that can happen anywhere. We felt, we felt pretty safe there, but there were times when we had to call the police. Yes. Somebody even tried to break in when we were home late at night.

Zapol: But this didn't happen when you were first there in the late '60s.

Bernhard: No.

Zapol: It happened more in the [19]70s or [19]80s.

Bernhard: I think later on. I don't know if it was people looking for drugs. I don't know. I don't know. But we certainly lived there, and when we didn't live there, we always had somebody. When we were away, we had somebody who looked after. We also had a dog. Partly the reason for the dog was also safety and security—to hear.

Zapol: Right. Yeah.

Bernhard: But we loved it there.

Zapol: Yeah, tell me about your relationship to your neighbors.

Bernhard: Oh, we loved it there. We thought it was a wonderful area. We had a nice big lawn, flowers. Loads. Planted a cherry tree and made pies from it. The ivy that you have there, I planted originally inside the wall. I don't know if the cherry tree is still there, but I remember we

went down to a place way downtown—a garden place and took the cherry tree home in a taxi and planted it. **[00:25:04]**

We let—anybody who wanted to pick cherries on the outside of the wall could take them. They were wild cherries, so they were wonderful to pies. That was a very, very—for me, it was a wonderful time in my life.

Zapol: What was your relationship to your neighbors? Who were some of the people that lived around you?

Bernhard: Well, all around us, if you're talking the early days, there were warehouses. it wasn't really—behind us [the] tower, that has those beautiful windows, arched windows. There were warehouses.

Zapol: The red brick?

Bernhard: Yeah. Right across. The corner across from us on Greenwich Street, right across—that big building? There were warehouses. Loading docks.

Zapol: At night, it would be quiet. But in the early morning it was when the—

Bernhard: Really early. But you knew that, and you get used to it, just like you get used to hearing the train if you live near a train station. Same thing. You get used to it. The thing that was harder to get used to that is a huge improvement now: right across there was hardly a day that I didn't have to go and pick up all kinds of paper garbage at the gate, because right across there—I think Donna Karan's late husband bought that property. He had a studio there—

Zapol: There is a studio. The gallery there, yeah—

Bernhard: I think Donna Karan owns it still. Anyway, that was a paper place. They, I guess, opened their doors a lot to get air in, but the paper would fly all over Charles Street. Of course, certainly right across the street to our place. I used to be so, "Oh, that paper place!" I even have some pictures that my husband took, because it looked horrible.

Zapol: There would just be paper up against your wall.

Bernhard: Yeah. Not a day that you didn't have to pick up. That's a big improvement. I would have liked to have seen that when lived there.

Zapol: What about your relationship to the Landmarks—the Commission process. The home became a landmark, right, within a couple of years? There was the Neighborhood Preservation Council.

Bernhard: I don't think it did. I don't remember that. I do not remember. I don't remember that. it ever never did as long as we owned it.

Zapol: It's funny. I only bring it up because it says here that it became a protected landmark in 1969 with a designation of the Greenwich Village Historic District—because the area became a Historic District in 1969.

Bernhard: I knew that the area was a historic district.

Zapol: Yes. I think—

Bernhard: But I didn't know any more.

Zapol: I see.

Bernhard: I wouldn't have minded. You know? At all. Nor would my husband.

Zapol: Did you have any relationship with some of the preservationists, like Jane Jacobs?

Bernhard: I don't think anybody ever contacted us. I don't think so—unless someone can remind me, or if I go back and read some of the articles and can remember something—but not that I remember.

Zapol: No, I just wondered. Was there a cultural scene, artists, in the neighborhood? Did you have a sense of that shifting during the time that you were living there?

Bernhard: We actually sold the property in [19]86, but we moved out of there and had somebody look after the house. We moved out in December [19]85, because my husband also moved his business out at that time. He had a travel business—wholesale travel. [We] moved out

to Rowayton [Connecticut]. There were definitely so many warehouses that had changed into apartments.

The place across the street from us with all the papers was still there. That had not changed. But so many had changed. I think you definitely knew there was a coming area, more and more.

Zapol: How did you get the sense, besides the apartment buildings? How else did you get a sense that the area was shifting to a more desirable neighborhood? **[00:30:07]**

Bernhard: More people living there—people who bought the condos that were done. Yeah, so more people living there. Then when we first came there and came to live there in 1968, so there were big differences there.

Zapol: Did you ever socialize or go out to places around there?

Bernhard: We knew some people, and one of our longtime friends of course is the Stonehills. We still keep contact. They moved there a year after us.

Zapol: Judith Stonehill, one of the trustees at the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

Bernhard: Yeah. I remember when the first person in that family who I met was John Stonehill. We were working on putting back the cobblestones when John came walking by. This is in [19]68 in the spring, probably. There he comes walking by with his daughter sitting up on his shoulders—Alexandra—and introduced himself. They had just bought the house down in the next block.

I remember the people who lived there before, but I can't say that I know them. You see, we hadn't lived much there, because we didn't move into the house until Memorial Day Weekend in [19]68.

Zapol: Right. Right. tell me about.

Bernhard: In, yeah, in [19]68. Right.

Zapol: What about in terms of restaurants or bars or anything like that?

Bernhard: Oh, wonderful restaurants all over the place there.

Zapol: At the time you would go—you said there was a place across the street, but even—

Bernhard: They were up the Hudson, over towards Bleecker, downtown—all over the place. They were easy to find. Both of us were working, so we would go out at least once or twice a week for dinner. I also remember a little girl in the neighborhood, one day, who came to me and she said, "Do you and Mr. Bernhard always have candles on your dining table every night?" she says. I said, "Yes." "For dinner?" she said.

But that is all gone, those people. They're not tenements anymore. But they were—

Zapol: That girl lived in a tenement.

Bernard: She was one of the little girls in one of the pictures.

Zapol: What background do you think she had, or what family background?

Bernhard: I don't know. I never knew her mom or who she was. I don't know.

Zapol: You saw the neighborhood changing to being more desirable. Were there other things you noticed in terms of neighborhood change? You mentioned drugs, so I don't know if that affected or if you saw any of the effects of drugs in the neighborhood.

Bernhard: Not any more than I had—I think some people who tried to break in were definitely drug-related, unfortunately. But I think that that is what happened.

Zapol: How did you, why do you say 'definitely?'

Bernhard: I think because of the way they were. Who is there?

Zapol: A gardener, perhaps?

Bernhard: Oh, yeah. OK. I think that they were. I remember one man who was caught. The way they acted and behaved. Yes. Often no identities on them—I mean one who was caught, when the police came, he was actually sitting [and] hiding near the kitchen door behind a bush.

I think that was a certain period of time where there might have been more difficulties with that in New York.

Zapol: Yeah, I think so, too. What about major national or international events, or even local events? Like you were there around the time of the Stonewall Rebellion, or even the Weatherman bombing on 11th Street. Were you aware of those things that were happening around you?

Bernhard: I remember the Weatherman bombing. I remember that. But not enough to really tell you anything or say anything. Some other things I remember that happened: big problems with the subway—but we were still uptown then. Or with the electricity—when all the electricity went out in Manhattan, but we were still uptown. That was before we moved.

Zapol: Now wasn't there another major power outage in 1970 or 1972?

Bernhard: Yeah. I think there was also. Yes. Yes. I don't remember that we had any problem, specifically. We loved it. We had a good time there. I can't say—all right, you know, we had a few burglaries. There's no question. I mean we did, but it wasn't anything that was disastrous. I mean even our dog got out. Somebody on the street—but eventually I found her at the ASPCA [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals].

Zapol: Oh really?

Bernhard: Yeah. She had gone. I guess she had gotten hungry, and she went to an Italian restaurant. They didn't know. They called ASPCA, and they picked her up. I went there and got her.

Zapol: Is there a particular—you were there for quite some time, so it's hard to single out a particular day or memory, but when you remember the house at 121 Charles Street, is there a particular day that comes to mind? Can you tell me a story about a particular memory?

Bernhard: I could tell you a story about then. Somewhere in the '70s—I think the early '70s—Halloween evening, there was a Swedish famous man's choir at the end of a concert tour. Eighty-five men. Singers. All from all kinds of walks of lives. All had one thing in common—they loved to sing, and they were good.

They had a concert in Carnegie Hall. We had invited all of them to come down to our house after the concert. We had 115 people there and served hot dogs on the grill and potato chips and—

[Dog barking]

Zapol: So, yes. If you can just back up a little bit and just say that you invited everybody over.

Bernhard: The reason they were invited was simply that it was one person who we knew well, who was in charge of Stockholm's Tourist Bureau or something. They all came after the concert—that meant around eleven o'clock. We provided them with buses from their hotel. They went home, changed into regular street attire from tuxedos and came down to our house.

We just did hot dogs on the grill. [The] Stonehills and other neighbors helped and served just beer and soft drinks and liquor. But not cocktails. That was just too much.

They sang in the garden in Swedish, in English, in Italian, or whatever languages. We had told the police of it. People came. It was a beautiful October 31st night. People came out and sat on the stoops and listened. All over, windows open. It was just magnificent. It was just a fantastic evening. We had dressed the garden in torches all around, a lot of just candles. It was just a fabulous evening. People who were there will never forget it.

The next morning, my husband stayed home to pick up all the empty glasses all over the place, on the wall and all over, and he said, "So many people came and said 'Thank you for the concert.'" That was also very nice to hear. That was a fabulous evening. But they were not just, they were wonderful singers. There are many recordings of theirs—world-known choir. **[00:40:17]**

Zapol: That sounds beautiful.

Bernhard: We had a wonderful experience when we lived there. At Christmas, there would come a choir—a local choir—to sing Christmas songs. The first times we didn't know that they were coming or had never heard of them. They didn't just come to our house, they went to a few more places. But they always came to our house. The director was a woman who directed them, learned that if she told us ahead of time, we would have the Swedish Christmas drink, *glug*, ready.

They came into the house and sang. They were standing in the stairs, you know, and all over. Sang some Christmas songs. We always thought that they sang a lot better after they left our house. [laughs] That was also a wonderful memory.

Zapol: What influenced your choice to move away from the house?

Bernhard: I have to say we, when we lived in New York, we kept a sailboat in Rye [New York]. We both loved water, loved sailing. I think maybe sometimes when you've been in—you sometimes want to change. We didn't sell the house right away, even after we moved, but we knew—I actually was afraid that my husband was going to miss it too much. I didn't want to sell. I remember saying to him, "If you don't want to sell, let's not. If you think you're not going to like it—" because you're never going to be able to buy something like that back. That's rare.

So we didn't. We waited a half a year after we moved before we sold, but you can't leave a house like that unattended in a big city. It is subject to problems happening. It's never good, anyway, to leave an old house not lived in. But we kept it for half a year after.

Zapol: What happened when you left the house alone then?

Bernhard: Nothing bad happened at all. We sold it. I think maybe it, I don't know, there was some difficulties that I'm not going to say, but not anything more than you could handle. There was nothing wrong with the house or anything.

We moved also the business outside. If we hadn't been able to do that, I don't think we would have sold. But it seems we could. As it turned out, there was maybe—who knows if it was good or not in the long run? We had a wonderful time there, and I love New York. It's hard for me even to go into New York to not go take a cab and go by Charles Street and look. I'm so glad to see it well taken care of.

Zapol: You mentioned the name of the current owner.

Bernhard: I keep contact with her. I talked to her not long ago. She's a very lovely person. My sister from Stockholm was here last [year], late October. We were in New York, and she knew we were coming, and she invited us to come there, which was lovely. Very nice.

She really cares about it, and I like to see that. She has a wonderful story [about] how she came to like the house herself, which you could ask her for. It's just very charming.

Zapol: Because she saw Sven in the doorway, is that right? **[00:44:58]**

Bernhard: She was just a little girl visiting New York with her parents. I thought it was a wonderful story, and today she's the owner of it and has been so long. She's lived there over twenty years, I think. I hope it will always be well looked after. It's kind of nice to see, I think.

I hope a lot of people like it. People used to come, walk down in the late May to look at the first roses, you know, the flowers. I hope people like it. I think most people do.

Zapol: I wonder—we're near the end now—if there's anything that you wanted to say about the house, about the move, that I haven't asked you about that you wanted to share today.

Bernhard: No. Maybe things that I'll think of later, but not—I just think my husband would have been very pleased to see the way it is and to see the interest that has been taken. I think that that would have made him feel very happy that he took the pain of moving and the cost of moving the house.

Zapol: There have been events recently about the house.

Bernhard: Yes, there in all now—the historical society [is] interested. I think that's very, very nice to see. That it needs it. I hope you'll always be that way.

Zapol: Thank you. Thank you for your time today.

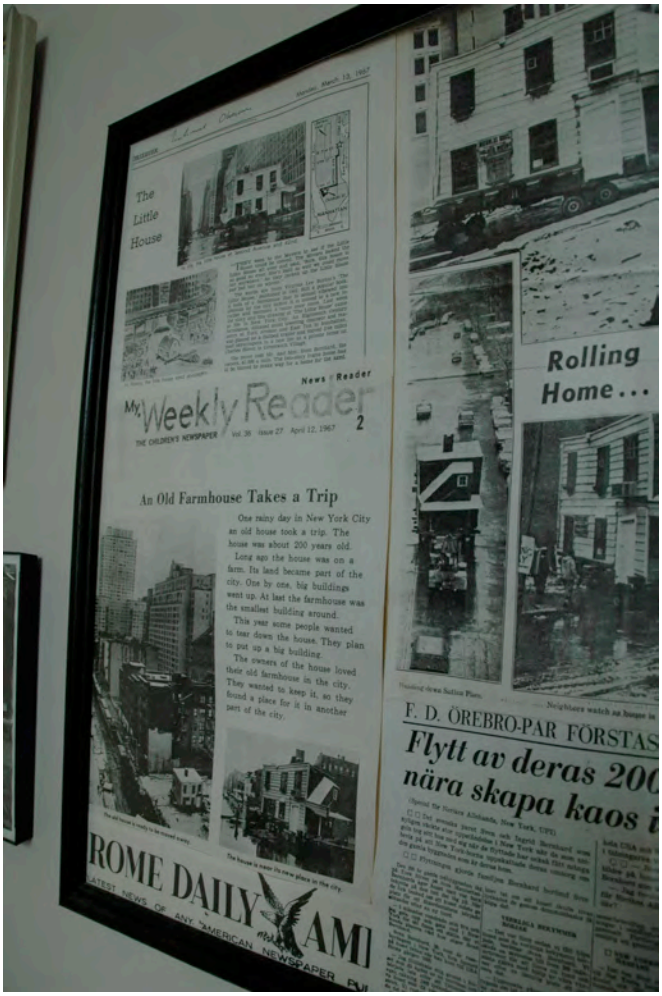
Bernhard: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS, taken and Ingrid Bernhard's home, June 27, 2015


Cobble Court
BUILDING MOVERS


EL TIEMPO
10
TEMEN MUERTE DE
OTRO COMPLICADO
EN ASESINATO JFK
Home
is where the house is


The Little House
News Reader
My Weekly Reader
2
An Old Farmhouse Takes a Trip
Rolling Home...
F. D. ÖREBRO-PAR FÖRSTAS
Flytt av deras 200
nära skapa kaos
ROME DAILY AM


Manhattan country life
The Booming West Village
Love Affair With A House

Chair from historic home which was perhaps a model for a chair in Margaret Wise Brown's books.