



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

Peggy Harlow

Interviewer: Francesco De Salvatore

Narrator: Peggy Harlow

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Lloyd House, 200 North Washington Street, Alexandria, VA, 22314

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Transcriber: Jaclyn Maraldo

Summary:

Peggy Harlow reflects upon her childhood in Massachusetts, Ohio, and New Jersey. It was during this time that she developed an interest in history. She then describes her 20+ year career in the U.S. Navy. Lastly, Peggy recalls her experiences volunteering for Gadsby's Tavern and the Office of Historic Alexandria.

Notes

On page 8, Peggy Harlow speaks about the USS Mercy. She intended to refer to the USS Hope, which is a sister ship to the Sanctuary. It had a post-military function as a non-for-profit that provided hospital care to under-served places worldwide. The organization still exists as Project Hope.

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General	Childhood; Education; Historic Sites; Navy; Volunteering; 1970s; 1980s; Military Women
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Peggy Harlow [00:00:04] Peggy Harlow, [I'm] 75, somehow or other. It's August 22nd, 2023, and we're at the Lloyd House.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:14] Great. My name is Francesco De Salvatore and today is August 22nd, 2023, and we are at the Lloyd House. Great. So, yeah, thanks for being here today, Peggy. And I just want to start with, you know, just maybe starting with where you grew up. Can you tell us a little bit about where you grew up?

Peggy Harlow [00:00:33] Oh, there's lots of where I grew up. We moved around a bit. I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, just down the road from Harvard [University]. Not that my parents had anything to do with that except living on a street called Harvard Street. And we moved around in Massachusetts a little bit and went until I was about five. We moved to Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and I was there for a few years and moved to Agawam, Massachusetts, which is right next to Springfield. And we went out to Ohio for a year and then moved to New Jersey, just outside of Philadelphia, Exit 4 [of the New Jersey Turnpike], which is how one identifies places in New Jersey. And I went through high school and college there and I went to Rutgers [University]-Camden. And I lived home. So I actually went to about nine different schools until I got to college.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:01:48] So can you tell us, like, why did your family move around?

Peggy Harlow [00:01:52] My dad was always willing to take the next promotion someplace. And they were quite willing to move us around and try something new.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:04] And so what were some of your memories from New Jersey?

Peggy Harlow [00:02:08] Oh, let's see. It was pretty flat where we lived. I went to two high schools there and college, and that's pretty much all the same. College for me was just a little bit more, only a slight advance over high school. And you're living home. Nothing really changed there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:37] Can you describe your parents? Who were they?

Peggy Harlow [00:02:40] Ah, my mother and father met in the Navy in World War II. They were sailors. They were in a blimp squadron. And Mother did the admin and Dad was an aviation machinist mate. So they always spoke very highly of their time. Actually they met in Lakehurst, New Jersey. And so that was always sort of a good background thing. That was my way out of the house, really. It was easy to get out. It felt as though [they thought], "Okay. Yes, we don't mind if you go join the Navy right after college." At that time for women, it was only two years of commitment. So that was easy. And I forgot what the question was. Oh, describing my parents.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:30] What were their names?

Peggy Harlow [00:03:33] Um, Bill and Peg. My brother's named Bill. There was absolutely no creativity in the family [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:39] Yeah, just passing on the name.

Peggy Harlow [00:03:46] Yes. As a matter of fact, both of my grandmothers are named Margaret, although they have different middle names. And Margaret Ann apparently would have been my mother's aunt but she died as a baby. So I think that's how she got to be Margaret Ann, so I got to be Margaret Ann. I didn't have a lot of choice in that.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:04:09] Okay, yeah.

Peggy Harlow [00:04:12] But, um, you know my dad was very hard-working. He eventually became a small business finance company person and seemed to be always [emphatically] working. And my mother was always volunteering. She worked a little bit, but not very much. She was mostly with Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts and church stuff and, you know, all that sort of thing. So I was always being dragged to that sort of thing. So I was used to being around volunteers. And they're very house proud. So used to, you know, doing things for the house and that sort of thing.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:05] So yeah. Could you maybe talk about in your childhood, you had mentioned to me earlier how when people came to visit, you would maybe go visit historical sites. Can you describe those visits and what they meant for you?

Peggy Harlow [00:05:21] When I lived outside of Philadelphia, in New Jersey, and pretty much any time that we had company come, there was probably more company visiting going on those days because it was cheaper than resorts and things like that. And especially with people with kids. And we'd always go down to see the Liberty Bell. So I think I went down to see the Liberty Bell seven or eight times and with, you know, different cousins and friends and family members because we hadn't always lived there, so it was still kind of a new thing for us. And we did a good deal of long-distance driving as a family and we did a lot of historic things. It was often just historic things and we did whatever and came to Washington [D.C.] and for some reason my father's job went away and he started interviewing for jobs. But we had planned this trip to Washington [D.C.], so we were still gonna go to that and do the trip to Washington [D.C.]. And I think he called from a phone booth at some point while in Washington [D.C.] to find out he had a new job. So that's one of those things. And I remember the silly things you remember. I remember the hotel we stayed at was across from the barracks at Fort Myer. They're the long red barracks there and you could hear them exercising in the morning in the barracks. It was raining, it was pouring rain, so we were feeling sorry for them. And then we realized they had balconies. But in those days my mother would bring a hot plate and cook something extremely simple rather than going out to dinner all the time. But we hit all the, you know, the major monuments. And the only other thing that I can think of that comes to mind about that, [I ask myself], "Why do you remember these things?" My younger brother who was maybe 8 at the time, seven or eight, we had gone in to see the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. And he wanted to know as we were going down the steps, why that there was all this protection about for these documents. And he says, "Does it mean that whoever has control of these, it can control the government?" So it was explained to him, no that wasn't quite the way it was. But again, it's part of those funny things I can still remember from however many years ago that was. And the other kind of silly historic thing is I wound up spending my 21st birthday in Williamsburg, [Virginia]. We were taking my brother down to Norfolk, [Virginia]. He was going on a ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] cruise and coming back, we were driving slowly back up to New Jersey and it was going to be my 21st birthday. And so [we said] "Let's go to Williamsburg" and [we] spent the day there. So I've always had sort of a background of history. I also remember in seventh grade? Eighth grade. Doing extremely well in a history class. One of the

times we moved schools and we went to three different schools in less than one year in Ohio. We moved there in the middle of the year. Actually, we would have gone to four different schools. Three of them were in Ohio. We moved back in March and the school we moved to was kind of weird and we just didn't think it was, you know, the subgroup suburban, but it was kind of weird. So my parents wanted to just move us to a different school. The next year, we were just renting a house and so we started at a Catholic school because we're Catholic. And about a week or two before school started, we were told that the people who owned the house wanted not to rent it anymore and we had to move out. So we suddenly had to find another house and the only place we could find it, you know, first they looked near the school. But we wound up going to the other side of town completely in Dayton, Ohio. And actually, happened to go into a really good school. And the class I have very good memories of was, I think was American history class and they had this strange way. They had quizzes every week. And so something that would not be done now I'm sure in school is you would change your seating position in the classroom based on your grade on the quiz. And even though I'd only been there 1 week, I came out on top of the class. So that kind of surprised all of us. And I continued to really enjoy that class. And it was a very good teacher but we didn't finish the year there either [laughing]. We didn't go to any more schools, but we we moved out before the end of the school term. Went back to, at that point, New Jersey.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:42] Where do you think you got your passion for history, like, growing up? Was it those visits or -

Peggy Harlow [00:11:47] Yeah. And growing up in kind of historic places like Boston, [Massachusetts] and a few other places and just even in the small town I lived in Agawam [Massachusetts], how the houses had a big sign that said, "George Washington Slept Here." I always thought it was a rather amusing concept. I should go back and check to find out if they ever did find out for sure that he did.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:19] Yeah.

Peggy Harlow [00:12:21] Because it was the other end of out of state from where we know he was. But, you know, just it was, it was around and growing up, particularly in New Jersey, not New Jersey, but New England, more so than New Jersey. It was kind of in the air, so.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:43] And so where did you end up going to college?

Peggy Harlow [00:12:50] Rutgers University. But in Camden, New Jersey.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:55] So, yeah. Can you describe your experience at Rutgers?

Peggy Harlow [00:12:59] It was slightly better than high school. About half the time my mother would drive me to school. There wasn't a really good bus system to go from where we lived, which was you're just out in the suburbs to in-town Camden, [New Jersey]. So there were different varieties of things to do at different times to get there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:27] What did you end up studying?

Peggy Harlow [00:13:29] But freshman year my concept was to study pre-law, which then at that point could be almost anything. And I remember taking psychology, sociology, and political science and determined at the end of the year that I did best in psychology. So I decided to become a psych major and it didn't matter what I was going to be for to be in pre-law. I think nothing else was really related. So I don't remember taking much in the way of history. Of course, it's there for some reason.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:14:11] So why do you think you were interested in psychology?

Peggy Harlow [00:14:16] Our general theory at the time was if you're in psychology class you probably think you're crazy. So you're trying to figure yourself out as much as anything else.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:14:28] Yeah.

Peggy Harlow [00:14:29] I'm not sure that it worked, but-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:14:33] [laughs] And so what did you end up doing after college?

Peggy Harlow [00:14:36] Well, I went to take the GREs [Graduate Record Examination] because [they] don't tell you until you're a junior that, "Oh, there's no job in psychology. Just have a graduate degree." So I remember walking in to the University of Pennsylvania to take the GREs, and I know when we walked out, I said, "I think I'm joining the Navy" because the GREs were asking me the types of questions that we just didn't deal with at my school. I don't know why because I thought I'd taken all the psych classes we had. But, um, but basically, I liked learning things about people and things, so that interested me. And yeah, I don't know why I didn't take history classes in college, at least I have no recollection besides, you know, world history or Western Civ, that's what it was called. And, you know, whether it's just the group, the people we had there or what, I don't know. So in the spring of my senior year, I decided the GREs had convinced me that this is not the way to go. I guess I applied for the Navy and went to Women's Officer School in October and graduated in June 1970. And went to a Women's Officer School in October of 1970.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:24] So had you always maybe thought about the Navy?

Peggy Harlow [00:16:27] I suppose so, because it was always there in the background. From what my parents, yeah they'd tell stories, and their very good friends. And, you know, they had pictures of having really great times.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:41] And how did it feel in 1970 to be joining the Navy? How did that feel? The country was at war.

Peggy Harlow [00:16:49] You know, things were kind of calming down at that point. But there was still a lot going on. I wanted to be supportive, I suppose. And there wasn't a lot of anti-Vietnam stuff going on in my campus. It was a kind of a working class school and there really wasn't much even of a drug problem beyond "who's got an aspirin?" because almost everybody worked in something nearly full time. There were no dorms. It was a community college before there really were community colleges. But it was four years. And it was very small, [it] didn't really have sports or anything of that nature. I guess it did have sports teams, but nobody kind of knew about it. And

we even had to create our own sorority. There was just one and some of us decided we needed to have at least 1 other one. And I think there were only three fraternities.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:13] Hmm. So, yeah. So there wasn't a lot of anti-war sentiments?

Peggy Harlow [00:18:20] No there wasn't.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:21] And so you joined something that you had grown up with.

Peggy Harlow [00:18:27] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, you know, it seemed perfectly normal to me.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:33] Interesting. And so, yeah. So, yeah, maybe walk us through. So you joined the U.S. [United States] Navy. And so then what happened after that?

Peggy Harlow [00:18:41] Well, we started in October of [19]70 and we actually got commissioned just before Christmas and went home for Christmas for two weeks, then went back. And even though we were now officers, they didn't treat us any different. There was only 45 in the class, of the women, and we were off by ourselves and we had just one male instructor and all the other[s were], you know, female instructors, including a couple who were probably crazy. But it was it was an interesting experience because I had never, you know, lived away from home before. But, you know, I survived all that and graduated in February of [19]71. And my first duty station was New York City in a building right next to where they were building the World Trade Center, which was a federal building. New York was a weird place for the Navy, to say the least. But there were two commands there, and one was there primarily to run the reserves system. And my job was educational officer. Except it was a very senior command at the time. They had a big press on everybody getting their GEDs [General Educational Development]. We only had one person [laughing] who didn't have a high school education. But I did also have to run all the tests or, I didn't administer the tests, but dealt with handling, sending out tests to all the reserve units. And there were a lot of those around. That was a big political deal, which I never cared for. I really didn't care for admin either. I did like being able to go to Broadway shows, though, where you got free tickets to the Broadway shows that night. And because we lived in the city, we could actually call a number and find out what tickets were available. They were frequently in the first or second row of the theater. So that got to be all you got to see, sort of through the make up. So that wasn't a very naval time. I didn't even wear uniforms at first, again, because of Vietnam issues. And the only time we would wear our uniform was to go to parties and any time the ships would come in, visiting ships, we'd sometimes get to go to the admiral's house for parties in uniform. And it took a while for women to be allowed to even stand duty, be on the watch at night. But finally that happened. And also, the other big thing was there was one area in Brooklyn, there was officers' quarters. They, uh, they didn't allow women to live there because there were common heads, common bathroom facilities for the whole floor in this probably early World War II building or may have been even earlier than that. Just had a really good shape. It was a U-shaped building. And in Brooklyn, behind a 20-foot high brick wall to protect us from, some nasty parts of Brooklyn in the old Brooklyn Navy Yard. That was kind of pleasant, you know, it was kind of a weird group of people because most of the people who lived there, officers who lived there, were considered geographic bachelors. They had families elsewhere. They didn't want to bring them to New York. And there's a few of us that were real bachelors and a few other fun people. There was a very much a camaraderie. The other command that was there also was up at the U.N. [United Nations] and the only thing they did was

they would have meetings with the Russians and they'd just sit around and talk for a bit and then schedule the next meeting. They had to have these meetings with the Russians, or the Soviets back in those days. So I was not particularly happy with my job there, but I did manage to stay on and because they were doing a riff as Vietnam was slowing down. But I stayed on the regular Navy as opposed to Reserve, and I just couldn't seem to get out of there. And I had all these collateral duties. My favorite job title was Cosmic Control Officer.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:24:32] What did that mean?

Peggy Harlow [00:24:35] I was in charge of the books that came from NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and I don't think very many people actually bothered looking at them there. But, that became funny because many years later I was in charge of producing them at NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. But my job was just making sure that all the pages were there, on occasion. About that time there were big changes and there was a shift that women were allowed to be on ships. And I applied for it and I eventually got to go on that. But I was there for at least three years in New York and it turns out I was actually replacing one of my classmates who had been the first woman officer assigned to the ship. She had already gone by the time I got there. So I didn't get to have any turnover with her, but I was the personnel officer and the admin officer and so I was still doing admin and personnel and paperwork and mostly signing my name to things. And I really hated that. And being in charge of people. I really don't like being in charge of people. But I had this bunch of weirdos who worked for me and there were times I had to tell them, "Wait a minute, it's not your turn to give me a hard time. It's still his turn to give me a hard time." But that didn't last long because this was a ship that was an old hospital ship. It was Sanctuary, USS [United States Ship] Sanctuary. And it was redesigned to be a dependent support ship. The plan was in the early [19]70s to home port a carrier in Greece and bring the families over, too. Well, they needed support facilities, the doctors and exchange and, you know, commissaries and all that sort of thing. So they fitted out this ship for that purpose, primarily hospital accommodations, but a few other weird things like, you know, freezers for frozen food. But before they got to move it over there, the politics in Greece changed and they no longer wanted the carrier [laughing] sitting in their port. So what do you do with this other ship? Uh, it was sent around doing, you know, mercy type things and went down to like Haiti and a couple other places to just provide some medical care to people for a little while and eventually moved it up to Mayport, Florida, outside of Jacksonville. And it just did sick call for the area there. But it was still a ship and so they could still say they had women on ships, [or rather] ship. So about the time I got there, it was determined that, no, this isn't working. We need to do away with it. But to make it sound good, the four women officers were all sent to teaching positions. So then I got sent to a teaching position, and one of the reasons I joined the Navy was not to teach, as was the case of most of my classmates. But I was sent to Newport [Rhode Island], which is, again, full of history. So I, you know, survived teaching, teaching there. But I had a better time doing history stuff. And I was actually there during Bicentennial. So there were a lot of Bicentennial-related things going on up there at the time, including the week before the big Tall Ship Parade into New York City for, actually, the fourth of July. All the ships that were coming in from Europe and everywhere were just hanging out in Newport [Rhode Island]. So sort of, you know, gathering there. So there was all kinds of activities and you just sort of walked around and looked at all these really neat ships, tall ships. And so that was interesting. Then having spent pretty much three years teaching or being an admin officer again for the Navy and how to be a really good ensign at the beginning in the Navy. My next duty station was in Korea with the Army. Again, still admin, but in an interesting place. It was only supposed to be 12 months. Turned out to be 13. That last

month was really awful. First, I was a long way away. It was really weird. It was a good shopping experience. I had some personality clashes with my army office mates. And again, it was a really dumb job. It was a joint command. So everything that came up to the generals my office was supposed to read over all of this stuff and look for errors and not do anything about them except tell them to tell the people down below to fix them. And I just found that extremely non-creative and just not interesting. So I got into the Korean art and history and that sort of thing, and there were lots of organizations that would take you out on tours on the weekend. So that helped some.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:12] And when did you start working with the U.S. [United States] Army? After this?

Peggy Harlow [00:31:19] That would have been like [19]78.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:23] When you started working for the U.S. [United States] Army?

Peggy Harlow [00:31:24] Yeah, but that was in the Navy.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:26] Yeah, right. Right. We're talking about in the Navy.

Peggy Harlow [00:31:28] Right. I'm still in the Navy.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:30] Yeah. It's like, what year were you doing this?

Peggy Harlow [00:31:34] I must have gone out there in [19]78 because I was only out there for a year. Because after learning all this about Asia, my next duty station was Belgium, which was the best way to do it. You had to go from, they had two countries -

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:52] Is this still in the Navy?

Peggy Harlow [00:31:53] Yes, but now I was at NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] headquarters working on the Military Agency for Standardization Naval Board. So at least I was back with Navy stuff, mostly. That was kind of admin. We ran big international meetings and put out the books that helped them standardize what they were doing. You felt like you're really doing something. Plus we'd have these meetings that were not just at Brussels, they would be around Europe, but actually even in Canada. So I got to see a lot. And plus being in Belgium, you'd go driving off in one direction or another and in an hour or two you're in another country. Sometimes we went to Germany for lunch, so that was great. After three years there, I got my orders, I was sent here to Washington to go to Defense Intelligence College. So at this point, totally switching the type of work I was doing. It was a kind of a little bit of that at NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], but learning how to be an intelligence officer. When I came in, women didn't do that sort of thing. Things were changing.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:32] Did you want to leave Belgium? Were you ready to leave Belgium?

Peggy Harlow [00:33:35] Yeah. After three years, you're kind of ready. It'd been four years since I'd lived back in the States. But I was quite content and I've gone back several times and got to be very

close with some British women officers. I go back and visit them every now and then, too. I'd shared an office with, well, two women. One replaced the other and there was another senior officer down the hall. One replaced the other, so I got to know four of them very, very well.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:12] So you were sent here to attend school, right?

Peggy Harlow [00:34:17] Yes. And, you know, over at the Air Force Base, at the time it was Defense Intelligence College. It still exists, but it has had several other titles. Defense Intelligence University and Joint [Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling] something or other Intelligence, something or other. But it did give me a Master's degree, an MSSI., a Master of Science in Strategic Intelligence. And so it was very much a work-oriented, you know, sort of thing. I had classes on the Soviet military, it was pretty much all Soviet-related stuff. And so that lasted about a year. And I got to write a thesis on women in the Soviet army or the Soviet military. And so I got to spend three months kind of writing stuff up. And I lived south of here at the time.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:35] South of Alexandria?

Peggy Harlow [00:35:36] Yeah. Down Route 1 about where Hybla Valley [is], just beyond there. I had a nice little townhouse I could get over to Bolling fairly easily on the parkway. I did stay on here, once I knew that I could buy a house for the first time. And I bought a townhouse at the end of Old Town on Green Street. And so that was a big, big step. And I was at that point stationed at Naval Operational Intelligence Center, which was over in Suitland [Federal Center]. So it was fairly easy right over there. And I was doing various types of intelligence work there. But again, in those days, everything was pretty much Soviets. And I still felt, although I had this sort of technical, not quite technical, degree in intelligence stuff and Soviet stuff, I felt I needed a little bit more background. So I took night classes at Georgetown [University]'s program that was largely designed for military officers. And so I got another Soviet-related degree. By the time I finished that, the Soviets were no more. So I'm not really good at picking graduate degrees.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:35] Why did you decide to move to Alexandria?

Peggy Harlow [00:37:39] Well, let's see, my brother had a townhouse in the same complex a while back. And so he had moved on at that point. But I looked there and found a good one that would fit my needs at the time. And once I lived down there, and was doing things up here for my fun things, I'd come up to Alexandria to do. So, I can remember my friend telling me once when I started looking for a house, "Well, you know, you're not going to be happy unless you actually live in Alexandria, in Old Town." And she was right. So I worked at finding a place in Old Town, although at the very edge.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:31] And so this was, like, the 1980s?

Peggy Harlow [00:38:33] Yeah. This would have been [19]82.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:36] And so, like, what was your impression of Alexandria at that time?

Peggy Harlow [00:38:40] I thought it was interesting. I was still kind of visiting. So I was spending too much time with work and the house and everything you do to get into anything else but I did find it interesting. I loved going out to the, you know, the restaurants and walking. I could start with, it was a long walk, but it was a healthy walk and it beat parking because I would never remember where I parked my car. And I knew a little bit about the, you know, the, some of the historical things, but I didn't get much into that at first.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:29] Where would you come to visit when you came to Alexandria? Do you remember the restaurants or any place?

Peggy Harlow [00:39:34] Let's see, the restaurants are largely gone. There was a, there was a crepe restaurant, the Creperie, or something like that. And the Fish Market, which is still there. Yeah, let me think. There are a couple other ones I can't think of the names of at this point.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:57] What did it look like? Like for those, you know, who weren't there in the [19]80s. Like maybe describe -

Peggy Harlow [00:40:04] Yeah. There were parts of it that were a little bit rundown, besides I didn't usually come down at night so it didn't matter to me that much. Not Henry Africa's, that was the other one up here that's changed. I'm always amused that some of the restaurants that have changed hands so many times and none of which I could come up with a name for at this point. I can't say that there's that much physical change. I'm sure there has been but it was the decade before when we had the real big changes. I do remember coming down here once in the [19]70s. My brother was living here, and we went to, I think the crepe place down at the eastern end of King Street. And seeing it, it was very kind of dark and not quite nasty, but it was a little iffy. But I think by that time things were already changing. But I can't remember whether or not the new buildings were built or were still holes in the ground or what.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:37] When did you move to Rosemont?

Peggy Harlow [00:41:40] In 2000.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:41] Oh, okay. So so you're at this condo-

Peggy Harlow [00:41:46] It was a townhouse.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:47] Oh sorry, townhouse.

Peggy Harlow [00:41:48] Yeah. My mother died in 2000, and my father was going blind, so he really needed to come up here where my brother and I [were]. My brother was also in the Navy, and he lives in the area, too, so it made sense to get him. He [my father] lived on an island right off Savannah. But there was no, you know, no transportation, public support, you know, that sort of thing going down there. So he was willing to come up here and the townhouse was very narrow. I think the townhouse is narrower than this room. And I think what really made my mind up about that is down the street from me in another townhouse a couple of years or so before there had been a gas explosion and it blew up the whole house. I don't think anyone was killed. I think they were out at work, but that afterwards the firemen were coming through our houses to check on

everybody else's stuff. And I can remember, you know, not that large firemen, but they had all this gear on them. And it was like, [laughing], it was hard for them to manipulate, you know, the corridors. And I was thinking of my father who could barely see. I wanted him to be able to come visit a lot. Plus, I was absorbing some of their stuff and a cat. And I really loved Rosemont. I had happened to have met people who had houses over there and just loved the neighborhood. So I'd spent about a year already. I was already looking for a house in Rosemont when my mother died. So, it just took another few months to actually make that happen. And it was a good investment.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:52] So you moved there in 2000?

Peggy Harlow [00:43:54] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:54] Okay. And so can you describe your home in Rosemont?

Peggy Harlow [00:43:58] It is a bungalow. Kind of considered a 1 and a half story bungalow with a front porch, which is very important on my street. We're very much a front porch street. We feel sorry for the people who don't have front porches. Had party on my front porch last night, and it's very green. There's a lot of trees, some of which we're a little worried about, but it's friendly. There's a mix of people of people of my age and people who are all a whole lot older and have now passed on recently. But there are a few kids and the neighborhood tends to go through these cycles and there's little kids and then there's teenagers and then yeah. So it's a reasonable mix. And it was very good during the pandemic because I managed to get, you know, have a little pod of people and you could sit outside and, you know, at least commune or something with each other.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:45:09] Mm hmm. Can you describe some of the neighbors over the years in Rosemont? The ones that stick out to you?

Peggy Harlow [00:45:15] Yeah, well, there was 1 couple who had built the house, a brick house in the 1940s, and I guess his father had built it originally. And they were immigrants from Italy. And a bricklayer, at least the father was a bricklayer. I'm trying to think of his name right now. The gentleman that I knew came over as a teenager but eventually moved into the house and raised five children there and only passed like last year. So the house had been in 1 family, you know, since the [19]40s. Um, my next door neighbor, that house actually had been in the family also, that they sold that about 3 years ago. His grandparents had built that house in the [19]20s, late [19]20s, and his mother had brought him home from the hospital there because apparently she had a quick World War 2 marriage and that didn't work. And she eventually married someone else. They moved away for a few years and then moved back to that house, certainly before he was in high school. And he just outlived his stepfather and his mother and he was kind of a hoarder [laughing]. And I was the one who was taking his mail in and out and taking his trash in and out for several years. They couldn't get up and down the stairs and that sort of thing. But that was his own fault. So he finally got convinced he needed to be moved someplace where he'd be safer. And a couple younger than me, they had about a two year renovation going on next to me, so that's now finished. So now they have to survive mine, which is a much smaller effort. But it is an area where people do a lot of renovation. You know, the houses have changed tremendously over the years. But we do find it annoying when we've seen a lot of it lately of tear downs, complete tear downs of houses we thought, "Gee, those look really nice." I don't know what their internal problems were, but my

house, I think is 89 years old. And with the new renovations, my plan is to make it go to 100 and then also I won't worry about it anymore. But I want to make the house go to 100.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:43] Where do you live? You don't have to give me the address, but what street is it?

Peggy Harlow [00:48:50] West Spring. Which is right near the corner of Commonwealth and Braddock.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:56] And so when did you start hearing about OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria], when did this sort of -

Peggy Harlow [00:49:01] Well before it was called OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria] certainly [laughing]. And I don't really know. There must have been something in the newspaper about, uh, they were looking for people to go through the newspaper and look for stuff about Gadsby's [Tavern], uh, in the old newspapers on microfiche, I think in this room or where the kitchen is now [in Lloyd House]. And I had a little time on my hands at the time.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:32] This is the 1980s?

Peggy Harlow [00:49:34] I think it must've been the [19]90s. I'm not absolutely sure. It could have been late [19]80s, but I would have still been in the Navy. But I would have some time, whether it was just on Saturdays, maybe just on Saturdays or something like that. And then I helped out on a couple of things at Gadsby's [Tavern], these street festivals. They had at least two or three of those that it was just, you know, grunt work, whatever needed to be done. And then just one thing led to another and I was invited to join the Gadsby's Tavern Museum Society. And doing more things for them.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:50:30] Mm hmm. So when you started, who was working at Gadsby's [Tavern] when you first started volunteering?

Peggy Harlow [00:50:38] I think Jim MacKay was either the director or the assistant director. And one of the first people that I do remember is Gretchen [Bulova]. But it was before she was married. And that was a long time ago obviously. I don't have a lot of other recollections of people. I know there were people even further back, [like] Linda [Lovell?] would probably know a lot more people. Because I also was not a docent. That just wasn't my thing. But helping out with other things was. And I did my playing dress up and doing things for them.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:42] Why did you decide to volunteer at Gadsby's [Tavern]? What drew you to -

Peggy Harlow [00:51:47] It may have just be the first thing that came up that was, you know, looking for somebody that was something I could be helpful with where I knew I couldn't be helpful as a docent. But, you know, looking at newspapers, that's how I go. You know, that to me, that's intelligence analysis. Basically, it's the same thing. I like to find out things and share them as long as I don't have to do it in the classroom [laughing]. Yeah, and from there you know, one thing leads to another. But by the end of the [19]90s, there were websites and I could be helpful building

websites. And then, of course, I'd suddenly discovered I was the only one that could do those things. Somehow or other in between. I'm sure there must be other people, but nobody else wanted to do it type of thing. You know, PayPal and Square and pushing us into more online capabilities.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:53:08] Who are the other volunteers, not even when you first started, but throughout time, that kind of, do you remember?

Peggy Harlow [00:53:15] Well, I got very close to three other women. Mm hmm. To the point where I'm not sure if I used this term first or my father did. When I would explain to him what I was doing any given time and I called us "the Gadsbyettes". That way, he would know who those three people were. And it was Linda Lovell, Kathy Kelly and Lori Scattergood. And we, you know, we eventually were all on the [coughs], excuse me, all on the Gadsby board at the same time, I think. I think what really started this off is we are working on our project, that was basically our own little Antiques Roadshow. And it was a two day affair. It would be on Saturday and Sunday. Well, we survived Saturday, whoever was, you know, the group of us around. I was kind of running the thing. Oh, yeah, I also got a degree in appraisal studies at George Washington [University]. Never figured out what to do with it. But I like the -

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:45] When did you do that?

Peggy Harlow [00:54:46] It must have been in the [19]80s, [19]90s. It couldn't have been the [19]80s, it must have been the [19]90s, but it was mostly on weekends and about half of it was all this really boring technical stuff. And the other half was a ceramics course and this course and that course and even a trip to England actually. Yeah, but that was the [19]90s where we were looking at crazy ceilings. Like, I remember, you know, paintings and ceilings. Yeah. And I go, "Wherever [are] you gonna do this?" But it was a great trip, and I got to see my friends. I was talking about our little Antiques Roadshow. And at the end of Saturday somebody was talking about going for dinner. I said, "Well, I need to go down to St. Mary's [Catholic Church] for 5:00 mass. I haven't got time on Sunday to go to church." And two of the others said, "Yeah, I do too. I do too." So it turns out three of us were Catholic. And some were all on the line, whether it Lori at that time or another time, although Lori was Episcopalian she was very high church, or still is very high church. And so we would take her to church, too. So we started hanging out together with Gadsby things and going to the theater and going to concerts and going to Folger Theater, the Shakespeare Theater, and worked out very nicely. I would buy a pair of tickets and most of the time that one of the others would come with me and the other ones, we had it all worked out. It worked out very nicely for many, many years. And we started traveling together sometimes to Europe. And it usually was a variation of who was available to travel when. But very sadly, in December of 2019, Kathy died of cancer. It was her third or fourth round of cancer. She would get better and go do stuff for a while and something else would happen. And then Lori, it's harder and harder for her to move. So Linda and I are the really healthy ones at the moment, but it worked well for a while.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:43] That's great. You mentioned a little bit some of the things you did as a volunteer, but can you describe, like, what are other things you did as a volunteer that kind of stand out to you during your time?

Peggy Harlow [00:58:01] Well, I was very frequently for a number of years, a wench. I would refer to as being a wench at one of the events, usually the Birthnight Ball, in particular, and sometimes the

other things and put on a costume and show up and do whatever needed to be done. Bartending was a biggie. Or the historical hauntings. I was usually in crowd control, you know, because I didn't like to do anything else. I didn't like to do the the talking parts. I guess that was the time we were doing something about Bluebeard or Blackbird, one of those guys. Somewhere along the line I came across this kind of big plastic parrot puppet, and I would use that to amuse people waiting in line. And I also had, from my career days, had this box of sticks for like Pick Up Sticks but it had actually numbers on it and you look the numbers up in a book and they give you a fortune basically. So again, that was another thing to just amuse people. And then once the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary came in, I helped out there. Excuse me [takes a sip of water]. [coughs] Excuse me. And there was the night that we had, what do you call it? Not the opening night, but the book launch was made available. The last Harry Potter book was made available. So there was a big deal in town. There was the bookstore and the railroad station had a deal for being at nine and three quarters or whatever it was. Uh. And they were doing dancing at Gadsby's [Tavern] as if it was, I guess, a Christmas ball from Harry Potter. But my job was running the line outside of the Apothecary. They were having fairly quick tourists through. One of my friends had a son who was at that point maybe 8th grade, and he had done a summer camp where he learned some magic tricks. So I said, "Okay, come up and have 4 or 5 of them." And, well, we used that, you know, that you can do standing in front of people. I even made him a black cape. So we had a good time doing doing that. The top piece of that was that a little girl came along after watching his act said to him, "You're going to do really well at Hogwarts this year." I said, "Okay. I guess we're doing this right." Well, while I had him busy on the line, his parents had come over to Gadsby's just to kill time and tried out the dancing and they really got into it to the point of having, you know, a room full of costumes now. And now they've moved down to South Carolina and they are now teaching the dancing. Although Bob, as a retired Marine, had a different view of it than his wife and did call it fancy walking. [It] works! [laughing] So those are the things that sort of jump, come to mind anyway.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:02:25] I'm curious, so, like, how you see OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria] and all the sites, how do you see them change? What's your perspective on it?

Peggy Harlow [01:02:39] Well, I didn't realize it was a system until fairly recently, or it's become a more of a system. You know, we were focused on Gadsby's and then, you know, I was involved with the Apothecary. I did their website, too. I can do very simple websites. I was really good at this in the [19]90s but they got too far ahead of me [laughing]. I also would do that for work, too. Oh yeah, after I left after I left the Navy, I went to work for Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory way up in Laurel, [Maryland]. And apparently I was there for 30 years and I never really worked full time there. It was usually never more than 3 or 4 days a week. First, because I was dealing with my father's issues. Actually, first because I just didn't want another grind job. I didn't want to work five days a week. And they were happy. An old boss was already up there and he felt he needed more intelligence personnel and there weren't too many of that sort up there. They were all engineers or mathematicians. And now, of course, they've got all those kinds of things. But in those days, I was probably the only one that wasn't an engineer. And we did figuring out what, okay, what is the Navy going to need 10, 20 years from now? You have to project out and again, doing intelligence projections. And I did a few other things related to that and ran some conferences later on. And doing less and less. I most, in the last few years, I was doing it strictly from home. But why did I go off on that thing?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:07] We were talking about how you see the change of the whole system-

Peggy Harlow [01:05:10] Oh, change, okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:12] How you started at Gadsby's and I think you maybe get pulled into volunteering for other things?

Peggy Harlow [01:05:17] Yes, got pulled into Apothecary, oh doing websites! That's what it was. That was a connection. I got riffed off that job at Johns Hopkins. Even though I was only working 3 days a week, it was still, you know, suddenly my time was totally different. So I needed something, a little bit of a focus. And I took a tour, a walking tour, actually, I think Linda and Kathy were with me, Pam Cressey was doing about the Waterfront and she mentioned something about the fact that they had all these pictures that needed to be organized digitally. And I said, "Oh, I could do that." So I volunteered myself down to the archeology and the first focus was going to be the focus on Civil War and the hospitals. And some work had already started and I've continued it and making it into a usable website thing. And then a walking guide and things of that nature. So I was then more, although I was probably aware of these other elements, of OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria]. I, you know, I didn't see them as a single thing.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:02] Interesting.

Peggy Harlow [01:07:03] But recently obviously it's much more so.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:09] That's great. We'll start with this, what's your hope for OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria] going forward in the future?

Peggy Harlow [01:07:21] See, that's not the sort of thing that I'm interested in dealing with.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:28] That's fine. I'm curious to hear more about, what does the history of Alexandria mean to you? What do these sites mean to you?

Peggy Harlow [01:07:38] Well, it's something that when I'm explaining Gadsby's to people, I always like to say, "You need to go up to the ballroom where George Washington danced." I think that, you know, most people are not going to be aware that, first off, that George Washington danced. I'm not even sure he ever, you know, I know he went to dances there. Whether he actually danced there is something else. But certainly there are stories that say how much he danced elsewhere when he was younger anyway. And, you know, I just think it's really important to maintain that the concepts of where this all came from. It's kind of bringing it back, although I know it's no longer the thing to do. The old musical 1776 you saw those people as slightly more human than they are on the money, even though it was silly, but it just made it a little bit more realistic really.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:57] Is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to mention before we close up?

Peggy Harlow [01:09:07] I can't think of anything really.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:09] Great.

Peggy Harlow [01:09:11] Good that's what outside of work is not being able think about it [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:16] Great, well, no, thank you so much. And I mean, and thank you so much for all your service for OHA [Office of Historic Alexandria], you know, for past 2 decades, 3 decades, almost.

Peggy Harlow [01:09:26] Easily.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:27] So yeah, no, thank you so much for speaking with me today.