

Eileen Thrall

Eileen Thrall was born in 1943 in Washington, D.C. She grew up in Arlington, Virginia and graduated from Washington Lee High School. Eileen went on to obtain an associate's degree from American University and a Bachelor of Science in Business from George Mason University. Eileen met her husband, Tony Thrall, in high school and they were married for 51 years until his passing in August 2014. They had three children together, all of whom attended Prince William County schools.

Eileen moved to Prince William County in 1967 to Dale City when it was a brand new community. In 1971 the Thralls moved to Possum Point Road to a home overlooking Quantico Creek. Since moving to Prince William County, Eileen has been and continues to be extremely active in the community. For around five years, she wrote a column for the Potomac News that was dedicated to local issues of her surrounding community. Thrall worked as an assistant to the former Chair of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, Kathleen Seefeldt. Eileen also notably served for over 20 years on the Board of Zoning Appeals for the county, and after leaving this board in 2022, now serves on the Commission on Aging (COA). In addition to these positions, she is a staunch environmental advocate for local issues on the eastern side of the county.



Image 1: Eileen Thrall at her home in October 2024.

Transcript of Oral History Interview with Eileen Thrall (October 24, 2024)

Interviewee: Eileen Thrall (ET), Former member of Board of Zoning Appeals & long-time Possum Point resident

Interviewer: Lauren Maloy (LM), Prince William County Office of Historic Preservation

Thursday October 24, 2024 at 10 am

Interview location: Eileen Thrall's home in Dumfries, Virginia

Please keep in mind that this document is a verbatim transcription of the spoken word rather than a written document.

LM: So recording here. And we are recording here as well. So I am going to go ahead and get started. My name is Lauren Maloy. I work for the Prince William County Office of Historic Preservation and today I'm interviewing Ms. Eileen Thrall at her home in Dumfries – or in Prince William County on Thursday, October 24th, 2024 at 10 am. Ms. Thrall, can you please state your name and spell it for the recording?

ET: Eileen Thrall and my first name is spelled E – I – L – E – E – N My last name T – H – R – A – L – L.

LM: And when and where were you born?

ET: I was born in Washington, DC in 1943.

LM: And what are the names of your parents?

ET: My father's name was Edward Fowler and my mother's name was Violet Fowler.

LM: Can you talk a little bit about your childhood? And did you live in the same place growing up?

ET: Interestingly enough, there was no hospital in Arlington, Virginia when I was born, it opened the next year. So I grew up in Arlington, Virginia, and I lived in the same house until I was married. So and and it was almost an idyllic childhood there, uh, very different. They say you can never go home. Guess what? I can't go home because the Arlington that I knew is not there anymore. It's developed much like Prince William County and uh yeah, so I enjoyed my childhood. I had excellent schools in Arlington at that time. Playgrounds in the summer and you know a lot of different things to do there. So yes, I had a wonderful, I did have a wonderful childhood. So, yeah.

LM: OK. And what's your educational background?

ET: OK, of course. I went to elementary school.

LM: Yes. Yep. OK.

They. They didn't preschool then that I remember.

LM: Oh really?

ET: And I graduated from Washington Lee High School, now known as Washington Liberty High School. I went to college. I did graduate the first time from the American University with an

associate, and then I got my Bachelor of Science in business from George Mason University later, so I went back. Women in that day didn't really go into business that much, and so it was kind of an interesting education. So.

LM: And you've spoken about this a little bit, but can you talk a little bit about your family and?

ET – Yes, my husband, Tony, passed away ten years ago, sadly. I have three children. One Jimmy is in Washington state. My daughter Jennifer lives about three or four blocks from the house that I have at Lake Gaston, and my son John lives in California and also at Lake Tahoe. And you know, so we had our hands full and I - two of our children were adopted. So one time I'm sitting out on the porch saying to myself, what have I done to myself? (Laughs) I'm not kidding.

LM: But it worked out.

ET: Yeah, and they all went to Prince William County schools. John Joseph, the youngest they did then have available for him, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. So, he was, he did graduate from there. And people say sometimes, you know about the school system, and I said, well he went from Dumfries Elementary and he got his masters at Oxford, England. So, yeah.

LM: So he did just fine.

ET: Oh, yeah. (Laughs)

ET: But we had quite a commitment to the schools too, to work as volunteers and you know, to try to make sure that all the schools were treated equally because a lot of times in the past when a community was new, it got the new schools and older communities didn't. So you had to fight.

LM: So you were very involved -

ET: Oh yeah (laughs)

LM: With your children's education...

ET: Oh yeah.

LM: Ok. Can you talk a little bit about when you first moved to Prince William County and where in Prince William County you moved to?

ET: Right. I moved to Prince William County in 1967 to Dale City when it was brand new. And we had been told by a sales manager over in Woodbridge, "there's going to be this new community called Dale City and you might want to wait and, you know, go there." And we mainly came to Prince William because of our love of water and boating, and we could keep the boat over at the Neabsco Creek, they had marinas there, so that's why we originally came this direction. I was working for the developers of Reston, Virginia and basically there they mostly had townhouses. So we wanted a single-family home, so we moved to Dale City and it's kind of interesting. It is a planned community. Um, and Patrick Portway, I don't think he always gets credit. But he was the original person that started the Dale City Civic Association, which was the largest in Virginia at that time and, so that involved like a couple thousand people eventually and you know it did a lot of

innovative things.¹ Dale City had cable television, which everybody didn't. So all the politicians would come to our houses to watch the cable television.

LM: Oh really?

ET: Yeah, but, and we served almost like a welcome wagon because a lot of people were moving to that area from all over the country, which is what has happened in the Washington area is, you know, as anybody knows. Yeah. So and let's see what else. Uh, so we lived there for four years, and then we found this house on the water in 1971. So I've been here fifty-three years. And when we first moved here, the house was not new. And I'm like, oh. And we were always fighting something because out one side is this beautiful Quantico Creek, and at the other side is a road that leads to an industrial area. So we were always having to, you know, stand up for ourselves here and did. OK, so. And I think originally there were only about fifteen houses and they added some more houses and they built four new ones down beyond us, so it's grown a little bit, but not, not a whole – I mean it's never going to be, you know, like Potomac Shores or something like that.

LM: No, you don't really get a sense that you are in a very developed area on this road.

ET: Oh no, everybody. People are always surprised. I didn't know this was here. How did you find this? And we see in the winter we have tundra swans that winter here and people go, "what?" I said "swans, you know, white swans." And they do winter here and, and course eagles and heron and all kinds of things. So it's a unique area close to town.

LM: So before we move on, do you have any thoughts about how Dale City has changed over the years? I know you moved quite some time ago, but -

ET: Yeah. Well, it's. It's grown dramatically, which it was supposed. It was always supposed to be a planned community, of course where the rest area is out on 95, that was supposed to be a golf course and in my understanding, I don't know if it's true, that Lady Bird Johnson came by and she thought that should be turned into a, a rest area or something. I don't know if that's true, but, and the one difference that I see when I drive over there, which is kind of interesting. Back, you know, fifty some years, fifty-seven years ago, people only had one or two cars. Now you go there and there all these cars and you know, it's kind of interesting. So it has a lot more obvious, lot more population, but I think it's grown in a pretty good way. You know, myself, the planned areas are still there and you know many people that I know still live there. Yeah, and I think it's turned into a nice community. Of course it doesn't have the, like the homeowners associations, like the newer big planned communities have, the townhouses do, but not the single family. So sometimes that, you know, does I think become an issue when people do things that the other people don't like or, you know, whatever. Yeah. They don't have that protection except to call the county.

¹ "Residents were accustomed to the 5 to 7-mile drive to the shopping centers along Route 1 in the Marumsco section of Woodbridge. Because of this, Methodist minister Rev. Ben Pratt and Patrick Portway put together the Dale City Civic Association (DCCA), which formed out of public meetings designed to get Hylton to resolve minor community deficiencies. Some of the most substantial influence that DCCA had were the planning and zoning committees of DCCA and a presence at Board of Supervisors meetings." From, "Dale City" section on "Post WWII population growth." <https://www.pwcva.gov/departments/gis/post-wwii-population-growth>

LM: Well, yeah, that was my question. That, what was the community that you moved to? Was it like back then? I think you've mostly answered that. Unless there's anything else that you'd like to add about Dale City?

ET: Well, except that when I was there, it was new and we were starting the Dale City Voting Association, the Dale City Civic Association. The Fourth of July parade that was started back right in the very beginning.² And just, a lot of it was like, oh, the fire department. My, I remember my husband sitting in a living room and they deciding they would become a part, come on their own rather than become a part of OWL.³ That was a decision that was made. The churches were new. It was like a pioneer situation, kind of.

LM: Kind of closer to Northern Virginia and DC.

ET: Kind of, right. Oh, that's another. There was no shopping, no shopping. We ordered clothing from the Sears catalog store at Marumco Plaza. There was a Giant food store. And if you if you forgot a loaf of bread, you had to go to Woodbridge to get it. There was one country store on the corners, but that was a there was no shopping. None.

LM: It's so hard to imagine that now, considering.

ET: No Parks. We didn't have a Park Authority and we did not have a police department. It was a Sheriff's Department later became, you know, the Police Department, but it was. I mean, there were only fifty thousand people here and now we have five hundred thousand. So big difference, big difference.

LM: Well, I have some more questions on that later, but because I we're very interested in in how the communities have changed as a long time resident, have you noticed significant changes on this road where you live now?

ET: As I said originally, when we first moved down, I think there were. Maybe, maybe fifteen houses, and there were still some lots and people built the house. That is how they built these houses. They, they bought a lot and then they built on the lots. There was no, there were no developers in here. And then eventually on the left-hand side of the road some people came in and built there and then down beyond me there are four, four houses down there so. So I've seen a growth in terms of the number of houses but, but basically you know it's never going to be huge, which is fine with me.

LM: I imagine fine with most people.

ET: Yeah.

LM: So moving along to a little bit more about your career and your life in Prince William County, and I noticed that you were a reporter for the *Potomac News* for over a decade.

² Tara Mack, "In Dale City, Civic Pride is a Cause for Celebration," *Washington Post*, July 1, 1997. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1997/07/02/in-dale-city-civic-pride-is-cause-for-celebration/df042a99-82a9-48df-bcbd-7b1db830fed5/>

³ OWL – Occoquan Woodbridge Lorton.

ET: Well, that's kind of interesting. I'm not sure where that number came up, except that the town of Dumfries very kindly gave me a nice award recently and they had that in there and I go well, that's not exactly - I think it was more like, you know, five or six years.⁴

LM: OK.

ET: And I was going to school at night and have three children, and it was crazy. And what they did is they had neighborhood columns and, but they kind of let you do whatever you wanted to do. And the editor at that time, Paul Muse, the original publisher lived two doors over from me, and he's the one that said I think you should write this column. So I wrote them once a week for however many years, and it was more just interest and what was happening in people's lives. It was a very interesting way to get to know, there were some very interesting people in in the Dumfries area - was called Dumfries District instead of Potomac District. And so, you know, I and and I did write some special articles for them when they would have I, my neighbor, had a 1923 Mack truck and I did an article on him and I did a couple of articles, articles on things that the town did because I'm so affected by the town, you know, tried. I would go down there and say, "Did you know that this is happening on Possum Point Road?"

LM: Yeah, you corrected me and said that we're not in Dumfries actually -

ET: We are not.

LM: But you're just adjacent.

ET: Yeah.

LM: OK, so important. And that changes what I said at the beginning of the recording. So you said you were there or you wrote this column for about five years.

ET: I think it was about five.

LM: And do you remember around what time this was?

ET: Yeah, I wrote it through the end of '84 because then I had always worked, when I was working in real estate, property management for Carey Winston Company and for the developers of Reston, Virginia. So, I got my Virginia license and I've kept that. I still have it and that's was basically my, my career was in real, I was a broker in real estate and that teaches you a lot about the community. And many of the people involved in real estate really care about the community, and they know what's going on in the community because they have to and they should, at least if they don't, they they should do something else. In my opinion, because a lot of people think, well, it's going to be easy money or this, it's not easy. And most people, the statistic is of the hundred that become licensed five years later there's five left.

⁴ "For over a decade, Eileen chronicled Dumfries life as a dedicated reporter for the Potomac News, delving into every facet of our town. Her column was a must-read, offering profound insights into our community's heartbeat." From "Honoring Our Living Legend: Eileen Thrall," Mayor Derrick Wood Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/DerrickConsults/photos/honoring-our-living-legend-eileen-thrallfor-over-a-decade-eileen-chronicled-dumf/773780334557032/?_rdr

LM: Really?

ET: That's about the truth. Yeah.

LM: People think it's gonna be an easy job, but OK.

ET: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, they do. It's not.

LM: Well, you know, my next question is and I guess this could be either in your capacity as writing a neighborhood column or with your work as a realtor. Can you talk about some of the most notable stories, personal stories that you reported on? Or maybe encountered as with your time -

ET: Well, like I said. The, my neighbor that had the Mack truck, that was very interesting. He had redone it totally himself, and I guess the American Trucking Association caught wind that he had it, and so he, you know, they, they took pictures of it and everything and he'd have it in the parades there, the town of Dumfries, you know, would have parades, that kind of thing, but I mean, as far as real estate is concerned, there are always stories there which we don't want to talk about. Yeah, the people that you least expected to lose it lost it, and the people you thought would lose it didn't. (Laughs)

LM: But you can't say that for recording, I'm guessing.

ET: You're right. I can't say any names.

LM: Ok, yeah, that's fair.

ET: But no -

LM: Any other stories that come to mind? So, you, you wrote about for this column, about -

ET: People, people. Yeah.

LM: And just interviewing them and ok.

ET: Yeah. And you know different. And mostly it was like, you know, such and such had visitors, you know, from somewhere, or. But I got to know a lot of people. And, you know, I'd go in the store and they knew me because my picture was in there. Like who are you? You know, and sometimes they, I did write about my own children sometimes because they did things. The Scouts, you know, wrote about the Scouts, wrote about the churches, wrote about the town. Just anything like that of interest that I thought that people would be interested in and they were. They enjoyed it and I enjoyed doing it, although it's being anything to do with the newspaper is tough work. I don't know how they do that day-to-day. It's a very tough job, you know, to put that information out there. And the *Potomac News*, of course we lost that, it became the *News & Messenger* and now we have really don't have, you know, a daily paper anymore.⁵ And I, I miss that. I really wish we did. I know they at the cost of – and I'm online just like everybody. But you know, I think I still like the old print papers so.

⁵ "In August 2010, *The Potomac News* and *Manassas Journal Messenger* combined into one daily paper called the *News & Messenger*. The Woodbridge office was closed and all the printing and page layout was done in other cities. The publication was based in the Manassas office." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_%26_Messenger

LM: You know, it's just to add that we've done a few of these interviews now and many of them had said that exact thing. Yeah, that they miss, also when the *Post* covered more local issues which they don't necessarily anymore, they do it tangentially, but there were dedicated reporters writing about Prince William County and then the local newspapers and that social media doesn't really fill that void -

ET: Right.

LM: Learning about your community. So moving on to, you are noted for being on the Board of Zoning Appeals -

ET: Oh, yeah.

LM: I Prince William county. How long did you serve on this? What exactly does the board do and what was your role?

ET: OK, I was on the Board of Zoning Appeals for twenty years. It's actually between the county and the Circuit Court and it hears appeals. If a zoning administrator or something in the, you know, the Planning Department. The person disagrees with or feels that they should, and basically I think our role and also variances we you know, if somebody had a house too close to a line, they might need a variance to to do what they want to do. I think our our basic role, in my opinion, was to listen. To make people in the county feel that they had somebody that they could go to before it went into the court system. In recent years, more and more became, you know, people represented by lawyers versus just citizens. And we took it very seriously. That and and that's the only board - there's only seven, they did not do, when they went county wide, most all the commissions have eight members, but it has seven. And if they don't like what the Board of Zoning appeals thinks they can appeal to the Circuit Court after thirty days, and then we've had a couple of cases that went on to the Supreme Court of Virginia. And so it's a quasi-legal body. Little different, the Board of Supervisors recommends people, it does not appoint the people to that, to the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Circuit Court judges appoint. And that's very confusing, especially when we get a new supervisor, we'd have to go and explain, you know what our role is. And we, I mean generally we were supportive of the county, but not always. And you know, so that that becomes a little interesting sometimes and I, you know, I enjoyed serving on it. In recent years, the zoning administrator has been given more administrative ability, so they were not getting as many cases. And we used to meet like once a month and then it got down, we didn't have any cases. So you're setting this time aside and and you know you're not doing anything with it. And it was time after, after twenty years, it was time, I served as chairman, many years, I served as vice chairman. And we we kind of changed the way we did things over the years and it was a very, very, very interesting, very challenging and there would be sometimes like on a weekend before a meeting, I might have four hundred pages to read. Especially when the lawyers got in.

LM: Really.

ET: Oh yeah. So and then after that I said to uh, my supervisor. I said I'd really, really like to serve on the Commission on Aging because of my concern for the seniors in Prince William County. And

so that's where I went. Right after that, she they gave me a nice award and then they appointed me to this other. So I've been on that now since 2022.⁶

LM: OK

ET: Yeah, and and before the Board of Zoning appeals, I served as Kathleen Seefeldt's assistant to the chairman⁷ -

LM: Oh, you did?

ET: So I worked for her for many years, up at the McCoart building, and before that I was on the I was an interim member of the school board, so, it's just been a lot of things. I you know, serving in the community, you know, which is very important was very important to my husband and I he served for thirty two years on the Wetlands Board for the county. And I served, after he died, I served for 6 years on that. So just you know, wanting to make this community a better place and I think we all did.

LM: No, it sounds like it. And you were extremely and are extremely active in your community.

ET: Oh yeah.

LM: Can you speak a little, I didn't know that about that, that you were an assistant to Kathleen Seefeldt -

ET: Yes, Kathy, that was.

LM: Do you have any good stories from your time working with her that you can tell me?

ET: Well, it was very interesting. It was very interesting because now they have chief of staff, deputy chief of staff and about five other people. Kathy had, you know, before she was the Occoquan District supervisor. And then they went, they decided to be have a county - wide chair and that's when, and her first person that worked for her was there for about a year or so. And then I came in. We had a county person that work that was, you know, supposed to stay on indefinitely. They worked for the county and I just remember one of the neat things that Chairman Seefeldt did was to have interns and so that was kind of my responsibility and we gave them serious things to do because we didn't have any - that's right when e-mail started to come in and we had a gentleman that was a retired colonel. I had, you know, couple college students and you know, they all, you know, they got - we didn't just have them pushing paper, they they helped and. So yeah, in the county during that time, the Disney thing was, you know, didn't go through.⁸ And there was a lot of, lot of

⁶ "Prince William Board of County Supervisors Recognize Eileen Thrall for 20 Years of Service on the Zoning Appeals Board," January 18, 2022. <https://www.pwcva.gov/news/prince-william-board-county-supervisors-recognize-eileen-thrall-20-years-service-zoning>

⁷ Kathleen Seefeldt served on the Prince William Board of County Supervisors from 1975-1999. "Kathleen Seefeldt," oral history on Prince William County Office of Historic Preservation Historic Communities page. October 23, 2023. <https://www.pwcva.gov/departments/historic-preservation/historic-communities>

⁸ "In the charming time before online news and social media, Disney had quietly assembled a 3,000-acre tract around the Prince William County town of Haymarket. There, it envisioned a patriotic yet honest theme park with sections spanning Colonial settlement to 1945." C. Suarez Rojas (Richmond Times Dispatch), "Controversial effort to bring Disney park to Haymarket turns 25," *Inside Nova*, August 30, 2019.

change during that in the '90's you know, before 2000 and before the computer and all you know really came in. And, maybe I don't if I should tell this one. Our office was at the McCoart building and my windows were right in the front and I was so busy one day I didn't even know this happened. We had a tax line right there and a gentleman came in and he wanted them to come out and check the mileage on his car because he would get a different, you know, personal property tax. Well, they wouldn't or they couldn't or they didn't. So he tried to drive his car in the front doors of the building, and I didn't, I was so busy, I didn't even notice it. We were very busy. I mean, you know, the and a lot of times the magisterial districts. You know, they're the if the people didn't get an answer there, then they'd call, they'd come to the chairman's office, and we'd have to go back to the district office and say, you know, you need to work with your district office. And we kind of, I, we kind of said well you know there are about three constituents of each magisterial district, so that's about twenty, that were really a challenge. Yeah. So anyway, but that was an interesting experience too for me.

LM: Well, it sounds like you're able to witness a lot of things firsthand then.

ET: Yeah. Yeah. And Kathy was, has done so much for this county. Over many, many years, I think totally twenty three or twenty four years something like that and all of the original supervisors like Maureen Caddigan, John Jenkins, Hilda - they all gave so much to this community.

LM: This wasn't one of my questions, but since you mentioned it and everyone we've interviewed has had a, a personal opinion on Disney and all of that, do you have any thoughts on that?

ET: I do. I, you know, I think it was a misunderstanding that they thought it was going to be this enormous. And it was only a hundred, and I think a hundred and eighty acres, something like that. Now there are houses there. So what happened was they, they weren't really getting interesting facts and then all the people out in, I guess it was Fauquier County got involved in it and you know the landowners out there, they didn't want it, but what they didn't understand is that there was going to be something there, and the something is nice housing. So and and you also, I can remember going down to Capitol Hill and Kathy having to testify and we listened.⁹ So it got it, got its own - it got a life of its own basically. Do I think it would have been... I don't think it would have been bad for that area. You know, I just don't. And but it didn't happen. And we also had here over where Potomac Shores is now - Legoland was going to go in there and once again I don't even know what happened to that, but it didn't happen either so...¹⁰

LM: Around what time was that? 'Cause I hear a little less about Legoland I guess.

https://www.insidenova.com/news/regional/controversial-effort-to-bring-disney-park-to-haymarket-turns-25/article_464bb0c2-ca86-11e9-aa34-0fb760776a7d.html

⁹ Along with other experts, representatives from Disney, and historians, in 1994 Seefeldt testified in front of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee about Disney America. View the full hearing here (Seefeldt testifies around the three hour mark in a 5 hour hearing): "Civil War Battle Sites and Disney Theme Park," <https://www.c-span.org/video/?58037-1/civil-war-battle-sites-disney-theme-park>

¹⁰ Carlos Sanchez, "Plan to be drawn for Pr. William theme park," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1992.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1992/07/22/plan-to-be-drawn-for-pr-william-theme-park/10a9631c-8fd4-4070-8719-5c6a0cb50835/>

ET: It had to be before. It would probably in the, let's see. Probably in the '80's but I'm not sure. Don't remember. I don't remember.

LM: Yeah, okay. So, I, I think we've covered actually my next few, which is asking how long you served on the Board of Zoning Appeals and some of the highlights of your tenure there. And speaking about Kathleen Seefeldt, my next question is which notable community leaders have you interacted with and of these, who are your favorites to work with?

ET: Well, obviously, Kathy, but I felt John Jenkins and his staff. In fact, when I served the inner - and that was going to be later, if you asked me for a name - the family that he was chairman of the school board. This was before the school board was elected and his wife served as aide to John Jenkins. So John Jenkins did a lot.¹¹ And so he he would probably be, you know, one of my favorites because he never ceased to, like when my sons got their Eagle Scouts. He came but he didn't have to come, but he came to, you know the ceremony and things like that, and there was always thank you notes from him, no matter what you did, even if you weren't in - I wasn't in his district, you know? And so he was very good about that and. You know that that whole group being for such a long time, you know, they they did a lot, you know, and so did the people that were around them, you know, the Planning commissioners and Park Authority people and just a lot of different people, which I'm sure you've met some of them.

LM: A few, but we'll take recommendations on who else to interview.

ET: Yeah. Well, and you know, as far as the county is concerned. I have the highest respect for Sharon Pandak when she was the County attorney for many, many years and you know some of the other people that have been there, many of them have been there a very long time, so.¹²

LM: Well, you know Sharon provided all of your names and but we've mentioned a few times that we should also be interviewing her as well.

ET: Yeah, yeah.

LM: So -

ET: She's a statewide person as well, teaching. Like when the Board of Zoning Appeals, you go and you be certified statewide, and many of our county attorneys and people with our county have been the leaders in that. Prince William County has been a leader in in things like education for the rest of the state. So.

LM: You, and this is a little bit of a jump, but speaking about you know, some of your advocacy work here, but you're known locally as an environmental advocate,

¹¹ "John D. Jenkins was the longest-serving member in the history of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors. He was appointed in 1982 to fill the Neabsco District seat vacated by James J. McCoart, and subsequently elected by the people of the Neabsco District in every election following." Jenkins Elementary School, Our Namesake John D. Jenkins. https://jenkinses.pwcs.edu/our_school/index

¹² Sharon Pandak served as the Prince William county attorney for 15 years. "Sharon Pandak Presented the Lily Blackwell Lifetime Achievement Award," *Prince William Living*, March 7, 2017. <https://princewilliamliving.com/sharon-pandak-presented-the-lily-blackwell-lifetime-achievement-award/>

ET: Right.

LM: How did you become involved with these local issues and what are you most concerned with now?

ET: Well, what started that was back in 2000. We used to, you know, boat out here and water ski and enjoy the creek. It's it - we started to get an invasive weed called hydrilla and it started to spread.¹³ So we got together. We're such a small neighborhood. I, you know, I would be in the living room, I said, everybody just come on and we'll talk about it. So we did and a couple times it was they did what is called harvesting, which they bring a machine in. The problem with harvesting is it tends to spread the hydrilla and so we even went down to the state and you know, you know, talked to them about that. And the thing is that in Virginia, the waters here are state controlled, and the river is Maryland waters, and a lot of people don't, don't realize that. And so we've tried to get the state to do more and I think now finally both the town and Potomac District, my supervisor, know what a resource it could be, so they're working finally. And do I think I'll see some things in my lifetime? Probably not. The reason that they don't dredge the creek is because we don't have any commercial interest. Now there was a man that lived here on – and he's passed away - that owned the headwaters. And they are, there's some things going on with that right now and he wanted to put like a marina there and you know, that would have dredged. It was dredged one time. Let's see. We moved here in '71 and I think it was dredged right before that. You could actually take a boat almost to the town, which you can't do that now. So basically that that kind of got us involved. And we reached out to a lot of people and we could get nice meetings, but we didn't, weren't getting much done. So we're still interested and I think this next spring, I plan to invite the waterfront owners here to talk about, you know, what might be the future, because there's some things planned. There's a lady on the other side of the creek that's interested. They would like to see a boardwalk up which would be wonderful. But you have to work with both the town and the county, so they have to be communicating and they are, which is good and that has not always happened. But and, and like I said, we don't have the numbers here, but we speak out. So, but that's how basically and for a while there, Friends of Quantico Creek Bay, we folded into the Prince William Conservation Alliance, and we were going to work on getting what we wanted for all the creeks, not just our creek, but there, you know, Powell's Creek, Marumsco Creek, all of it. And we got Covid. So that kind of stopped everything. And then the lady that was executive director passed away. And I, we we've gone back to how we're going to do it. We're not a formal, we're just individuals. So what we will do, I think in the spring is to try to, you know, start something up again and find out what what people want to do. And there's, we do have some younger leadership which is helpful.

LM: Taking up the charge.

ET: Right. We need more.

LM: And, and so you would say that that's the issue that you're most concerned with now?

¹³ KJ Mushung, "Invasive plant plagues Bay as Dumfries faces steep dredge costs," *Potomac Local News*, October 10, 2012. <https://www.potomaclocal.com/2012/10/10/invasive-plant-plagues-bay-as-dumfries-faces-steep-dredge-costs/>

ET: As far as the environmental. Yeah. As far as the seniors, of course, I want more for them, but we also, I mean we've had the Congress, our delegates, everybody knows the situation. The point is, what are we going to do about it? We even got estimates. Down at Lake Gaston, they treat the water down there. And it's pretty, it's very expensive. So treating it is probably not going to be the answer. Dredging it would be the answer. At some point, and if the town really does do something at the headwaters and the support is there from our supervisor, which it is, I think I think something will get done. But it takes time, yeah.

LM: Well, you, you just alluded to and my next question is about, because you are currently on the Prince William Commission on Aging and we did speak about this before, but can you clarify how long you've been on this commission, what its primary goals are and what your primary goal is right now.

ET: From 2022 to now I'm currently serving, I was appointed when the supervisor came into office again. And primarily it's for people over sixty. Prince William County is growing in and has grown from two thousand - I'd have to get the exact figures - but I think it's from twenty five thousand to a hundred and twenty five thousand. And now that we've got, there many people that you know, came here, raise their families, they'd like to stay. And you know, so we're working on that and you know we, we have a legislative program that will go to the state. In fact, we just approved it day before yesterday and I have to get that to the supervisor. And so we work on, you know things - we work with Northern Virginia area agencies. And also, just kind of you know we look we watch like the senior centers, we've been to both of those, Birmingham Green, which is a nursing home over in Manassas, they just won, they became the top nursing home in Northern Virginia and the second in the state, which is amazing. And one of those buildings has been there a hundred years or in 2027. So it's just trying to look out and talking about fraud to seniors, which is a serious problem, just anything of interest that would help you know the seniors in Prince William County and also Northern Virginia. So does that help?

LM: It does. Do the public come to your meetings?

ET: They can.

LM: They can.

ET: They can. Sometimes they do. But you know, and we vote on different, you know, things. And right now, we're, oh, one thing of interest, it involves Manassas City and Manassas Park City. Right now, they don't have representatives and we're missing one from one of the magisterial districts. So. You know, we need to make sure those are filled, you know? But, you know, always just trying to, you know, think about, you know who, and I'm so glad you're doing this to try to record some of the people that actually are gone now. Uh, and so try to find out, because, like last night, on our meeting with the magisterial district, one of the people there has been in the, his family's been in the county two hundred years.

LM: Yeah.

ET: And my family on my mother's side. Actually, I, it was all Stafford County that it was split into Stafford and Prince William and then Stafford, Prince William and Fairfax. Well, my mother's side of the family lived in what is now Fairfax, back in the 1700's. So their wills are actually in the Prince

William County wills, in seventeen, Will Book C. And you know, so there's, there's a tremendous amount of history in Prince William County and on Quantico Creek and. Of course, this is not part of your questioning, but I will share with you that my son did the, my older son, when he was at the United States Merchant Marine Academy, did the history of Quantico Creek and you know how it silted in and what's happen to it and you know, but it was a major port at one time. It was and people don't realize that it was.

LM: So yeah. Now that's, that's something a lot of people don't realize how important it was. No, I incorrectly called the area that you currently live in as Dumfries so. Please excuse this -

ET: It is Dumfries.

LM: Yeah, but as a longtime resident near Dumfries, what are the biggest changes that you've noticed in your community over the years other than the obvious growth and we've covered this a little bit but yeah.

ET: Oh my. Oh my. Well, the town has, well, the town's getting ready to change. I smile and say I'm going to have to get my boat back to get out of here because they're putting a Wawa on the corner, northbound US 1's becoming north and southbound, six lane divided. We've got Rose coming in on southbound, what's now southbound US 1. You have 234 going across into Potomac Shores. We will no longer be able to go up 1 and turn left. I'm not sure how we're going to do that. So that's major changes happening there and of course, Potomac Shores, which is an enormous community. It started many, many years ago and it's changed hands several times over the years due to the economy. And so that has changed things dramatically. And of course, once they get, finally get the VRE station there, that's going to make a big difference. We've lost some of the things that I think were unique about the town. There used to be a pharmacy down in the town that had a place where you could eat. You know, things like that.

LM: Do you remember what that was called?

ET: I think Dumfries Pharmacy.

LM: OK.

ET: Yeah, it's, it's where the, what is that, think it's a Walgreens now - where the pharmacy is and for a while it was a grocery store and it's, you know, they've changed and changed over the years, so. And there was also a store called Bell Store was a very nice gift shop and it's gone. It's, I think it's now the library. Yeah, that on that side, yeah, so.

LM: Well, that that bled into my next question, your favorite local businesses or restaurants to go that maybe aren't there or there are some that are still here.

ET: Well, of course. Who can, you know, Harold and Cathy's Dumfries Cafe is gone.¹⁴ I think all of us cried because you could just stop in there, you'd have politicians, you would have, you know, it was a wide range of people. And if you ever said to someone, have you ever been to the Dumfries

¹⁴ Harold and Cathy's closed in October 2023. Cameron Delean, "Beloved Harold and Cathy's Dumfries Café to close its doors," WTOP, August 22, 2023. <https://wtop.com/prince-william-county/2023/08/beloved-harold-cathys-dumfries-cafe-to-close-its-doors/>

Café? No, I wouldn't go there. And I'm saying well you don't know Dumfries then. And you used to be able to, if you went in, they knew what you drank. They, you didn't have to ask, and you know, stuff like that. It was just unique and I miss that. The other type of restaurants up above Woodbridge there was a place called Lazy Susan later became Lazy Susan Dinner Theatre. But when I was or when we went there, it was Lazy Susan, and it was a very nice restaurant with a big fireplace. And it's where I taught my kids how to behave in a restaurant because everybody would get, you know, you'd get dressed up to go to it. It was very nice. That was nice. There was also one over where the Lake Jackson Dam is, it was called. It had a couple of names. I think it was Lake Jackson Restaurant. Then it was called The Dam Site and once again you know it was a, you know, something that a family started. Another one was not Padrinos - there was a pizza place up in Woodbridge that - Mario's I think it was. I can't remember, but you know all of those type of restaurants, I mean, I love Chik-fi-La. What can I say? But, but I miss those kinds of restaurants because they were more personal yeah, so.

LM: Now those are. I'm going to look some of those up when I get back.

ET: And Giorgio's is nice. So yeah, I like Giorgio's.

LM: OK.

LM: Yeah, yeah, that was my next - if any of them were still around, I know, OK.

ET: Yeah, Giorgios is, yeah.

LM: And we lost Harold and Cathy's this past year.

ET: I know.

LM: It was the only place I could walk to from my office.

ET: Oh yeah. And you know, they were so friendly there. I was hoping they would open someplace else but the owners came, or the young people, that the family that worked there lived in Spotsylvania. They - well, most of them, not all of them.

LM: Then quite a commute. Do you have any thoughts on the future of Dumfries in this area as a community?

ET: Well, it's growing dramatically and like I said, all this road changing is going to make a huge difference. And I think the idea of people coming, coming to Dumfries. I think that's a good - I know between where ACTS is and the Town Hall. The, uh, there there's one landowner there and they're supposed to be building there, so there's going to be, I mean, it's going to be lots of changes and I, I'm not opposed to change. I mean, I grew up in Arlington. What can I say? I knew it was coming. I just didn't know how soon. So yeah, I don't mind change. Think it can be good? Yeah.

LM: So I asked Yolanda Green for some questions and she just said that you were a great source of stories specifically about this part of Dumfries. And she said there was a story about a tar truck.

ET: Yeah.

LM: Would you be able to tell that?

ET: Yeah. When we first moved here, believe it or not, the speed limit on Possum Point Road was 55 miles an hour, all the way from US 1, and there were some older places there, and there were little kids that would be playing around there. So that was one of the first things I went to the town about. How can you have 55 miles an hour in front of those and in front of us? So they did lower the speed limit and now currently it's 35 in my part and 25 until you get to the creek right before us. You know, so that that was a big change, but with that the asphalt trucks. They would go to the asphalt plant, which was there, I mean, you know, we knew it was there. They would come down the road at, you know, 55 miles an hour and there were no houses for the first about mile. And then you had our little group of houses. And one day I was out in the back and I heard this enormous noise. So I went around and there was an asphalt truck that had turned over and it - and dumb me. I mean, I was like, twenty seven years old. I didn't know how hot that stuff was, but it was coming down in my yard and the guy wasn't hurt. He had jumped out, but we had a number of those incidents. Of the trucks turning over. And in that case, they had to, you know, they had to do something about the damage, and of course we didn't, we weren't going to sue, we didn't sue anybody. We just wanted it fixed and so we were able to form a bit of a relationship with that company, it was out of Richmond, to slow their drivers down, but that's been an ongoing problem here and now we're getting ready to have - the removal of the coal ash - big issue.¹⁵ I think what's going to happen, it's going to be kept on site, but they still have to build the new landfill to hold it. There's currently Pond D does not have the sides that are needed to be safe as far as a landfill. So, the, the requirements for landfill are different today. So they're going to build a new landfill, but to get in and out, they will have to, they're going to take some of the dirt off of their own property, which would be good. But we're going to have truck traffic and I have been talking with them already, as has have Yolanda. You know, because they'll use subcontractors. These subcontractors need to know there are people living here and we usually can, we usually can communicate pretty well with that but that's, I don't know if they know. And when I was talking to them recently, I don't think they realized about the dual laning of northbound, about Wawa, because they've come from another area and the guy, the guy was looking at me and he's like, "really?" I said, yeah, I said I'm going to get my boat back and go to grocery shopping by boat because I am not going to be able to get out of here. So we'll see how that all works out, but that's in, that's in the future here and hopefully they will communicate with all these - there needs to be communication and I know I attended a town hall recently that Supervisor Bailey had. And I mentioned to the Director of Transportation, who is, they're actually doing the road. I said nobody knows what you're doing. Put signs up. Tell somebody because they think what's happened to Dumfries? All these businesses are, you know, empty and vacant, and most people surprisingly don't realize what's going on. And so, he said, "I think they're going to try to do that, you know, at least put a sign at the beginning and down where the U-Haul Automotive place was, now that, and that - just put signs there saying you know, coming soon in five or six years you know, what's going on because I understand they had to buy out 110 businesses and so forth. So they've got to, you know, and they're doing that now. You'll see, you

¹⁵ "Dominion Energy is moving forward with plans to build a new coal ash landfill near the Potomac River in Northern Virginia, entering the last chapter of a long debate over how to safely dispose of the lingering contaminant." Whitney Pipken, "Dominion seeks permit for new coal ash landfill in Virginia," *Bay Journal*, April 27, 2023. https://www.bayjournal.com/news/pollution/dominion-seeks-permit-for-new-coal-ash-landfill-in-virginia/article_5378d34c-dd29-11ed-94ad-b3fc6e05f764.html

know, one by one by one, but you think, well, what's going on here in the town that all these buildings are vacant? So I hope they do that. That would be good.

LM: So I'm gonna ask you to backtrack just for a moment. You alluded to the coal ash and for someone listening to or reading this and didn't know what that specifically refers to, can you explain that? Why that affects you and the community?

ET: Yeah. The power plant at one time burned coal.

ET: And a kind of a byproduct of that was coal ash, which they stored in ponds. And there were five ponds at one time. Now all of it stored in the latest pond, which is known as Pond D and by state law, back a couple of years ago there was a big push to do something to remove coal ash. I didn't, personally, I thought they could safely keep it there. Well, it looks like that's what they're going to do because the amount of truck traffic that would take to take that out of here. Totally would have been just an absolute nightmare and that I felt there was a lot of misinformation. I'll give you an example. Some people were saying that the well water was contaminated. Well, I had a well for thirty five years. I am now on public water. I had it tested. They, Virginia people from the state came and tested all of the wells and didn't find any of them to be a problem. But still, Dominion, the you know the owner, they went ahead and tied people in. Of course I was already tied in, so I didn't get a freebie, but anyway so that, but anyway, so they by law they have to do something with the coal ash. And so we've met, and there was some that wanted to barge it out and you know, have it recycled and it just. It's going to come down to the cost and I do think that what might come out of them putting in a new landfill, I think the county may get some of the waterfront on the other side to use as a park, possibly. I don't know that, but you know that would be part of it. But it's kind of been on hold recently. So I haven't heard anything. So I you know, I can wait it out, you know, but it's going to be, it's going to take time. There's, there's a lot of coal ash stored there. And actually, the coal ash, when we first moved here, I used to call it. In fact in my column I called it the black snowfall because it was coming down particularly across the street from me on the tennis court, you could see the black because that's a little bit higher over there. But honestly, as far as the water or anything like that, I don't have any health problems, so I drank the water for a long time. So what can I say?

LM: So you're fine. Yeah, it didn't affect air quality at all at the time?

ET: Well, originally when they were burning coal but not, you know, when they stopped burning coal.

LM: Yeah. Right, right.

ET: You know. Then it went to oil and gas and I think right now they're, I think there's only, I don't think their whole plant is being used. But then everybody's looking, here's seven hundred acres. What can we put there? And it's had some different ideas recently, so we'll see.

LM: Am I missing any other good stories about this particular part of Dumfries or about this road?

ET: Well, just the only thing I would say is even though we don't have like a homeowners association, if anything happens to anybody or we have a snowfall or anything like that. We all work together. But yet there's a level of privacy, too. And you know, and many of the many of the people

have been here. I'm probably now the longest resident, but I'm not the oldest. I don't think I wasn't. I wasn't. I don't think so, but my neighbors on both sides lived until they were ninety-five and another neighbor, she lived until she was ninety and was still baking me bread. So I have to think that, you know, living in this kind of a setting I feel is very, it's very calming and I felt that way during COVID. And I tell my friends, I said, if you just want to come sit on the dock or sit on the porch, I don't even have to be here. Just enjoy what nature and I think that's very important for Prince William County to keep its natural areas, at least some of them.

LM: Yeah, absolutely no. You don't get a sense that you're near the hustle and bustle at all.

ET: Yeah. No, you don't. And a beautiful sunsets. And it's a gift. And yeah, so I'm, I'm pretty happy here. I don't like the fact that I'm, you know, I may have to move someday.

LM: I hope that's a long ways away.

ET: Yeah. Hopefully.

LM: Well, I guess so you said because there's no homeowners association. How do you all gather? How do you know your neighbors? Is it just informally or...

ET: It's informal. And we, well, like if we have an issue like we did during coal ash when we were having some hearings and different things, we'd get out and pass flyers out to all the mailboxes. We didn't put them inside because we know aren't supposed to do that, but we'd hook them on the outside and I would do that in my neighbor, the Browns. We would all work together. Yolanda Green now takes kind of the middle. A gentleman named Derek takes the new townhouses and I take this end. So we kind of organized, but my, the people here aren't necessarily on e-mail. I think probably most of them are now, but not all of them, you know. And so we just try to communicate that way and you know, and I've been a little, I usually go and greet people when they move in. And of course, COVID kind of stopped that for a while. But we're getting back.

LM: So, well, that was going to be my next - is there a de facto leader on your road or no? It's kind of -

ET: I don't know.

LM: So it sounds like it might be you, but - according to Yolanda.

ET: Yeah, well, OK, I like to be involved? And I do, I, you know, I care about the issues and I care about the county and I know that's where because we don't have the newspaper. It's very difficult and I have friends in other areas and, you know, I'll say something and they'll say "I didn't know about that." You know how it the only way you're going to, well, you've got to remember too that a lot of people, you know my age and above are not, do not use the, you know, social media as much as you know, as much as some of us do, so that a lot of the information is on there. And I've even said when the county was taking surveys a couple times. I said, OK. now how are you going to reach the seniors that don't, I mean, my friend, that was a hundred. How did she do it? She had a neighbor. She had them communicating with her son's neighbor. She didn't have a computer. I mean, we still do have people here that don't have and don't do it, they get, get afraid and they don't. do it. I was pushed into it, because, particularly my younger son was involved in the beginning of

Yahoo and they would send - I'd be out there, he'd say, "I'm going to send you a text message." I said, text message? I better learn how to do this. So.

LM: No one like to call each other anymore.

ET: I know I know. It's kind of a shame in a way- so yeah, I still do that once in a while. And yeah. Well, I, down in Charleston, for example, still southern, they still, you know, go house to house and, you know, don't use the phones as much.

LM: A little different than here.

ET: Yeah, it is.

LM: Yeah, I well, we're running - we've really kind of come to the end of my questions, but is there anything that I've missed that you'd like to talk about that might be important for our understanding of Prince William County or its communities that you'd like to leave on this recording?

ET: Well, the only thing I think is I think too - another thing that people forget about is our beautiful Prince William Forest Park. I go over there every season and drive through it, even if I don't, I'm not that I don't hike by myself. The, you know, they have a scenic route and you know, I think we've got that. We've got the National Marine Corps Museum. There's a lot happening in this area and I think a lot of people, and I have friends, they get focused on their one little area and I think it would be good to reach out and I think by doing this type of a history, I think that would be helpful to have people understand better what the county was like. I mean how much it's grown and lots of good things.

LM: Yeah, yeah, lots of good things, but lots of history. And yeah, that we want to capture.

ET: Yeah.

LM: Well, thank you for your time. And unless there's anything else you'd like to add, I'll go ahead and stop the recording. OK.