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CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

David Speck

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrator: *David Speck*

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Lloyd House, 220 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

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Summary:

Former City of Alexandria Councilman and Member of the House of Delegates, David Speck reflects on his time spent growing up in and raising a family in the City of Alexandria, and his political career for the City of Alexandria.

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General	Childhood; Living in Alexandria; Alexandria School System; Segregated & Integrated Schools, City Council,
People	David Speck; George Speck; Kerry Donley; Ira Robinson
Places	Rosemont; City of Alexandria; Beverly Hills; Chapel Hill; Jefferson Park; Seminary Ridge; Old Town;

David Speck: [00:00:06] My name is David Speck. I'm 77 years old. Today is February 28th, 2023, and we are at the Lloyd House in Alexandria. [00:00:15][8.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:00:15] Great. I'm Francesco. It's February 28th, 2023, and we are at the Lloyd House. So, David, why don't we start with some of your earliest memories from Alexandria, growing up here? [00:00:29][13.4]

David Speck: [00:00:30] Well, I was actually born in New York City and lived there six weeks before we moved here. My earliest memories probably are not until I was more like three or four, but the myth that I was born in Alexandria is, I have to say more accurately, that I almost lived here my entire life. However, my family on my mother's side goes back to the mid 1800s in Alexandria. . One of my earliest memories I have was my father and a friend of his building a treehouse. Our first home was on Beverley Drive in Beverley Hills. And he and a friend of his had this ready made little house that they managed to pull up to a platform. At the time, it seemed so high that I couldn't imagine being in it. I think it turned out not to be all that high, but it was off the ground. My father always pointed out that when we sold that house, three years later, it was the only deed that included a treehouse in the deed. And for years whenever we would drive by the house it was still there. That's kind of fun. [00:01:53][82.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:01:54] What did the treehouse look like? [00:01:55][1.0]

David Speck: [00:01:56] It was made of split logs. It was like pine logs that were cut in thin strips. And it wasn't a major construction. It was one of those types of things that was already made and looked like a mini log cabin.. Most people probably put it on the ground. but my father had this idea that he wanted to see it up in the air. And my sister and I had a blast for as long as we lived there. That was that was my earliest probably childhood memory of something that still is in my memory bank. [00:02:30][34.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:02:31] Yeah. Why do you think that's one of your earliest memories? [00:02:34][3.0]

David Speck: [00:02:36] Well, I think it was because it was a significant event in terms of our family. To celebrate, my mother went to the grocery store and brought back Hostess cupcakes or something like that. . The entire project was a big deal because I could watch them pushing it up on ladders, getting it up to this platform that they built in the tree. So many, many, many years later, I built one for my grandchildren. [00:03:09][33.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:03:12] Yeah. Does it look similar or not? [00:03:15][3.1]

David Speck: [00:03:15] No, it was different. More modern construction techniques. But I always thought about that when I was building it, that was a legacy that I guess I tried to pass on. [00:03:27][11.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:03:27] Wow. That's great. Was your dad handy? Was he a handy guy? [00:03:32][5.4]

David Speck: [00:03:34] He very much was, interestingly enough. He was a doctor. And I don't think he grew up handy. But I think that his gestalt was to always be looking at how things work and

having the willingness to try to fix something by figuring out what was wrong. And I don't think he passed that on to me deliberately. But clearly it was something that I absorbed. And I'm still doing things like that all the time because I enjoy understanding why things work, how things work, and when they don't, how can I fix them? And he was a fisherman. He was a hunter. In his later years, he started playing golf but I had zero interest in taking up golf, but we all the other things together and it was a good experience to have that. And particularly because my mother died when I was quite young. And so my father was really a single parent for a number of years. And there was more things that we could have time to learn how to do. And I think even though it was probably harder for him to balance all the time and obligations that he had. [00:05:00][86.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:05:01] Wow. Let me ask you, how did your mother pass?
[00:05:05][4.4]

David Speck: [00:05:06] Mm hmm. My mother got sick when I was five years old, when we were still in Beverly Hills. And she had cancer and had an operation that is still referred to as an operation rarer than the disease. She had osteosarcoma, and the surgery she had is something called a hemipelvectomy, which is the amputation of her leg and half her pelvis. For the next four years. She had additional surgery, but they were never able to really get it all of it. She died in 1956. I just turned ten. And so one of the reasons that we grew up in a different house was because while she was still able to get around, my father built a house in the Chapel Hill area of Alexandria just on the east side of Quaker Lane. that was all on one level. She had a prosthesis, but that was not always convenient. And so being on one level made it easier for her to move around. Most of the houses in the area were traditional in style (i.e., second floor, basement, etc.). After we'd been in that house for a couple of years, my father built the first private swimming pool in the city. And in those days -- probably about 1952 or 1953--that was not common. And there were no zoning regulations regarding swimming pools. I can remember my father complaining that it seemed like every year somebody from the city would come over and say, "you need to do something else." You know, you need to build a higher fence or you need to have a fence that's different. But now, you know, there's plenty of pools in the city, But he built it so that my mother could have a place to relax and swim or just be in the water that was private. [00:07:23][136.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:07:28] What was it like for you during those years when your mom was sick? [00:07:32][4.4]

David Speck: [00:07:35] It wasn't normal, but I don't mean that in a pejorative sense. In the last couple of years before her death, she was continuing to decline. There was a nurse that was there. Initially probably 8,10 hours a day, and then in the last few months, 24 hours a day. She died at home. It's sort of hard to really explain because when something like that happens, you absorb it. And because there's no experience that you can replicate for something like that, you're sort of learning a little bit on the fly. I don't remember this, but my father told me, which probably explains something about my own personality, that when he was preparing my sister and me for my mother coming home after that first surgery, which was done at Johns Hopkins, and that she would be missing a leg, I went into her closet and I don't know if I knew right and left at that time, but I took one of each of her pairs of shoes and threw them in the trash because I was trying to keep things

order. In my mind, she didn't need another shoe. She only had one leg. Well, they retrieved the shoes, but I always thought that that

was probably reflecting a little bit of how, you know, the orderliness of how I like to have things. [00:09:12][96.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:09:13] Yeah. And at such a young age. [00:09:15][2.1]

David Speck: [00:09:15] Yeah. Yeah. I think it was harder on my sister, she was just becoming a teenager when my mother died and that was tough. But my father spent all of my formative years as a single parent maintaining a growing, very active medical practice. He was an OBGYN, but still having time to get involved in Boy Scouts and be president of the MacArthur School PTA. At the time all that stuff seemed sort of normal because he was doing it. But in fact, looking back now, after my own children are grown I was always finding it difficult to fit in all the things that I wanted to do. So, that was pretty amazing that my father could. He remarried when I was getting ready to leave for college. And so I never really had another mother, as it were. My grandmother was probably the closest mother figure I had while growing up; she lived in Washington, and I think she was very involved in my life. Not raising me, but doing things that a mother might do. She made sure that I went to every important monument in Washington, which, you know, sometimes when you live here, you get sort of jaundiced about those things. So, yeah, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, the Washington Monument, all those things. Yeah. [00:10:47][92.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:10:48] That's great. Yeah. What was your mom's name? [00:10:50][2.3]

David Speck: [00:10:51] Doris Deford Speck. And she grew up in Washington, but her family, what I was referring to, lived here. My great-grandfather on my mother's side was one of the founding members of Temple Beth El, which is now on Seminary Road. And if you look at the charter, his name is one of the signatories on the charter. Beth El, was, the first reform temple in Northern Virginia and it started just basically a block from here, a block from the Lloyd House. And the family business, this is where it gets a little vague because there's details lacking, owned a tannery right on the river in what I think was kind of north end of the city. And it was, relatively speaking, not that far away because the city was pretty small then. So the north end of the city could have easily been, you know, down where Prince Street ends or something. I don't have detail on that. But maybe through you all we can find some information about that. [00:12:11][80.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:12:11] Yeah. Did it have a name, the tannery? [00:12:14][2.9]

David Speck: [00:12:15] I don't know. But there was in Alexandria, a pretty active Jewish business community and political community. Alexandria had a Jewish mayor in 1900. So you can still see some of the names that, a number of them are gone, but of businesses that were important businesses and thriving here in Alexandria. [00:12:48][32.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:12:52] When did your mom's family come to Alexandria? [00:12:54][1.4]

David Speck: [00:12:58] When? I think, in the early to mid 1800s. At some point in time, and I don't know whether it was in conjunction with the Civil War, a lot of them either moved north to Philadelphia or Washington, and then some other family was in North Carolina. So at some point, probably, I think in the late 1800s, maybe early 1900s, the family that was here either ended up in more in Washington, Philadelphia or North Carolina. [00:13:39][41.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:13:41] So they weren't immigrants? [00:13:42][1.1]

David Speck: [00:13:43] No, no. On my father's side, they were, but not my mother's side. [00:13:46][2.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:13:47] Okay. Interesting. Great. [00:13:48][1.6]

David Speck: [00:13:50] Well, I guess, you know, everyone's an immigrant. [00:13:51][1.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:13:53] Yeah, at some point. [00:13:53][0.2]

David Speck: [00:13:54] But my mother's side, they were here a long time. [00:13:55][1.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:13:56] A long time. [00:13:56][0.2]

David Speck: [00:13:56] Yeah. [00:13:56][0.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:13:57] Interesting. So you've mentioned the tannery and the businesses. Were there any other stories growing up that you heard about your mom's side of the family in Alexandria? [00:14:06][9.3]

David Speck: [00:14:09] Not really. Other than the link to Beth El. Yeah, and it's something I'm interested in trying to find out more. But I think that if I start, and I am in touch with some older relatives in North Carolina, but they would have little knowledge of that because they were not part of the Alexandria community. They had moved either south or north by that time. [00:14:37][28.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:14:38] What do you know about that event? You know, your family was involved in the founding of Beth El Is there anything else about that period that you know about, like creating the temple? Were there any stories that you've heard? [00:14:49][10.8]

David Speck: [00:14:50] The stories that I've heard in general are about Beth El's history. The previous Rabbi, Arnold Fink, used to talk about that there was a period of time, particularly in the South, where Jews were actively trying to assimilate. And there was a brief period of time, according to Rabbi Fink, who's deceased, that the rabbi, and this was a reformed temple, the rabbi was wearing something similar to a clerical collar. And they had some of their services on Sunday. I don't think that lasted long. But there was clearly an effort to assimilate. And to some extent they did, and became very involved in the community, both in business and in politics. I don't recall any issues regarding anti-Semitism. There may have been, but if there were, they didn't make the news or whatever the news was at the time. And it was not something that I experienced. And so a lot of these stories that you hear now, these really terrible stories about not just anti-Semitism, but the violence that is directing to Jewish communities. We didn't really experience that. Probably the only thing that I can remember that was a little difficult was in the late fifties and early sixties, the

headquarters of the American Nazi Party led by George Lincoln Rockwell, was in Arlington, and he was fomenting pretty much everything, as you can imagine, and certainly targeting Jews. I don't know how much of a following he had, but he made a lot of noise. For example, when Alexandria schools were first integrated, which would have been, I think maybe like 1956, two kids came to Hammond, James and Patsy Ragland. Because they lived close enough to Hammond to walk to it. And so somehow or another there was either a court ruling or just the pressure of doing this, that they came to Hammond. And this is before I went to Hammond as a high school, my sister was there, and the day that they came to school there were so many threats, largely from the American Nazi Party and George Lincoln Rockwell, my memory is that my father was driving my sister to school and then was going to drop me off at school because I was going to Jefferson by that time in Old Town, or downtown. And what I describe as the campus of Hammond, there were police essentially surrounding the campus. They brought in Arlington, Fairfax police, Arlington police, Alexandria police, state police, some federal officials. And it was uneventful. But it was it was a very tenuous time because of the threats that he would make. Several years later he was killed. Assassinated. I think that's what happened to him. But he made a lot of enemies in very many different venues. He made a lot of enemies. [00:18:56][246.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:18:57] I imagine. Wow. Wow. That's fascinating to hear that. We talked a little bit about your earliest memory of the treehouse. Can you maybe walk us through your childhood? [00:19:10][12.8]

David Speck: [00:19:12] Sure. Well, we lived on Beverley Drive until I was, I think, about five. And my father's first office, let me take a step back for a sec. My father was the first OBGYN to start practicing at Alexandria Hospital in 1945—the year I was born. In those days, the hospital was on Washington Street. [00:19:32][20.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:19:33] And your father's name, really quick? [00:19:34][1.0]

David Speck: [00:19:34] George. [00:19:34][0.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:19:35] George. [00:19:35][0.0]

David Speck: [00:19:35] Yeah. [00:19:35][0.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:19:37] George Speck. [00:19:38][0.8]

David Speck: [00:19:38] George Speck, yes. And so the doctors that practiced there were GPs[General Practitioners], lotta GP's. And I think some pediatricians, some surgeons, you know, some others, but babies were delivered by GPs in those days. And if you wanted a specialist, you had to go into Washington. And there's an interesting story about how my father came to practice here in Alexandria. He had gone to GW [George Washington University] Medical School where he met my mother. He did his internship at a hospital called Cooper Hospital in New Jersey, but he did his residency at Bellevue in New York City. And when he was getting ready to decide where to practice, start his practice, start his life as an active physician, one of the people that he consulted was Senator John Warner's father, who was an OBGYN in Washington. And he talked to him about

practicing in Washington and Dr. Warner said, "go to Northern Virginia." I don't know if he said Alexandria, but probably something like that. "There are no OBGYNs." You know, you'll have a great start in practice because there's nobody competing with you at that point. That obviously changed, and within several years, there were more practicing. But I told Senator Warner about this story once, and he was quite interested because he'd said his father had died when he was young. His father died, I think, Senator Warner said as age 52. So he didn't know a lot about his father's professional life. And it was an interesting story to him. But anyway, my father started practicing here, and his first office was in Shirlington, which was the first sort of shopping center in this entire region. If you look at Shirlington now, the basic footprint is not that different. It was sort of a squared off U-shape, and the two sides of the U were smaller stores of different types. And at the bottom of the U was offices, professional offices on the second floor. So that's where he started his practice. And then he found a partner. And they practiced there for a number of years before they moved to a location that was a little bit more convenient, as the hospital was adding its location to Seminary Road. I remember that once a week, on Monday nights, he would have longer hours for people that couldn't get there during the day, and he would often walk from where he lived on Beverley Drive down to Shirlington and did his office hours. And on a couple of occasions I would walk with him, and that was always a lot of fun. [00:23:00][202.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:23:01] How far was that walk? [00:23:01][0.8]

David Speck: [00:23:03] Maybe a mile, if that far. But it was a successful practice almost from day one because there was no one else there. And then he, for a brief period of time, he opened an office right next to the hospital on Columbus Street. I think it was the corner of Columbus and Duke. But that was a secondary office. They were extending some of their hours. And so they would see patients there. But the only hospital he ever practiced at was Alexandria. And he was the, I think, the first physician to ever be on the board of directors. He was the chief of staff of the hospital when what's called the Alexandria Plan first developed, which is about emergency medical services. And if you look at the exhibition of the hospital's anniversary at the Lyceum, there's a big piece about the first triplets that were born at Alexandria Hospital. And it was big news, front page of the local paper, and he delivered them. And I remember that. I remember because it was really big news. [00:24:27][83.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:24:30] Are there any other memories of your dad working at the hospital that you can recall? [00:24:35][5.2]

David Speck: [00:24:38] Only that sometimes he would take me. There was a little snack bar that I could sit in, and everybody kept an eye on me. And he got his haircut at the hospital because there was a barber that would cut the hair of the patients that were there for a long period of time. And then when the new hospital opened on Seminary Road, both hospitals operated at the same time for a period of time, but labor and delivery was all moved to Seminary Road. And so for many years he stopped going to the old hospital and then, of course, it eventually closed and everything consolidated on Seminary Road. So if I live long enough, I will remember all three hospitals that Alexandria's had. The old one on Washington Street, the "new" one on Seminary Road and then the new new one to be built where the. where the old Landmark shopping center was. [00:25:44][65.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:25:45] Yeah. Wow. Do you remember any doctors or nurses or anyone that worked at the hospital that you interacted with? [00:25:51][6.1]

David Speck: [00:25:52] Oh, sure. There were several nurses. Alexandria at that time had a nursing school. And so sometimes one of the student nurses would babysit me. And they had a teaching program at the hospital. So there were interns that were there. And all that's, of course, changed.

But some of the nurses, there were a couple of nurses in particular that took a special interest in me knowing that my, at this point my mother was either very ill or dying or dead, and they kind of in their own way, took care of me whenever I was at the hospital. My father needed to have somebody keeping an eye out. And so there were always people that were really being very nice to me. I always remember that. You felt like you were being taken care of and protected. And that was true at the new hospital as well, until I became, in relative terms, old enough that I didn't need to be babysat. [00:27:07][75.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:27:08] Do remember their names? [00:27:11][3.3]

David Speck: [00:27:12] Cookie. Mrs. Cook. Everybody called her Cookie except me. I called her Mrs. Cook until I was older. Miss Gravely. Laurensteen Gravely. And some of the nurses became clients of mine when I started my finance practice, so that was always fun. And some of the teachers that I grew up with became clients, too. That was always weird, you know, that I'm so used to calling them Mrs. something and they'd say, please, you know, call me whatever their names were. I had to get used to that. [00:27:51][39.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:27:53] You were probably very young, but the first hospital, what did it look like? If you can remember. [00:28:07][13.6]

David Speck: [00:28:08] Old. In a weird way it looked like a hospital. There was a main entrance and you could sort of see a lot of medical directions and signs. You know, it looked like a good old fashioned hospital. And it was. And trying to modernize it became increasingly difficult, which is what led to the new hospital being built. It was integrated, sort of. There was a colored section and a white section. The colored section was in wards and the white section was rooms. There were actually a few private rooms, but mostly it would be two or possibly four in a room. And my father probably was one of the first white doctors to treat indigent black patients. And again, I never thought about it as being unique at the time until I heard more about it and I thought about it. Beyond his own moral compass, he did his residency at Bellevue. And you saw all kinds of people there. And he was chief resident. So if you wanted to be practicing medicine at a very urban hospital in New York City, you couldn't decide which patient you picked to serve. And so I don't think it was as big a deal for him as I think it probably was for some other doctors.. And that was always sort of part of his, you know, as I said, kind of his compass. [00:30:10][122.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:30:12] Again, I know you were young, but did your dad ever talk about those challenges? [00:30:16][4.1]

David Speck: [00:30:17] He did occasionally. You know, particularly as I got older, we would talk about things that were going on in the world, particularly as the movement towards civil rights was becoming stronger. And there were, you know, things like sit ins and protests. I remember the three

young men who were murdered in Mississippi. That were murdered because they were participating in voter registration. I remember us talking about that at the dinner table and how frightening that was. And I'm not sure I was intellectually capable of looking at that with perspective. More of what I saw was that there were people there who weren't welcomed, and they got killed. But I obviously began to understand more about that story as I became a little bit more mature. And here in Alexandria, I think everybody knows Alexandria was a very segregated community. In virtually every respect. Black churches. Black stores

You know, the library was finally integrated, sort of. Segregated schools, black movie theater, black drugstore, and you didn't question it. You didn't think a whole lot about it. I've talked to plenty of people that sort of grew up in that era and, you know, discussing. Why didn't we say something? And the answer is, what was there to say? Everybody seemed to be coexisting. And then you began to understand more of what this meant. For example, in politics, people that were canvassing for votes knew where you canvased by census tract and the black community in Alexandria was somewhat monolithic. You knew where they lived. You knew where they shopped. And you still see some remnants of that, but not like it was then. And you campaign differently. Do you focus on different issues? You had different events, but it was a very segregated political environment as well. It was a big deal when the first African-American got elected to the city council. [00:33:27][189.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:33:29] For those who don't know, what was this person's name? The first elected African-American? [00:33:36][7.1]

David Speck: [00:33:37] Ira Robinson. He ran as an independent. He didn't run by party. And in those days, the Democratic Party was the dominant party. In some ways it is again. But there began to be a much more active, progressive Republican Party. And he ran as an independent because, I think he was hatched. This part is, I'm not sure I remember correctly, but it was a very good council and he was a very good councilman. Now, of course, the fact that there are members of several different populations that are on the city council is no longer particularly unusual. [00:34:31][54.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:34:32] Yeah, for sure. He's definitely a pioneer. I'm curious, can you maybe describe more from your experience growing up in segregated Alexandria? What were the other memories you have of living during that time? As a young person? [00:34:51][18.5]

David Speck: [00:34:52] I went to the Boys Club. And I still have a woodworking project that I made. And it was only after many years later that I realized it was a boys club for white boys. And, you know, again, the black kids had much more limited resources. Now, of course, it's completely different. And again, I don't think that the environment that I grew up in at the time seemed exceptional. And I'm not going to describe it as everyone knew their place, because I think that really does not do justice to how we all lived. But clearly there was a coexistence that seemed to be functioning well for both populations. And then, of course, there were things that you begin to realize and discover in later years about where, you know, there were real oppression and crimes that were covered up, and that the black schools had far more limited resources. And these were things that probably a lot of us didn't know because it never came up. And I remember that at some point, the school board appointed a committee. I think it was the Urban League that first raised the issue, that there seemed to be a disproportionate number of black kids being disciplined or

suspended. And the school board created a committee to look into that. And I was asked to serve on that committee. [00:36:59][127.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:37:01] How old were you? [00:37:02][1.2]

David Speck: [00:37:08] Thirties, maybe late twenties, early thirties. When I was living back in Alexandria as an adult, I was away at school for a couple of years, but I served on that committee. It included some black former teachers and others. It was a good mix. It was a good committee. It worked in a very collegial way. [00:37:35][27.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:37:38] What was the name of that committee? [00:37:39][1.3]

David Speck: [00:37:40] I don't remember. Yeah. [00:37:41][1.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:37:41] But organized by the Urban League. [00:37:42][1.1]

David Speck: [00:37:44] The issue was raised by the Urban League, it was the school board that formed this committee because the Urban League was pushing hard to say, you know, you need to understand why this is happening and because the facts were the facts. It was true. Black kids were more disproportionately being suspended, expelled and disciplined. [00:38:05][21.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:38:08] So it's like late sixties, early seventies? [00:38:12][3.6]

David Speck: [00:38:12] 1970s, you know, probably early to mid-seventies. And as we began to explore that in more detail and to try to find out why some of this was happening, I remember that one of the members of the committee who was a former teacher for many years, Black, said, it was an interesting story. She said, "when the schools were segregated. At least among the black schools, there was far better discipline." And she said, "most of us lived in the neighborhood. We knew all the families. If a kid misbehaved, the parents would say, You can discipline him." And I'm sure that probably discipline in those days included some, you know, some whacking. But it was all done within this community. Say, "you make sure my kid behaves." And I was fascinated by her story of saying that in many ways, discipline was better in a segregated school system. Now, I don't think it was quite the same way in the white schools because teachers were not necessarily living in the same neighborhood. But in the black schools, a lot of them were. And there's still families that are part of those long standing connections, particularly women who wanted to rise in some sort of professional employment, became teachers. And, I mean, there were exceptions, of course, but that was a career path for a lot of African-American women. And I still think about that. And I think that at least my own experience with being in the schools that I went to was that there was also very little tolerance for misbehavior. And, you know, your parents heard about it pretty quickly if you did. And the principal, I mean, principals were to be feared. And I remember a couple of them, you know, you did not question their authority or leadership. [00:40:55][162.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:40:59] Can you say more about this committee or commission? [00:41:03][4.5]

David Speck: [00:41:05] It was a committee. [00:41:05][0.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:41:05] Yeah. What did you end up producing? [00:41:08][2.4]

David Speck: [00:41:09] Well, we produced a fairly long report that talked about, acknowledged, that this was happening and what you could do about it. And this is a long time ago now, so I'm not remembering some of it, I mean, it's 50 years ago now. There were clearly different standards for inappropriate behavior. And it led to at the time, I think, some additional training and direction that made it clear that there should not be two different paths of discipline. You know, one for white kids and a different one for black kids. It's probably in the archives somewhere. [00:42:05][55.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:42:05] Yeah. [00:42:05][0.0]

David Speck: [00:42:06] But that's, I apologize, I just don't remember a lot of the details other than that the sort of the macro view of things. And I know there were some recommendations that were made. [00:42:15][9.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:42:17] Why were you asked to be on the committee? How did that come about? [00:42:20][3.6]

David Speck: [00:42:24] Hmm. I knew some of the people on the school board that were appointing the members, and they knew I had an education background. Not at the school level, but I had worked at George Washington University for several years. My doctoral dissertation was regarding student discipline and disciplinary systems at the university level. But it gave me a little bit of insight into some of that. So, I think they saw me as being helpful. It was a good committee. I remember that. As I said, it was very collegial. And when you approached it there wasn't an immediate answer.

And as you started listening, you gathered at a lot more information than you might have initially. And it was very collaborative in terms of the report that we delivered as well. [00:43:21][56.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:43:21] That's great. Can you talk a little about your personal experience in the schools here? Maybe walk us through the schools you attended? Any memories from those schools? [00:43:31][9.9]

David Speck: [00:43:33] Again, talking about segregated schools. The school system at the time had no kindergarten. There was first through seven in your neighborhood school. I went to MacArthur. There was a single eighth grade for all white kids in the entire system. Jefferson. It's where Jefferson Houston is now, and everybody went there for the eighth grade. There wasn't middle school then—it was just eighth grade. And then high school. And high school initially was at GW for the whole city. Then Hammond was built and opened in 1956. and so the city was roughly east side GW, west side Hammond and that was 9th-12th grade. As enrollment increased, a third high school was built—T.C. Williams (now Alexandria City High School) located in roughly the center of the city. Then all three high schools consolidated at TC and the two other high schools became middle schools. That was also the time of “Remember the Titans” and the 1971 football team. My sister and I went to MacArthur through 7th grade (she was older and 3 grades ahead of me). My sister was president of the student council. I was captain of the patrols. My father was president of the PTA. So we always laugh about our political dynasty. [laughs] And then I went to Jefferson for eighth grade, and then I went to Hammond for ninth and tenth. And I think that's probably where some of my, I'm not sure I would call them struggles, but some of the impact of growing up

without a mother, affected me. And I started slipping a little bit in terms of how I was doing in school. And my father wanted to break that pattern. By this time my sister was gone. She'd started college. And I think my father was looking at getting on with his life, looking to remarry at some point. He didn't want to do it while we were still young and in the house. We lived right across the street from Episcopal High School. He wanted me to go to Episcopal, but they wouldn't take a day student at the time, and he said, "I'm not going to pay all this extra money for you to live across the street." He considered Sidwell Friends, and they would not accept me unless, they took the approach that anyone that was coming out of the public school system needed an extra year to catch up with what they thought were their academic standards, so you would have to repeat a grade. And I didn't want to do that. And I don't think my father wanted me to do that, either. I ended up in my last two years of high school going to St Stephen's. And that sort of got me back on the right track, as it were. And I started at UVA. I could not get accepted to UVA, now, if I were applying to get in. Tough to get in. So that was, you know, neighborhood schools. And that, of course, changed a great deal. By this time, we had moved from our first house in Jefferson Park to Rosemont where our two children started elementary school at Maury. The School Board, in an effort to create racial balance among all the elementary school started "pairing" two elementary schools together—one for 1st-3rd grade and the other 4th-6th. Maury was a Rosemont neighborhood and Lyles-Crouch was an Old Town neighborhood. In both instances, depending on where you lived, you could walk to school for 1^{sr}-3rd and 4th -6th. And then you had to either be bussed or driven to Lyles-Crouch or Maury. Note: In 2022, Maury was renamed the Naomi Brooks Elementary School. [00:47:52][259.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:47:54] So what school were you at when when integration occurred? The last two years of high school? [00:48:03][8.3]

David Speck: [00:48:04] No, it started probably around 1960, but it was limited. But it was also, it stopped being quite the big deal that I think it was initially. And then, you know, there were many incarnations of desegregation and integration that took place, like the pairing of schools where Lyles-Crouch was a predominantly black school and Morey was a predominantly white school. And so you started mixing people up. So all the kids that were in the Lyles-Crouch district, they were bused to Maury for first through third. Whether it was the best way to approach this or not, it was the way it was done. And I think that probably in many ways our school system still struggles, and I think there are a lot of committed people trying to make it a better school system. But the fact is that we've lost a significant middle-class population that would have been using the schools. And I think that there are more families that moved to Alexandria in spite of the schools. Whereas when I was growing up and when my kids were growing up, people came to Alexandria because of the schools. And that's really sad to see that. It is what it is. I mean, you can't change that. You can't suddenly make people feel better about it. But I think the thing that always bothered me was that I think people made that judgment without even trying. [00:49:57][112.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:49:58] And so what led you to want to study education? That's what you ended up doing, correct? [00:50:05][7.1]

David Speck: [00:50:06] Well, my undergraduate degree was in psychology, which, you know, can mean anything. But then, at that time, I was at GW and I was actually working at GW. I became first an RA [Resident Advisor] and then a dorm director. And I was interested in a program that

directed you more towards a career in student affairs. And so I got a masters in what was called college student development. I started working first as, again as a dorm director, and then as an assistant dean. And then I got my doctorate in higher education administration, thinking that that was a track that might ultimately lead to a college presidency. And I continue to have higher level jobs at GW. But I began to be uncomfortable with what the career track would require, and that is to advance you would have to be moving to maybe a comparable sized position in a parallel move or smaller university in a higher position. But clearly, you were going to have to make a couple of geographic moves. I did not want to do that. My connections to Alexandria were just too strong. So that's when I decided to move in a different direction. [00:51:39][93.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:51:41] Can you say more about your connection to Alexandria? Why were you so connected? [00:51:45][3.5]

David Speck: [00:51:45] Lived there all my life. I was interested in pursuing politics. My father was here, and that was a route that was important to me. My friends were here. These are my roots, you know. And I realized that it was becoming increasingly important to me. I didn't know where it was going to take me, but I wanted to be here. I wanted to raise my children here. I wanted to sort of grow and develop here. And I've never, not for a second, have I regretted that. [00:52:20][34.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:52:21] And you mentioned that you met your wife at GW, right? [00:52:24][3.1]

David Speck: [00:52:25] My first wife. [00:52:26][0.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:52:26] Your first wife? Yeah. Okay. [00:52:27][0.9]

David Speck: [00:52:27] Yeah. [00:52:27][0.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:52:29] And did you have kids with your first wife? [00:52:31][1.6]

David Speck: [00:52:31] Yes. We were married for 18 years. My two children are the product of that marriage. And we got divorced in 1986. And then I met my current wife about a year later. She was not from here. We got married in 1987 and we just had our 35th anniversary. My former wife still lives in Alexandria. She remarried, and her husband has a daughter. They still live here. She worked for the city for a number of years. And we're kind of, you know, the modern family. We all get together for events and occasions and that's good. [00:53:31][60.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:53:33] So when you had your kids, you said you were living in Rosemont. Can you describe Rosemont when you were living there, raising your kids? What the area looked like? [00:53:41][7.3]

David Speck: [00:53:45] It looks a lot like it does now, but the demographics have changed. I mean, on our block, I think virtually every houses had families like ours. We were all sort of the same age. We all had kids about the same time. And so we shared that common interest. But that, you know, that's what happens in neighborhoods. My generation bought houses from people that had lived there for a long time, often could have been some of the original owners. And then we gradually moved on in different ways. And as our kids got older, and the environment changed a

little bit and then younger families would move in. Because the house that I lived in before I moved here in Old Town was in Seminary Ridge. And we lived there for, I don't know, maybe 20 years or so, maybe more, 22 years. And the people that bought the house from us were a young family with a baby and then a second baby. And that pattern repeats itself. [00:55:02][77.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:55:03] Interesting. Did you ever interact with an area that some people have called colored Rosemont? It was about 2 to 4 blocks. It was where some of the first black homeowners in the city lived. It was just north... [00:55:20][17.2]

David Speck: [00:55:21] It really wasn't thought of as Rosemont. So the answer is I didn't interact much, for no particular reason other than the kinds of stuff that I was involved in didn't link with that part of the community. [00:55:37][15.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:55:40] Okay. Do you remember any kind of relation? Was there any kind of connection at all? Maybe not you personally, but was there any interaction? [00:55:48][7.8]

David Speck: [00:55:54] I think one of the things that led to more interaction was soccer. As soccer became a much more popular sport, you saw teams all over the city that had integrated. So, I think in some ways it was the kids that led the movement towards a more natural and comfortable, relationship. And I had some friends that lived on the GW side, and they were much more involved in sports. White and black kids, particularly basketball. One of my friends was a very good basketball player, and he used to tell me when he was growing up that, you know, they had really good teams and they played together and that sort of brought parents together. It wasn't easy, but I do remember that you no longer looked at soccer teams with surprise when they would be far more integrated. [00:57:06][72.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:57:08] And just really quick, what are your two kids names? [00:57:12][3.9]

David Speck: [00:57:13] Elizabeth and Jonathan. [00:57:14][1.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:57:17] Do you recall any fond memories being a parent, raising your kids in Rosemont? What are your fondest memories? [00:57:23][6.2]

David Speck: [00:57:25] We had some fun things that we did for several years. I had a great Santa Claus costume, and I would go to the various houses in our neighborhood with my elf. And one of my kids each year got to be the elf, and I would visit each house on Christmas Eve and tell the kids to make sure that they got to bed early so that I could come back and visit them. I don't know what started me doing that, but it was just a blast. And then at another point, where we lived in Rosemont we backed right on to Beach Park, and Beach Park had a little bit of a natural amphitheater. And so we started in the summer, this is long before, you know, computers and CDs and everything. I would borrow a 16 millimeter projector from the library. We had this screen that we put up. I would run the electric cords from my house, and we would get the most god awful movies. I mean, you know, movies that were really old. [laughs] But no one cared. It was a lot of fun. Everybody brought popcorn, and we sometimes built a little bonfire. And we did that for several summers. And those were things that we really enjoyed. [00:58:59][94.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:59:01] What were some of the movies? [00:59:02][0.4]

David Speck: [00:59:03] Um, I can't remember. They were so bad. I mean, they were just really old movies that nobody probably ever checked. You got them from the library. I mean, these were movies like, from the 1940s and things like that. But it was fun. Every now and then we'd managed to get a more decent movie, but it didn't make any difference. That was part of the Rosemont culture. A lot of families of similar age, similar kids. And we did a lot of things together. [00:59:39][35.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:59:41] And you mentioned earlier, you know, efforts of desegregation and like how your children went through it. What was it like as a parent? When these efforts were being done to desegregate the schools? [00:59:56][15.0]

David Speck: [00:59:57] I think... [00:59:58][0.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [00:59:58] From your perspective, the parent. [00:59:59][0.8]

David Speck: [01:00:00] For my wife and me? We were probably more, I don't think the word is outspoken, but we were far more active and involved in pushing back on any opposition. There were times when I think we were being very presumptuous about how people felt, but we were so sure we were right that I think there may have been some people that got annoyed about the self-righteous part of the argument. But we had pretty strong feelings about that and tried to be supportive as much as we could. Again, my wife at that time, one of the things she did when she worked for the city was Project Discovery, which was working on supporting kids. The purpose of the program was to support families with the first child going to college. And that was a very successful program in many ways. [01:01:23][82.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:01:24] Is this the 1970s? [01:01:24][0.1]

David Speck: [01:01:25] Yeah, yeah. Early 1980s too, and then then it continued after we, you know, when we separated, then got divorced in 1986. And then my wife Marcia became very involved in the arts community, particularly the Alexandria Symphony. She became the executive director of the symphony. Then she co-founded an opera company with, the musical director of the Alexandria Symphony. And that became a real passion of hers. So a different direction, but I think equally committed to strengthening the community in a different way. [01:02:09][44.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:02:13] One thing we haven't talked about is your political career, can you walk us through that? [01:02:19][5.3]

David Speck: [01:02:19] Sure. It has its own story. There is no requirement that if you become more involved and interested in the community, that you have to run for office. But what I began to see is I was more involved in different committees and things like that, is that if you wanted to have more influence, you would do it by being in a position where you could direct the energy and talents of the city in different ways. I was becoming more involved, but I hadn't yet decided about what political party I was going to associate with. I think intellectually I was probably always a Democrat, but at the time, the really active progressive political party in Virginia and in Alexandria was the Republican Party. And I became very friendly with a number of those folks. [01:03:21][62.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:03:22] What time period, in the 1980s? [01:03:25][2.7]

David Speck: [01:03:27] Yeah, this would be in the late, mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s. [01:03:32][5.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:03:32] What do you mean by progressive? [01:03:34][1.4]

David Speck: [01:03:35] Well, I mean... [01:03:36][0.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:03:37] What are some things the Republicans are doing well? [01:03:38][1.3]

David Speck: [01:03:39] You have to go back to an old joke about politics in Virginia. Virginia always had a very active and engaged two-party system, but both parties were Democrats. And because you had the Byrd machine, which was the political structure that closed the schools to prevent integration, massive resistance. The Republican Party became the more, like I said, progressive party. Linwood Holton, who's Tim Kaine's father-in-law, was first elected, as a Republican from the Shenandoah Valley, with a lot of help from people that were nominally Democrats but were leaving the Democratic Party because it was becoming so rigid in its conservatism. So I made a decision that I was going to become involved in the Republican Party here. And start to run for office. And I tell people this, and they don't believe it. Not that long ago in relative terms, early 1980s, Alexandria had the most elected Republicans of any city in Virginia. Three City Council members. Congress. Commonwealth Attorney. Sheriff. One of the two delegates of the House of Delegates and the State Senator. And it wasn't some huge ideological change. It was people who were active in the community with deep roots and moderate in their politics. So, I first ran for office in 1979 for city council, and I finished seventh and the top six get elected. Jim Moran finished sixth. That was first time he ran for office, too. We always joke about what would have happened if I'd finished sixth and he'd finished seventh. But there wasn't anything I did from a campaign or political standpoint that I had to recover from or rehabilitate myself in some way. So, in an unexpected situation, both delegates from Alexandria left after one or two terms. And so there were two open seats. I had had a good campaign for city council. So a few months later, I just pivoted into the House of Delegates race. City Council elections were in the spring and the Delegate election was in the fall. I ran as a Republican for the House of Delegates and won. There were four people running for two spots. I was the top vote getter by a wide margin. A man named Bernie Cohen, who has since died, was the Democrat who got elected. So a Republican and a Democrat representing the city in Richmond. And I went to Richmond, enjoyed it tremendously. I was named by the Richmond Times-Dispatch as one of the outstanding rookies members. Everything was going well for reelection. And then I ran into something that I didn't really expect, which is I was running in a gubernatorial race one year after Ronald Reagan had been elected, because Virginia elections are often "off cycle" and I never saw it coming. But it was one of those races where a lot of people who were Democrats in the city voted without really sort of looking at the choices. Because people that vote in local elections are not necessarily the same people that vote in statewide or presidential elections. There were a large number of voters who really weren't interested in local stuff and just, you know, looked at the sample ballot and voted for their party. So my brilliant burgeoning political career abruptly ended at that point and it was time to

focus on my career. At that point I had begun my career in finance and didn't necessarily have any plans to do anything further. But for different reasons I decided to run for city council in 1991. And was elected easily, as a Republican. Again, a spring election. That's where I started my first term. Kerry Donley started his second term. But that's really where our friendship began because we weren't enemies. We just didn't know each other. We knew of each other. We didn't know each other, and we then did. And he became my most endearing friend. [01:09:02][322.8]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:09:03] For those don't know, can you explain who he is? [01:09:06][2.8]

David Speck: [01:09:07] Kerry Donley was a city council vice mayor, mayor, chairman of the State Democratic Party. And truly my best friend. He died suddenly and unexpectedly this past summer at 66. And I'm still processing it. I probably will do that for the rest of my life. I guess I miss him a lot. But I served one term on council. Things were not going so well within the Republican Party locally and in Virginia. And I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. And I didn't know how to work that out. I couldn't change parties right before the next election and expect to get support because I'd be really, I think, betraying the people that supported me the first time. But I didn't want to run again as a Republican. I really began to recognize that that was just not going to be where I fit or where I fit in. So after one term on city council, I stepped down didn't run for reelection. And then, unexpectedly, the state senator at the time, Bob Calhoun, was defeated for reelection by the mayor at the time, Patsy Ticer. I don't think anybody saw that coming. But the result was that Kerry, who was vice mayor, became mayor. And I, then, at the encouragement of a lot of people, and by this time I had announced that I had changed parties before any of this happened. And I didn't expect that there would be an opportunity like this, but I felt I needed to lay the groundwork for being accepted in a different party that created an opening on city council. And I ran in a primary, but a Democratic primary, but got through that because a lot of my friends that happened to be involved in Democratic politics supported me because I was still relatively new. And then I got elected and continued to get reelected several times. And Kerry and I both stepped down in 2003. He needed to focus on career things and family and all that. And I did, too, and didn't expect that I would run for office again. But I think it was a surprise to a lot of people because I actually had announced before the election when I was elected the previous term that this would be my last term. I don't think anybody paid a bit of attention to that. But when it was time to announce that I was whether I was running for reelection, I said, "no," you remember, I said, "I'm not running again." And it wasn't because I couldn't get reelected. It was because I didn't want politics to consume me. And that can easily happen. Suddenly you start thinking about the office that you hold, you know, you don't want it to start defining you. So I was comfortable with the decision to step down at that point and work on other things. And Kerry also stepped down, but then decided to come back on city council a few years later. And he, you know, again, he's younger. And I think he made the right decision at the time when he stepped down. But I think he made the right decision to come back. And he was extraordinarily good at the role of mayor and of city council. [01:13:35][268.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:13:37] When you started in the nineties, what were the most pressing issues for the city during that period? [01:13:42][5.3]

David Speck: [01:13:43] Money. It was a difficult time financially. One of the more difficult times we had financially. And Kerry was a very good leader in municipal finance. People didn't realize how smart he was about that. And I think his leadership really helped us get through a lot of that. I spent a lot of time focusing on economic development. And we were very involved in getting the Patent and Trademark Office, PTO, approved as well as the National Science Foundation. I really worked at what I think was, and probably still is, called Smart Development, which was transit oriented. And I think that what I worry about more than anything else is that this is a city with finite resources. Our primary source of revenue is real estate taxes, and you can't keep doing all the things we want to do without finding new sources of revenue. But where would they be coming from? I mean, they come from real estate, commercial and residential. And, you know, you have to be careful about too much development. But you can't just sort of take a pass. I mean, you've got to be far more willing to aggressively develop the city in ways that will contribute to its prosperity and its strength. And it's a fine line. I mean, there are plenty of people that complain there's too much development and there are plenty of people that complain that taxes are too high. And that's one of those things that you'd have to find in balance. But the way to understand this is that, think of Alexandria as a business or think of yourself as having a business, a product or service, and it's a good product or good service. You develop a reputation. You find good customers and you're doing quality work and you suddenly realize, though, that there's one limitation to all this great work that you're doing. Somebody drew a circle around where your business is and said, you cannot get customers outside the boundaries of this circle. So what happens over time? You find that you have to raise your prices, which makes you less attractive to your customers, or you start cutting back on the quality of your service or your product in order to continue to be profitable. That's an understandable analogy, but it's exactly the case in Alexandria. Alexandria, if you look at the map of Alexandria and come back in 50 years, it's the same map. It's the same boundaries. And there's only so many things that you can do to generate real estate revenue. When I was growing up, just on the east side of Quaker Lane, I could walk across the street, walk across Quaker Lane, and I would be in Fairfax County. Everything that you know to be the west end of the city was Fairfax County. But in those days, Alexandria annexed into that area in 1952. But that's what cities would do in those days to create a stronger tax base. You annexed into what were thought of as sort of rural counties. And in Virginia, people don't pay a whole lot of attention to this, we have an unusual structure of municipal government. We have independent cities and independent counties. So Fairfax County does not have a county seat. Alexandria is not in a county, and we try to make it confusing by having this whole section south of the city with an Alexandria mailing address. And so when people say, I live in Alexandria and you ask them where they live and then say, well, you know, that's not Alexandria. You know, you pay your taxes to Fairfax County. But it's the way Virginia is structured. And it creates some confusion. But Alexandria is responsible for itself. And there aren't other people that you can draw from other than the state which we send more money to the state than comes back to us. Not necessarily the case in every jurisdiction, but it's certainly the case here. [01:18:40][297.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:18:41] And so were these conversations happening when you're a city council, were there talks of annexing more areas? [01:18:47][6.1]

David Speck: [01:18:48] You couldn't. I mean, it's not allowed anymore. So that's why the management of what we have has to be done very carefully, because you can't put up some huge

development and then look back on it and say, "jeez, that didn't work out so great. Let's try something else." I mean, there's no mulligans in development. If I'm famous for anything, and I don't think I'm famous at all, but it would be that I developed a framework for thinking about real estate decisions called the 20 year Idiot Rule. And it's still referred to as my rule. The 20 year idiot rule was: when you're making a land use decision, and you're pressed to make the decision that seems right at the time, the expedient decision meets all the approvals and everything else, ask yourself a question; 20 years from now, if somebody drives by that, whatever that project was and looks at it, and says, "jeez, what kind of idiot approved that?" That should be a test that we apply to ourselves. And every now and then you see something, say, "what were they thinking to do that particular project?" And I think that's something that should guide us that we may not be around to explain. I'm talking about we in the sense of when city councils do this, we may not be around in 20 years to explain why we did this. So ask yourself that question now. [01:20:19][90.6]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:20:20] What were some developments when you were on city council that you remember that you supported and support? [01:20:25][5.7]

David Speck: [01:20:27] Well, Wilson Bridge was a very controversial one, but that was not necessarily within our control. I think probably PTO was the biggest one, because the PTO at the time was in Crystal City and the landlord at the time was generating, I think I heard about \$7 million a month in rent. Because the Patent Trademark Office was in all these different buildings. And so when they made the decision to locate in the Carlyle area, there were people that actively opposed it. And what they thought was going to be all the damage it was going to do to the city didn't turn out to be that way. But people get pretty riled up about those things. But it was also being fed by Charles E. Smith and that company. They were funding these, quote, "grassroots opposition." So I was living somewhere in that area at the time, and I would be getting fliers, you know, a couple of times a week, really fancy slick fliers talking about Armageddon, you know, building PTO. [01:21:50][82.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:21:51] What's the company called again? The company you just mentioned that owned the property? [01:21:57][6.6]

David Speck: [01:21:58] Oh, Charles E. Smith. [01:21:59][1.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:21:59] And so they were landlords? [01:22:01][2.0]

David Speck: [01:22:03] Oh, yeah. They're big. They were a big real estate development company and they owned, they started, Crystal City. So they owned a lot of these buildings where PTO was. I think somebody told me they had property, they had offices in 14 different buildings, all in the Crystal City area. But that one of the reasons for making the move was to consolidate and have everything in one place. And they built this beautiful complex. That's what led to the development of Carlyle. If you hadn't had that anchor, I think a lot of other things would have been slow to come. Kerry and I in particular really worked on getting that approved and really engaging the community so that we could isolate the opposition, which was very active and vocal and fully funded. That was a big one. Wilson Bridge was a big one, too, but that wasn't entirely in our control. But that's worked out okay, too. [01:23:13][70.3]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:23:14] Why was that controversial? [01:23:14][0.6]

David Speck: [01:23:16] Its a bigger bridge. And people that lived in Old Town were adamant that that was going to destroy Old Town. It was going to be devastating to real estate values. As it turns out, it was anything but. But, you know, I always used to say when I was on council that when issues come up and people come forward to speak to their government, there is no requirement that they have to be worldly, selfless, or open-minded. They're coming because they feel strongly about something. And our job on city council is to listen to that and try to balance all the things we're hearing to make the best decision on behalf of the entire community. But people can get pretty inflamed. And it doesn't make any difference what the logic is of a particular decision or not. But I think we worked through that. I'm very proud of the fact that I think we got that through at a time when it was critically important to the economic development of the city. [01:24:35][79.0]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:24:36] Is there anything else from your time on city council that you want to mention? [01:24:38][2.5]

David Speck: [01:24:40] I'm sorry. Say that again, please. [01:24:41][0.9]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:24:42] Is there anything during your time on city council that you worked on, whether it was related to development or any other policy or anything that you would like to mention? [01:24:50][8.1]

David Speck: [01:24:52] There are actually a couple of things that I always think about. One is creating the resident police officer program where we identified some certain neighborhoods where there was a higher statistic of crime taking place, and we would move a police officer into that community, that neighborhood, and that would be his beat. So, for a young police officer, it was a chance to really do some positive policing and also save money on housing. That was a good program. I initiated a program for directing a penny on the tax rate to be designated for saving open space, and we had some nice accomplishments there. [01:25:46][54.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:25:47] Can you describe the open space policy? [01:25:48][0.9]

David Speck: [01:25:48] Well, open spaces is land that could, in many cases, could be developed. And you cannot prevent that if it's something that is allowed. But by setting aside some funds, we were able to acquire open space or maintain open space that allowed us to keep it open. So, for example, if you look at the corner of Janney's Lane and Quaker Lane, that's the area where President Ford grew up and the park is named for him. That section right at that corner is always going to be preserved as open space, because we were able to acquire it. And that was something that was of one of the last things that I did, when I initiated that on council. By the way, I came back on city Council briefly in 2012 when there was an opening as a result of a current member of council who got elected to the House of Delegates: Rob Krupicka. That resulted in the court appointing me to fill the remainder of that term. And that's a gig you only do once, right? So it was fun to do it, but it didn't last that long. And there's a memorial for a man named Rocky Versace in front of Mount Vernon Rec Center that we got very involved in to discover how many Alexandrians died in the Vietnam War. Rocky Versace was the only Medal of Honor winner that was awarded the Medal of Honor for what he did as a prisoner of war. He was killed by the Vietcong. His body has never been found, but he grew up right across the street from Mt. Vernon School. It's a beautiful

memorial, which was entirely paid for by private funds, raising private funds. It's a wonderful memorial, not only to the work that he did, because right before he was captured, he was getting ready, his tour was going to be over and he had been accepted into the Maryknoll Seminary to become a priest. And he was going to come back to Vietnam to work with children that had been orphaned from the war. So, there are benches around this plaza that have the name engraved, the names of every Alexandrian who has been identified as having been from Alexandrian or claiming that as their hometown who died in the war. Some of whom I knew. [01:28:47][178.4]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:28:49] Wow. Yeah. I'm curious, just to go back to the residential police officer program. Can you describe the creation of that some more? What were you modeling it off of and who was involved? Who was involved in creating it? [01:29:02][12.4]

David Speck: [01:29:03] I don't know if it was modeled off of anything. I think it was a model for others. But what became clear was that you could see statistically that there were certain areas that had a higher crime rate. And there was a little bit of, I call it the sheriff model. You know, the old days, the sheriff knew everyone. And if there was a problem, you know, the citizens came to him. And if somebody was causing trouble, he knew who it was and could take care of it. And the idea behind this was to have someone who's not just there when there's a call for service, but that's where he or she lives. There were women, I think, a couple of times that did that, they get to know that particular community. I mean, their beat was maybe no more than two or three blocks, but they became known. Kids used them for resources. They heard about problems before they became problems. And I don't think they're doing it like that anymore. But part of that is because the areas that were being focused on were public housing. And public housing is obviously being spread out into the community. So there's no longer that many specific enclaves of public housing, which is a good thing. [01:30:23][79.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:30:23] I was going to ask, what were these areas that you're talking about? Was it all public housing units? [01:30:32][9.4]

David Speck: [01:30:34] Primarily, yes. There was some overlap, but primarily. Yeah. And at one time, I think there were three different areas where there were RPOs, resident police officers. And I think it worked at the time for what it was intended to do, I think was very successful. Other communities modeled their programs after that. But for us, what began to happen was that you did not have these very defined areas of public housing. And that's where everyone lived. Now it's integrated throughout the community. [01:31:17][43.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:31:19] That's great. [01:31:20][0.1]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:31:36] So is there anything that I haven't asked you that you want to include before I move on to some general questions? [01:31:44][7.9]

David Speck: [01:31:47] No, I just I think the sort of overall theme of a lot of things that we've talked about regarding Alexandria and this was something that Kerry and I used to talk about all the time. One of the great things about local government and about local government in this city, is that Alexandria is small enough that you can understand a problem. But it's big enough that you have, at some level, all the problems of any big city, but small enough that you can get your hands around it. And there's no other form of government that says, "I can see a problem, I can think about a

solution, and I'll put it in place and watch it work." And I think that's incredibly rewarding and it's this sense of community that, you know, we struggle to maintain, but it's still pretty important.

[01:32:37][50.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:32:38] That's great. I'm just curious, what are some of the most important lessons you've learned in your life? [01:32:45][7.0]

David Speck: [01:32:49] There's a quote, actually, that is something that I keep on my desk to remind me all the time. It's attributed to Aristotle. And I've never seen that contradicted. "To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing." And I think that has guided me in many ways, particularly in public office, that if all you do is just try to please everyone, you will end up pleasing no one. So don't be afraid of being criticized if you want to be able to accomplish something. And particularly as it relates to city council, you know, there's not a single decision you'll make of any consequence that doesn't involve telling someone no. There are always going to be people who are opposed to something you're doing. And that doesn't mean that they're wrong. But what you want to be able to impress upon people when you're making a decision is everybody's point of view is valid. But at some point, decisions are made that look at things in balance and you try to do that. And I always felt that was kind of what guided me when I was in office. And I think that enough people over the years tell me that. And I'm not trolling for compliments, I mean, in the sense that people would say, you know what I liked about the way you operated--and I think there were certainly others on council exactly the same--is that if you don't necessarily make a decision that I like, but I know that you made a decision that you thought was the right one based on the facts that you had in front of you, and that I'm not unique in that. And I think that's one of the great things about local government. [01:34:59][129.7]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:35:00] That's great. And maybe related, is there a memory, or are there any memories that you wish you could hold on to forever? What would they be?

[01:35:04][4.3]

David Speck: [01:35:17] That's a great question. I really have to ponder this some more after we stop. Because if you ask me what was something that you particularly feel was important, I'm not sure I've ever thought about it in that context. I'm, you know, I'm of an age where I'm, I think, becoming more contemplative. And not that you can't be contemplative when you're younger, but I know that I'm closer to the end of my life than I am the beginning. And I'm looking at things in many ways differently. And I think that's part of the process of aging. But I'm proud of the way I served. I'm proud of the way I lived. I'm proud of the way I helped people in my career in finance. We haven't talked a lot about that, nor do we need to. But that was that was my 35 year career helping people plan their financial futures. And I find that just as rewarding as some of the other things that I've done. [01:36:42][85.5]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:36:43] That's great. Is there anything you want to mention before we end the interview? [01:36:49][5.6]

David Speck: [01:36:50] I'll probably think of a lot of things as soon as I walk out of here. But I think you've done a great job of asking good questions that caused me to think. And I appreciate

that you're doing this. I think these are great records to have for people that will be interested in how Alexandria came to be what it is. [01:37:15][24.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:37:16] Great. Yeah. And thank you so much for participating and sharing so much. [01:37:19][3.8]

David Speck: [01:37:20] My pleasure. [01:37:20][0.2]

Francesco De Salvatore: [01:37:21] I appreciate it. [01:37:21][0.6]

David Speck: [01:37:22] Thank you. [01:37:22][0.0]