



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



Oral History Interview

with

Marian Van Landingham

Interviewer: *Kerry James Reed*

Narrator: *Marian Van Landingham*

Location of Interview:

1100 Cameron St, Alexandria, VA, 22314

Date of Interview: *2/1/2024*

Transcriber: *Kerry James Reed*

Summary:

Marian Van Landingham reflects on her time spent creating, directing, advocating for and working in the Torpedo Factory Art Center in the 50th year of its operation.

She also discusses her early life in Georgia, changes she has witnessed in Alexandria, and the threat of commercial development on the longevity of the Art Center

Notes:

Table of Contents and Keywords

Minute	Page	Topic
01:00	3	Introductions
02:37	4	M reflects on her parents and growing up in Georgia
9:02	7	M reflects on Art at the Atlanta institute
14:00	9	M reflects on Art in Northern Virginia when she moved there
16:58	10	M discusses urban renewal
22:00	12	M remembers the history of the Torpedo Factory
23:15	13	M discusses her memories of the Torpedo Factory
31:25	15	M reflects on bringing the Torpedo Factory to city attention
35:06	16	M remembers cleaning the Torpedo Factory
37:30	16	M discusses community support and resistance to Torpedo Factory
40:31	17	M reflects on her the bicentennial plan
42:00	18	M remembers the grand opening of the Art Center
49:46	21	M discusses jurying system for Artists in the Torpedo Factory
54:00	22	M reflects on the changing art scene in Alexandria
1:00:48	24	M reflects on the attractiveness of the Art Center to visitors & tourists
1:10:43	27	M discusses personal art work
1:18:13	29	M reflects on the 50 th anniversary of the Art Center
1:30:08	32	Closing remarks

General	Torpedo Factory Art Center, Marian Van Landingham, Alexandria, Commercial development, Waterfront, Art League, Art
People	Marian Van Landingham
Places	Alexandria, VA; Emory University; Arlington; Washington D.C.

Marian Van Landingham: [00:00:00] This is Marian Van Landingham, age 86. The date is 2/1/23 [00:00:10][9.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:00:12] 2024. My mistake. [00:00:12][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:00:16] Right, right. 1100 Cameron Street, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314. [00:00:18][1.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:00:21] My name is Kerry James Reed. I am 26 years of age. It is the 1st of February, 2024, and we are at 1100 Cameron Street. So thank you so much Miss Van Landingham for agreeing to do this interview for me, it means a lot. This is going to be absolutely fascinating. We'll start with some pretty basic stuff. Where were you born? [00:00:43][22.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:00:44] In the hospital in Albany, Georgia. [00:00:45][1.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:00:46] Hospital of Albany, Georgia. Okay. [00:00:48][1.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:00:51] I don't remember the name of the hospital [laughs] [00:00:52][1.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:00:56] Of course. Were your parents living in Albany, Georgia, at the time? [00:00:58][1.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:00:58] Oh, they were living in Sylvester, Georgia. [00:01:00][1.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:00] Sylvester, Georgia. [00:01:00][0.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:01:01] Which is about 20 miles from Albany. [00:01:02][1.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:03] Was there no hospital in Sylvester, Georgia? [00:01:05][2.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:01:06] No, no. [00:01:06][0.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:07] Ok. That's a long drive. Yeah. Could you describe your parents for me? [00:01:12][5.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:01:13] Well, my dad was... Well, I don't know how much detail you want, but he had grown up in that southwest Georgia environment and near a little town called Cairo. Not in Cairo, but near Cairo. [00:01:35][21.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:36] Cairo. [00:01:36][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:01:36] You know, that's, not far north, really, of Tallahassee, Florida. And he was in Georgia, employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Which at that point was trying to help farmers buy land, also to get loans to improve property. Yeah. Its a time, of course, of coming out of the depression, and there was a need for that kind of thing. So that was, it was called at that point the Farm Security Administration. Mother had grown up in the same corner of the state nearer Alabama, just south of Columbus in Cuthbert, Georgia. And she had been an orphan when she was a child. Parents both died when she was young. But an aunt had taken responsibility of her, her father's sister. And fortunately he left her well enough in his will for her to be financially able enough that even in that sort of coming out of the depression period she was able to go to college. [00:03:13][96.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:03:14] Oh, that's excellent. [00:03:15][0.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:03:16] You know. So, that was really, they of course had just married and we didn't live very long in Sylvester at that point before dad was transferred across the state. But... [00:03:36][20.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:03:38] What were their names? [00:03:38][0.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:03:39] Myrtle Van Landingham. Myrtle Taylor Van Landingham. And dad was Strauter Leroy Van Landingham. [00:03:45][6.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:03:48] Strauter? That's a very interesting name. [00:03:50][1.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:03:50] That was a different name. And so, it was somewhere, his mother's family, but he never knew exactly how they came up with that, you know? He usually went by SL. But then a lot of people just called him Van, which is anybody with the name Van Landingham is likely to do. [00:04:11][20.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:04:14] So you mentioned that your family didn't stay in Sylvester for long, they moved across the state? [00:04:18][4.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:04:19] Yeah. Dad was transferred. If you're a federal employee, right? [00:04:23][4.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:04:23] So where did where did you grow up? [00:04:25][1.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:04:25] In several different places. We lived in Albany, Georgia, where he was transferred for 3 or 4 years. And we were moved to Greensborough, Georgia. North Georgia. And finally to Athens. And eventually, when he became state director, we were in Atlanta.¹ [00:04:55][29.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:04:59] How old were you when you moved to Atlanta? [00:05:00][1.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:05:01] Oh, I was in college, so. Well, you know, excuse me, about junior year in high school. [00:05:13][11.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:05:14] Junior in high school. Could you describe the neighborhood you grew up in? [00:05:20][5.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:05:25] Not really. Nothing is exceptional. You know, all the little small towns that you'd expect. During the Second World War, we were in Greensborough, almost all the time. And dad did not have to go in service because he had young children. and he continued with Farm Security Administration all through that period. [00:05:52][27.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:05:56] I guess I'm asking because, you know, living in Old Town now, I was curious if you ever had exposure to an area like Old Town growing up? [00:06:06][9.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:06:08] No. No. Maybe it's one reason I was fascinated by Old Town when I got here. [00:06:13][5.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:06:13] Yeah, it's a very fascinating place. Were there any particular moments in your childhood or any, you know, trips or anything like that that made you, that attracted you to the arts? Anything that stands out? [00:06:28][14.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:06:29] No. No trips. In fact, we didn't really take any. My travels are entirely since I became a college age and beyond, you know, here. Which was, I was very curious as a child, and, you know, I had a globe and, you know, I think cousins, others, you know, got me a subscription to National Geographic, that kind of thing. And I read a lot of other places, but I didn't have the experience of going, you know, having any childhood travels.² [00:07:17][48.6]

¹ After Ms. Van Landingham was born in Albany, she lived in Sylvester, Victoria, Greensboro, Athens, and finally Atlanta.

² Ms. Van Landingham did make one trip as a child to Ontario, Canada.

Kerry James Reed: [00:07:20] So when you were looking at that globe as a child, have you gone to most of the places you were fascinated by as a kid? [00:07:28][8.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:07:29] Oh, a lot. I've been, you know, I've been all over Europe but particularly Italy, that was my favorite spot. In South America, in this area, there was, you know, Mexico once. Costa Rica. Argentina. And I'm trying to think. I think Puerto Rico. Did I say that? [00:08:10][41.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:11] No. [00:08:11][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:08:12] No. Anyway, I've been in Brazil. Well, one day in Brazil. [00:08:16][4.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:18] Quite the traveler. [00:08:19][0.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:08:20] No. Not really. [00:08:21][0.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:22] Oh, don't sell yourself short. You've been more places than the majority of people, I would say. [00:08:25][3.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:08:26] Yeah. But some of it was close, you know, it was not very long. But some of it was a few days or weeks. [00:08:35][8.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:38] So you mentioned to me previously that you first took, art classes at the Atlanta Art Institute? [00:08:44][6.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:08:45] Yeah. [00:08:45][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:45] What was that experience like? [00:08:47][1.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:08:47] Well, it was fascinating because I had already taken a fair amount of Art History, you know, in college at Emory, but I had not done it myself. So I took a class in art composition and, get this, a class in portraiture. Which is one of the hardest things I tried to do. But that was just one, one summer between college. [00:09:23][35.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:09:25] What drew you to Emory? Why Emory? [00:09:27][2.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:09:29] It was close. It was a good, a very good university and it was actually in the neighborhood where I'd gone to high school. [00:09:38][9.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:09:40] Ok. What did you study while you were at Emory? [00:09:42][2.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:09:43] Political science. [00:09:43][0.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:09:44] Political science. That's a very interesting combination then, an art history and political science. [00:09:49][5.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:09:51] What can I say? [laughs] [00:09:52][1.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:09:55] What drew you to political science, then? [00:09:57][1.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:09:58] Yeah, I don't know. I was always fascinated by what was going on in the world, so to speak. And history in general really interested me. But I got the undergraduate degree, and I also the master's in political science from Emory. [00:10:26][28.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:10:27] Excellent. So then, when did you move to Alexandria? [00:10:30][3.2]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:10:37] It was, I'm trying to think exactly about it. God, when was it? I'm trying to remember exactly because I worked in PR at Emory and Georgia Tech, and in the National Communicable Disease Center, oh, which took up most of the 1960s. So it must have been about 67, 68 when I got to Alexandria.³ [00:11:26][49.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:11:27] Were you still working for the CDC then or? [00:11:30][2.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:11:31] No. Well, when I was working at the CDC, they loaned me to something called the Task Force on Environmental Health. [00:11:40][9.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:11:41] Ok. [00:11:41][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:11:42] Which [this task force] was a prelude to this establishment of the Environmental Defense Agency. You know, this was the Nixon years. And they drew off all of the employees that were already at the CDC and other public health service groups to be to be on that task force, which lasted one spring. And we did interviews about everything that the federal government was doing in the environmental area because they didn't know what they were doing either. And we were trying to think about how to put it together. So, I spent a spring doing that up here just temporarily. And then decided, and I'll say one prelude, in my last year in college at Emory, I had gone to American University, for one year there on a kind of spring semester thing. That was done with colleges that were tied in, with the sort of Methodist universities around the country. So, I had had that previous time of being and enjoying in the Washington area. I jumped at the chance to come back for that one. And then I then decided that that would be better if I could transfer from CDC up here.⁴ [00:13:15][92.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:13:15] Right. [00:13:15][0.0]

³ Ms. Van Landingham lived in Arlington for several years before moving to Alexandria.

⁴ It was while on this task force that Ms. Van Landingham decided to transfer to the national public health service.

Marian Van Landingham: [00:13:16] And I was able to do that. [00:13:17][1.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:13:18] When you went to American University for that one spring semester, you know, did you notice the art scene in D.C.? Was it very vibrant or? [00:13:27][9.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:13:28] No I didn't. [00:13:28][0.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:13:29] No you didn't. [00:13:29][0.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:13:29] No, I didn't really have any time or contacts with it. [00:13:34][4.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:13:34] Ok. [00:13:34][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:13:35] No, the art came later. [00:13:36][1.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:13:38] So when you first moved to Alexandria then what was the art scene like in the city? [00:13:44][6.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:13:46] I didn't know the first few years I was here what it was like. I had quickly moved from the CDC, in Public Health Service doing PR [Public Relations], speeches and press contacts with Congressman Phil Landrum of Georgia. And I did that for 4 or 5 years. I'm trying to think, and it was while I was working for him that I finally heard about and I don't remember exactly how, but there was something called the Art League of Northern Virginia. And that it was in Arlington, and I went there and found out, visited its gallery, and I quickly joined it. You know that was a contact. [00:14:46][59.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:14:48] So when you first went to the Art League where, where was it located? [00:14:54][6.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:14:55] It was in Arlington, in a little business district which has now been redeveloped a lot. And in fact they were starting the redevelopment of it, which was the reason the Art League finally had to move. The place that they had gotten, was going to be, not renovated but I mean that whole area was going to be more commercialized.⁵ That's where the Hett company was. I don't know if you know that. And I'm trying to think of what the shopping center was called at that point. I don't know that it really matters, but that was where they were at that moment. But they were in the process of moving into Alexandria, to Old Town. And they had found space on Cameron Street right opposite City Hall. It's right in the middle of the block. And that made it really easy for me because at that point I had already just moved Old Town about a year before and left the high-rise apartment on the highway. You

⁵ Ms. Van Landingham would like it noted that she is not completely certain that the Art League was located in the business district she describes in the interview.

know, that's where I was when I first moved up here. So, I had moved to Old Town. [00:16:20][85.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:16:22] Did you move here to 1100 Cameron? [00:16:24][2.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:16:24] No.⁶ [00:16:24][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:16:24] Where did you move to in Old Town. [00:16:26][1.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:16:27] It was 501 Cameron I think. It was a third floor apartment in the corner house at the corner of St. Asaph Street and Cameron. [00:16:37][10.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:16:40] Do you remember anything particular about Old Town at the time when you moved here? [00:16:44][4.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:16:45] Oh, I loved it immediately. But it was in the process of urban renewal itself at that moment. And they had just torn down most of the 500 block of King Street, opposite the other side of the side of the block from City Hall. And were rebuilding that whole block, which as it is today. And had also, were in the process of tearing down the 500 block of on the other side of King Street, where the courthouse is now, you know, that block. So, but at the same time, I heard that that city was interested in doing some celebration, because of the, in memory of the bicentennial, and in memory of the so-called Fairfax Resolves that sort of predated the Declaration of Independence [laughs] of course, you know. Oh, so we were going to try to do some history things here. I had grown tired of doing speech writing, press things for Landrum. So I was freelancing at that point and kind of looking for an idea and found, was interviewed by Jim Coldsmith, who was chairman of the Alexandria Bicentennial Commission, and he was editor of a newspaper, you know, at that point, and had contacts in town and he hired me to be the staff of the Alexandria Bicentennial Commission, and that really got me involved. And we had several history reporting things or interviews and whatnot for writing some publications. But also, of doing the PR for the renovation of the Lyceum and Gadsby's, which was still being renovated at that time, too. There was a lot going on that the city was trying to do. So, I was sort of the staff. But, you know, I wasn't actually, doing physical work or anything, but really it was part of the PR function. [00:19:31][166.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:19:33] So do you remember what kind of history the city was focused on for the bicentennial? [00:19:36][3.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:19:39] The bicentennial age.⁷ [00:19:39][0.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:19:41] The bicentennial age. [00:19:41][0.5]

⁶ Ms. Van Landingham purchased her home in on Cameron St in 1974

⁷ 1756-1800

Marian Van Landingham: [00:19:41] You know, the celebration of the nation's birthday and how it had kind of a prelude here in Virginia. [00:19:52][11.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:19:53] Right. So, was there a big focus on the Founding Fathers or just the culture of early America? When you were compiling those reports, what did they have you focus on? [00:20:05][11.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:20:05] Well, we were focusing on the Alexandria contribution. [00:20:07][1.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:20:11] OK. [00:20:11][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:20:12] In terms of people that were active in that period and some the structures that were left from that era. And also trying to bring the city, spiff it up and make it so that people know where things happened here. The city made the decision to go back to brick sidewalks at that point. You know, so they tore up the concrete sidewalks and put the brick ones back in where they had long been replaced. And also had gotten funding for various things, like the renovation of the Lloyd House, you know, the renovation, as I say, of Gadsby's and all that [00:21:06][54.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:21:06] Mhmm. [00:21:06][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:21:08] We weren't the primary fund group, you know, for raising the money, but we advertised it and made it part of, and celebrated it. [00:21:21][12.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:21:23] So, while you were doing all this, were you creating much art? Because you were a member of the Art League while you were working in the city? [00:21:31][8.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:21:32] Yes, I had joined it in Arlington. [00:21:33][1.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:21:34] Okay. So, were you working on much art at this time or did the work for the city sort of take all your time? [00:21:40][5.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:21:40] No, I did art all the time. I was, you know, it was always my vocation. [00:21:47][6.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:21:50] What kind of things were you doing when you first moved to Old Town? [00:21:53][3.2]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:21:53] Well I was in an abstract mood. [00:21:55][1.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:21:56] Abstract? OK. OK. [00:21:56][0.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:21:58] [laughing] At that point. [00:21:59][0.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:22:02] Interesting. Very interesting. So, were you aware of any other, public arts programs in the region or the country or in Georgia? [00:22:16][14.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:22:17] No. [00:22:17][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:22:18] You never heard about that before? [00:22:19][0.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:22:19] No, no. [00:22:20][0.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:22:20] So this didn't really exist? [00:22:22][2.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:22:23] I'm sure it did exist in bits and pieces, but I had not done any kind of study or indication of it. Really, I got focused on the Torpedo Factory and finding a space for the artists when the Art League was about to lose its lease on the Cameron Street site, and we had to go somewhere. And I was an officer at that time and president of the Art League. And so where were we going to go? I started looking around Old Town. 'I'll find someplace.' It would be close to where we were. And I said, 'I looked at every pigeon filled place,' and was discouraged about it. When one day Jim Coldsmith was in the office and he said to me, "why not the Torpedo Factory? The city doesn't know what to do with it." And he was following the go rounds the city was having with the federal government about, you know, what to do, what would be the fate of those buildings, which the federal government was about to give the city. And the city didn't know what to do with it. And, that really hit me. Almost immediately, I went down to see these buildings. I had never really paid any attention to them. And the first block of King Street in that waterfront area, there was nothing except I think one restaurant on the corner of King, that had been there forever. And a place that specialized in inexpensive imports things. And other than that, the waterfront was pretty. Well, it was not attractive, let's put it this way. And when I got on my bicycle and went down to see it, I found that it was there, it was a great hulking thing that filled all the block. And there was cyclone fencing around the ends of King Street and end of Cameron Street. But there was a gate that was open at the underpass at the end of Cameron Street, I remember. So, it was a space, like this area is now, up between the buildings there, but it had been fenced in. So, anyway I went through the gate, and I got to the back and saw the waterfront. It was astounding, you know, that it really was there. The dock was pretty rotten. But the only thing that had been active there was a school rowing facility. It was a little concrete block building at the end of the main part of the pier where the restaurant is now, the end of the end of, Cameron Street assets. But anyway, I was impressed. There was, and, I followed up, basically, we came back, you know, this was an interesting space, and I wanted to see it and went in. And it was an enormous amount of space, which was fantastic. But of course, it had been filled with mostly federal furniture and old desks and things of this nature. That had to be gotten out if the city was going to use it. And also, a lot of pigeon mess since the windows had been broken and pigeons had come in. But I was astounded by this space. And felt immediately that it would be great. [00:27:06][282.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:27:07] So, what was astounding about it? Because, I mean, now we can go down to the Torpedo Factory and it's, you know, obviously a fabulous building with all these partitions and everything else. But when you first saw it in the early 70s, what made it astounding and in your mind? [00:27:21][13.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:27:21] Well, just the figure that you had, of the space. Which you could use and turn into almost anything, and of course it was sturdy. The walls looked awful, but they were mostly government green. [laughs] And, but I mean, we knew paint would clear that up. You know it was, of course, dirty. And it was a place where we could move our school because the Art League had developed a good many classes in the basement level at 315 Cameron. But also, at the corner of Cameron and St. Asaph a couple of years earlier in the basement. So, we needed immediately a space for the students and classes and we knew that would be available.⁸ [00:28:52][91.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:28:57] So what had been the purpose of the Torpedo Factory before the city took it over? Because you mentioned, you know, I can't imagine the federal government letting such a dilapidated building just sort of sit there for so long. [00:29:11][13.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:29:12] Yeah, they apparently right after this, [clears throat] my voice is really off today, so I'm sorry. [00:29:20][8.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:29:20] It's okay. [00:29:21][0.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:29:24] After the Second World War, and it was used, of course, through the Second World War. After the Second World War, the Nazi war records were brought there and were studied by historians. I early spoke to the man that was the senior person over that. He lived here in Alexandria in Beverly Hills neighborhood when I talked to him. I think he passed away recently because I saw something that I know about that sounded like, I didn't remember his name, but it sounded like his bio. But anyway, apparently that was the use of it for a few years after the war. I don't know exactly how long. Then it became just storage space for the federal government. [00:30:30][66.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:30:30] Yeah. So, when you brought this space to the attention of the Art League, what was the response among your fellow members? [00:30:40][9.2]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:30:40] Well they were interested because we hadn't been able to find anything else. And I assume that someone had led walking tours down there, like a lot of people did. You know I think a lot of them were astounded by the size of it, the condition of it was shabby to say the least. But it seemed like a good possibility, and they heartily supported it. And I got the Bicentennial Commission in support, Jim Coldsmith in particular was good about that. And I mentioned it very early to the mayor, Chuck Beatley and he was very supportive. He was a United Airlines pilot, and he was very open to ideas unlike his predecessor

⁸ This section has been edited by the narrator and may not reflect the audio

and those who didn't support us later. Beatley could see the possibilities immediately. He was a man that had built his own house. Yeah. I mean by his own hands, in the West End. So, he was one of the best mayors we've had. I was lucky. He brought the city council into support of this experiment. I phrased it as an experiment to see if it would work. And there's a bit more, particularly that it was a three-year experiment. So that city could get rid of it if it didn't work. [00:32:48][128.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:32:50] Why phrase it as an experiment? Was it because the public arts program was novel? [00:32:54][3.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:32:55] Well, because we weren't sure the city would want to commit itself to a long-term use at that point. This was an experiment. And they put up, I'm trying to remember now exactly the amount, it was not a lot of money, but they support enough to make it habitable. It was enough to put one coat of paint on the outside and some cold water sinks inside. And not much else, you know, but they approved it. That's City Council in May, I first proposed it to them right after Christmas. You know, so I mean it was a very fast action. [00:33:58][62.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:33:59] Very fast for the city, yeah. [00:33:59][0.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:34:00] You know by city council standards. [00:34:01][1.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:34:04] So they gave you some money for this experiment, as you call it. Did any of that go towards the cleanup of the Torpedo Factory or where'd that money go? [00:34:18][13.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:34:19] That money went for the paint for the outside of the building. And for the installation of those cold water sinks in a few places. And you know a little bit else but not much else. [00:34:30][10.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:34:31] So then, what did the process of cleaning up the inside from all that pigeon mess look like? [00:34:36][4.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:34:36] We did that. [00:34:37][0.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:34:38] The Art League did that? [00:34:38][0.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:34:39] Yeah. Art League members and all the people that found out about the art center and were interested in supporting it. Well, maybe coming into it. So, we started that in June. It was approved in May. We started in June. To make it habitable, and we got in there immediately and started cleaning. And the artists who thought they wanted to be part of the art center came in. If they thought they wanted to rent a studio when we got it fixed. I got them signed up. And to put up, knowing the what the first month rent check what it was for, it was going to be for \$4 a square foot a year. That was it. [00:35:44][65.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:35:45] So you mentioned the community helped you guys clean up the Torpedo Factory initially. [00:35:50][5.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:35:50] Some did, and others opposed us. [00:35:54][4.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:35:55] So others opposed you. What was it facing opposition for your experiment? [00:36:00][4.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:36:01] Well, I led endless tours of the building and tried to describe what we were going to do and when we could use it. And some people, you know, supported it. I mean, the others looked at that dirty building, this big, gray, hulking look and thought that they really wanted it torn down and to have a great park all along the river. Which would have been nice too. So, there was community opposition. Oh, and so they circulated all the groups, came in, looked at it. Oh, a lot of them didn't, couldn't visualize it. Some supported. Then there was a group that circulated a petition against us. And then it put something on the doorsteps, a flier about it, all the way through Old Town. [00:37:09][68.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:37:10] Oh, wow. [00:37:10][0.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:37:13] The president of the Old Town Civic Association, though, was a friend of ours. And he sent his three daughters where the fliers had been, all the way through Old Town putting flyers, something, in support of us. And one of the daughters is right now the president of the Artists Association. [00:37:40][27.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:37:41] Oh really? [00:37:41][0.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:37:42] He's long since passed away. But it was Pete Schumaier. He was a good friend to the Factory. [00:37:52][10.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:37:55] What was it like when the community, you know, the Citizens Association, sort of rallied behind you to, oppose the people pushing that petition? What was that experience like? [00:38:09][13.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:38:09] Well, Old Town Civic did not take a stand. They did not actively oppose us. But there were members, some of their people were, I don't remember which voices. Oh, for the day [clears throat] Oh, sorry. But, anyway, there were enough that were supporting us, too, that the city council did not back off. They stuck with us through that. And that was the way we were able to, when they approved it in May, we were able to go in and start cleaning up immediately. And the federal government started removing a lot of the property, the desks and whatnot. But a lot of it they left too, they didn't really think it was worth moving. So, we gave away a certain amount of stuff and other things were repurposed. Desks were painted and became work tables in the art center. And. [00:39:32][83.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:39:33] Very useful. Thrifting, very nice. So, it's interesting, the timing of the Torpedo Factory has always been very interesting to me. So, here we have the bicentennial plan, where ostensibly the city is trying to celebrate, you know, Alexandria and the Founding fathers and, yeah, American culture and things like that. And yet they approve of a public arts program in the Torpedo Factory. How did you see the Torpedo Factory fitting in to the bicentennial plan? [00:40:05][31.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:40:08] Mainly it was as a draw. You know, and something to make the city more attractive, finally. It was not that we were going to do just artwork of Old Town. [00:40:28][20.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:40:29] Mhmm. [00:40:29][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:40:30] Or anything like that. [00:40:31][0.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:40:35] What kind of art was being done when the Torpedo Factory first opened? So, you mentioned to me that you were doing some abstract things when you first moved to Old Town. Are you still doing abstract art at that time? [00:40:46][10.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:40:46] Yeah. And the work that was done by the Artists, you know, went across the waterfront, so to speak, of the people in the Art League or what they were doing at that time. So, it was a mix. The only thing that was, it was another attraction to Alexandria and hopefully to the Torpedo Factory.⁹[00:41:42][56.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:41:44] The portraits and everything, right. [00:41:45][0.2]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:41:45] Portraits and everything, yeah. You know, it really had no ties to the history of the city, except we were in a building that had been there, been important in the Second World War. [00:42:03][17.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:42:06] Very interesting. What was the grand opening of the Art center like? [00:42:10][4.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:42:12] That was interesting too, because we wanted to do something that would tie in with the city's history. Exciting that first summer, but we knew we couldn't really get it started in June. Get it ready. So, we sort of cleaned it up as best we could and painted it as much as we could of the interior, and actually opened it to the public, so to speak, on the city's birthday in July. And, I stood on a loading platform on the side of the building. (There were loading platforms on the Union Street side at that point, and the mayor was there.) We had someone create an opening celebration poster, which was really great. We presented that and then we had a dance that evening in Union Street, because we really couldn't do anything inside at that point. Right. So, it was sort of a preview opening. But that

⁹ Transcript has been edited by the narrator and may not reflect audio

was still pretty amazing that we were able to do that much. Between the end of May and city's birthday in July. [00:43:41][89.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:43:43] So how long from when you first presented your experiment to the city and to the grand opening, how many months was that? [00:43:52][9.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:43:54] The grand opening really was in December. [00:44:00][6.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:44:01] December. [00:44:01][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:44:02] Yeah. We kept working at it because we had to paint the whole thing clean and paint the whole interior. And, meantime, I was also enlisting new prospective renters for the building, all that period of time. So basically, we worked that end of that first summer into the fall finishing the clean-up. In meantime the city also, contractors did what they were going to do which was paint the exterior and put in the cold-water sinks, that kind of thing. So, in essence it took another six months to actually make it habitable. And we were going to go into the winter, we didn't get it, we did not get improvements to the heating system. I never did that first time. So it was, the furnace was turned on each morning at 7:00 or 8:00. I forgot, but I think it was 7:00. And it gradually warmed up in the mornings, but it was pretty chilly that first year, as far as heating. We went, it was few years before we had air conditioning also. You know, later. [00:45:33][90.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:45:34] So it was still very raw space. [00:45:36][2.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:45:36] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. [00:45:37][1.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:45:40] What was it like working in in the Torpedo Factory in the early days of its opening? [00:45:47][6.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:45:47] Well, in the winter part we had to wear a lot of layers. [laughs] And we did. Other than that, we really had space to work, which was great. And our individual artists made their own spaces as comfortable and attractive as they could. We also had a very, very talented artist who did super graphics on the walls, in the hallways. [00:46:25][38.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:46:26] Interesting. [00:46:26][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:46:26] We didn't have the, the corrugated metal fronts to the studios that we have today, that was part of what the city did later when they did renovation work, maybe, you know, ten years later. [clears throat] Excuse me. But the super graphics down the halls was very colorful. And added a good bit of color. [00:46:54][27.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:46:56] What was the artist name who did the super graphics?
[00:46:58][2.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:47:02] I'm trying to think. I'm drawing a blank. I'll have to look back at it. She left us 30, probably almost, well, at least 30 years ago. I'm trying to think. She moved back to her native California. But I think she also designed the target that we use. It is still on the side of the building. Part of the factory. [00:47:42][40.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:47:43] Very interesting. So, were there any other artists that did any particularly interesting things to the structure, to the building itself? So besides the super graphics, was there anything else? [00:47:54][11.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:47:55] No, not really. It was, you know, they fixed up their own studios. But it was, you know, they couldn't do the furnace or make major improvements, that kind of thing. It took a while for the city, what the city did was quite limited too. But we had not asked for more because if we'd asked for more we probably wouldn't have gotten it.[laughs]
[00:48:21][25.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:48:24] So you mentioned that while the Torpedo Factory was being, you know, renovated to the best of your ability, you were going around trying to enlist local artists from the region to come down and rent space. [00:48:37][13.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:48:38] Yeah. [00:48:38][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:48:39] What did that process look like? Were they receptive to it?
[00:48:41][2.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:48:42] Yeah. Different ones. We tried to get the word out as best we could. I didn't, I actually did not go to make speeches anywhere. It was more that we had available space and would they apply. And they heard about it and were getting in touch with us. And some of the ones, when I saw their work, I knew that that was poor. But, we did have a jurying system from the beginning. And we tried to get as good a group as we could to begin with. [00:49:25][43.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:49:28] So you mentioned the jurying system. What did that process look like? [00:49:31][3.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:49:32] They had to bring in their work. [00:49:35][2.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:49:35] Mhm. [00:49:35][0.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:49:35] We had to get outside judges and other people to look at the work and see if they thought that they were capable of being part of the factory. Some were better than others. Oh, but also, we were drawing on the Art League membership, too,

because there were a lot of people which had brought work once a month to shows in the Art League. But, you know, had to paint wherever they could afford, work wherever they could. So that was a big advantage to begin with it. I was able to enlist in a lot of Art League members to apply to be in this in the Art Center. [00:50:32][56.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:50:36] So since the Torpedo Factory opened in 1974, how has the art scene in Alexandria changed? What changes have you noticed? [00:50:47][10.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:50:52] I don't know. There are probably a few more galleries, but we've never had a lot of galleries in the area. The Atheneum has continued in its shows and it was having shows back then. There's a space for hanging and they've continued to do that. But it was certainly not enough, the other major spaces, for artists to work or make or exhibit, you know, at that time. [00:51:36][44.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:51:39] So the Art Center was sort of the cynosure for art in the city for a long time. [00:51:45][5.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:51:45] Yeah. [00:51:45][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:51:47] What did it feel like to have created something like that? I mean, once the experiment had been successful, let's say. [00:51:54][7.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:51:55] Well it's never been ending. It's never ended. I mean it just continued to keep it going, so to speak. The original four year experiment, OK, they decided to stay a little longer. But it was, gosh, probably about ten years. The city looked at it and some developers were, I think, kind of wanting some of the space. And they thought, they realized they really needed to improve the space where the art center was, that we really did need a new heating system and a few other things. So we got it, but there was of course controversy because it was money. [00:52:52][56.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:52:53] Yeah. [00:52:53][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:52:53] But they at that point did approve the space, but it was lost too. They ended up taking away the King Street corner of the building from us. You know, we had originally going all the way to the King Street, to be put because the city manager at the time said it was too valuable for commercial interest for artists. That was at least what we heard. But taking away that much space from us, because it was, first floor, second floor and a third floor, it was just extension of the present building. They ended up adding the mezzanine in the area that was left to us. Which is how we got our current second floor. But it's not a complete floor because of the weight on the foundations. And the fact that we didn't want to lose the very high ceiling partly on the first floor was completely, so they added in that space. And we lost the King Street area. And of course, their commercial interest, right as we speak, that would like to take over the, you know, the space of the art center. In fact there's one that put up a poster about it. In the end of the commercial space, right by a window on the Union

Street side a year ago. Inviting the public to come in and think about all the uses. And it was, the artists were furious as you can imagine. And apparently that got pushed back by the city there. But it's been a challenge because they are now building, well, you know, we helped make the neighborhood attractive. There are, there are commercial interests that would like to get that space. [00:55:23][149.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:55:25] So what has it been like seeing you know all these commercial interests try to come to the space that the Art Center created, essentially, and try to muscle the art center out. What is your reaction to it? [00:55:39][14.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:55:39] We haven't had other artists, we have not had other art groups try to get us out or anything. It's, they like us, and we've had lots of inquiries and people coming in looking and thinking they're going to create something like this in their neighborhoods. And a lot have, a number have. We don't know all of them because we never kept track of everything that was going on. But there's some there, right, that are close of course is the Arlington Art Center that followed ours a year after we did. And Fairfax County has created one down in the old jail. There's one in Charlottesville that's been going strong for almost as long as ours. And there's one, I'm trying to think, was one in Yorktown, I don't know whether it's still going or not. But anyway, and there's been a lot, and we think they're still going. But we, you know, we don't have the money or the crew to look, to see how they all started. But, we've had people, groups, from as far away as... Probably the furthest... god, it's hard. Where are they from? Anyway, I know there was one profile of interest in Miami. You know, if we didn't have the staff to go check on them and follow up. And a lot of people have ideas, but they never cut it. Oh, they'll come through the building, 'oh, look what you did. This is wonderful.' And you tell them a little bit about how it started, and they're going to go back to their neighborhood and do something. Maybe they will, probably they will not. But you never know. [00:57:58][139.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:57:59] Yeah. [00:57:59][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:58:00] And it may not look like ours. You know, necessarily. Because I think there's one in Raleigh, North Carolina that's apparently been going a long time. But depending on the kind of structure they can get in, the deal that they can work out with their neighboring merchants, etc.. Whether the building is owned by the jurisdiction or whether they don't want to get in a commercial situation. We can never make it. The politics of every neighborhood, of course, is different of how they would be to get approval of it. So, there's a lot of interest, but how many actually succeed in keeping something like this going. As far as we know we are the largest sort of facility of this nature in the U.S.. [00:59:04][64.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:59:06] What does it feel like to have so many people try to emulate your experiment? [00:59:11][5.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:59:12] Well, we're pleased. We know it's going to be different, let's put it this way. Depending on the neighborhood and the kind of building that they could

get. Most of the time what we say to them is, or at least what I say when groups ask us, I say 'try to get a building that's in city ownership.' [00:59:43][31.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:59:44] Yeah. [00:59:44][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [00:59:46] Public ownership. That's hard because you're involved in the local politics and how much you support. But at least you have a chance. If it's going to be in a commercial neighborhood, if you make a success of it, they're going to take it away from you. Pretty shortly. Or raise the rent to where you have to leave. Which has been the story of our districts all the way through the country. [01:00:14][28.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:00:21] What do you think is the importance of public arts programs like the Torpedo Factory? What do you think that it did for the city up until now? [01:00:31][9.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:00:31] Well, it turned out to be the largest single attraction for visitors and tourists to the city. There's no question about that. And we had a, what is his name? I can't remember right now offhand. Someone that's an economist and knows, Northern Virginia and Washington really well. Several, it might be 5, 5 or 6 years ago, who said that it was the most valuable thing the city had done, basically, in terms of being an attraction and what they invested in it, etc.. We showed it to this city manager at the time and he was unimpressed. [01:01:34][62.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:01:36] Really? He was unimpressed that the Art center was the biggest draw. From an economic standpoint, that that's incredible. [01:01:42][6.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:01:43] Yeah. [01:01:43][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:01:44] I think that a city manager would be all about that sort of thing. [01:01:47][3.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:01:47] Yeah. Well, I don't want to say that in publication. [01:01:49][1.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:01:50] We can we can edit anything out that you don't want. [01:01:53][2.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:01:53] And he's gone. [01:01:53][0.5]

Kerry James Reed: [01:01:54] Ok. Thank goodness. So what is that like then? I mean, you know, Alexandria is, you know, publicizes itself as, you know, sort of the progenitor city of the nation, right? [01:02:11][16.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:02:11] Yeah. [01:02:11][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:02:11] So what does it feel to have your experiment, sort of, eclipse all that and become the biggest attraction in Alexandria? [01:02:18][6.6]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:02:21] I don't know. I think it'll continue. The ambiance of Old Town will continue. People are not going to remember that they visited Gadsby's Tavern. Or that they walked into the Lyceum. You know, hopefully if they stay in town long enough they'll get to some of those places. But I don't think that they would, I mean, people that come to see, visitors to Old Town that stay a few days will get in most of those historic places. I think it, you know, give them a little bit time. And I don't know really how many, I have no idea of how many people actually decide to come here because of the Torpedo Factory. [01:03:13][51.5]

Kerry James Reed: [01:03:13] Right. [01:03:13][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:03:14] I don't know about them. But it's one of the most obvious things once they do get here. And it is known as an attraction in the Washington metropolitan area. So we get a lot of visitors from, just as we get a lot of artists too, from the neighboring jurisdictions. [01:03:38][23.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:03:42] So how involved was the city on the administrative side of the Torpedo Factory at the beginning? [01:03:48][6.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:03:51] They weren't. [laughs] No. [01:03:53][1.9]

Kerry James Reed: [01:03:54] So it was artist controlled? [01:03:55][1.2]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:03:56] Well, they hired me for having gotten them into it. And I was the director. And basically the only staff except that I hired immediately an assistant. [01:04:13][17.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:04:14] Hmhm. [01:04:14][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:04:15] Whom I had worked with before on the bicentennial projects. Oh, Margaret Mayer. M-A-Y-E-R. We were the total staff and we covered seven days a week between us, you know. But that was it. [01:04:38][22.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:04:42] So have you seen, you mentioned the judging process earlier. Well, I guess whatever movements are going on in art, has that been reflected in the artists that work in the Torpedo Factory? [01:04:58][16.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:04:59] I don't know. It's hard to say. We've had, I mean, well, if you go now to it, you go through, you see just about every kind of style, so to speak. Of the people, what they do, I don't think there's anything that you could say is typical of the artists in the factory. There's a huge range. [01:05:33][33.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:05:38] Do you remember any particular pieces that have really stood out to you that have been produced in the art factory, or any any particular artist that came through that you were impressed with? [01:05:48][10.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:05:50] Oh, again, that's hard to say. You get a lot of people doing interesting work. But it depends on your, what you like and taste, and what I might like you might not like. Or vice versa. One of the benefits of of the factory, with the range of people that we have in there now, the number of people in the artist side related to the factory is that probably every art, shall we say, style or that's currently being done in the U.S. is done in the factory to some attempt to the aesthetic. [01:06:39][48.8]

Kerry James Reed: [01:06:47] So, when did you stop working as a director of the Torpedo Factory? [01:06:55][7.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:06:58] After about four years. I decided, then Chuck Beatley was no longer mayor and we had a mayor, I will not advertise his name. But anyway, he was very critical of the art center. And was not our friend. And, I decided to run for the city council and try to get a handle on it. And after about four years of getting everybody settled in and in place, some of the challenge was gone. I ran for council, and I won in a primary. We actually had a primary, but I lost in the general election. A few votes. So at that point, I went through a period of doing a number of things in town. [Clears throat] Excuse me. My voice is really going today. I sort of freelanced for a bit. It wasn't terribly supportive, but it was here in Alexandria. So I was able to stay, I was comfortable. I had already bought this house. O, fixing it up too. And I was active in the Democratic Committee. So when it would look like an opening for the possibility to run for state delegate, oh I guess it was in '83, I decided to try that. Some friends told me that would be very good and again still would have leverage within the city. I won in the primary and in the general election that time. So, I did that for 18 years. And it was good, I enjoyed the work. And it also the fact that it wasn't full time because we were only in session, you know, for two months and what I had, I could still work in my studio and keep going with things here and just occasionally go down to something special, meetings or something during the rest of the year. So that that gave me the flexibility I wanted and a place in the city. And it also gave me some leverage with it, the city, to continue to protect the Art Center. [01:09:59][181.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:10:07] So what kind of art were you working on personally at the time? Were you still doing abstractism? Or when you ran for city Council, what sort of things were you producing? [01:10:18][10.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:10:23] Trying to remember all the stuff I was doing. I was doing a bit of silkscreen printing about that time. I was still painting. I was doing some photography. I was trying a number of things. In addition to, and in all these kind of affected what I was doing. But that ended up being a fairly long period. And it was good. It gave me stability, gave me some position with the city and the city council. And with that local politics, you know. [01:11:21][58.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:11:24] Do you remember any significant public events or programs that the Arts Center put on over the years that stand out to you? [01:11:33][8.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:11:41] I don't know. We, you know, we had big parties. [01:11:47][5.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:11:48] Oh, really? [01:11:48][0.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:11:49] Oh, yeah. Particularly for things like Christmas and Thanksgiving, etc. You know, I'd invite all of our friends and others to come. Had one or two hilarious, costume parties. You know, we tried to do something to invite the public regularly and to be part of the Art Center. So once or twice a year, we did something of this nature. [01:12:23][33.9]

Kerry James Reed: [01:12:26] What were those parties like? They sound really fun. [01:12:28][1.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:12:29] They were. The costume parties were. They were hysterical. We did Mardi Gras a lot of times. So they were they were hysterical. We had a lot of imagination. [01:12:50][21.8]

Kerry James Reed: [01:12:51] Oh, yeah, I bet the costumes at an artist party were great. [01:12:55][3.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:12:55] Oh, yeah. Oh, terrific. And it gave us a continuous opportunity to invite the public in. Make it as a place that was fun. [01:13:09][13.9]

Kerry James Reed: [01:13:14] So were the art classes that were taught by the Art League prior to the Torpedo Factory, and at the Torpedo Factory as well, did you notice that attendance ever increased or what was what was the state of the teaching program there? [01:13:40][26.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:13:43] The classes? [01:13:43][0.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:13:44] Yeah. [01:13:44][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:13:46] They came. You know, what had been starting with what we had had on Cameron Street, it increased considerably. But I can't, I don't remember numbers of what the Art League did. The Art League could maybe tell you that. I'm not sure that they kept records. [01:14:15][28.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:14:21] Interesting. Very interesting. So as the waterfront has developed, sort of, around the Art Center, do you think that the commercialization of the area has had an impact on the Art Center at all? I know you all have tried to resist the commercialization. [01:14:43][21.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:14:45] Yeah. It's, well, you know, we have nice places to eat if we want to, but not too many artists go to the to the fine restaurants when they're working. You know, you go someplace, you go back on special occasions. And we're glad that there are people that maybe come there and then come to us or vice versa. There's I'm sure some symbiotic relationship there. But it's also been a continued concern. There's a sort of paranoia that the Art Center has continually, because the statements of some of the people that are part of the local mostly restaurant business. And others that down there because we realize that now that we've made the waterfront attractive, it's no cyclone fencing and often rotting docks and whatnot, that there are commercial interests that want our space. In fact, we're reminded of it almost every year. Which is always a little unnerving. [01:16:11][86.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:16:12] Yeah. So the Art Center is almost a victim of its own success, I guess you could say. [01:16:20][7.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:16:20] Oh, yeah. [01:16:21][0.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:16:21] That's really interesting. [01:16:22][0.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:16:22] Yes. Yeah. When nobody wanted the art there and then those rotten docks and what was that? And what were you going to do with the building of that size? Then we would have been, eliminated, but at least the buildings were not taken down. [01:16:42][20.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:16:52] What are some other challenges that the Torpedo Factory has faced over the years? You mentioned the commercialization. Is there anything else? [01:17:00][7.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:17:01] No. Not really. The general public and Alexandria has been supportive or has not taken a stand against us. Oh, it was a little bit of opposition, as I said when we first started. But some of the local environmentalist and all those who wanted ugly buildings down and wanted the park, and that's understandable. But there was no opposition to the artist per se. [01:17:36][35.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:17:44] So it's the 50th anniversary of the Torpedo Center opening. What does it mean to you that your experiment has lasted, you know, 46 years beyond what you had anticipated? [01:17:55][11.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:17:57] It's wonderful, and I'm glad. I think it's a fixture that would be very hard to kill at this point. Though, we still have opposition from those that basically want the buildings, which are usually local developers. We haven't had any, I mean, groups like the Old Town Civic has not opposed us, you know. We haven't had any of that. Nobody has proposed any replacement for us, basically. Although there were certainly hints of it a year ago from, again, the commercial interest. Wanting to, take most of the boat, part of our building. And even put up a bar where people could see the skyline of Washington on the roof of the

factory. You know, so I think that was serious. And then the guy that put the, again a year ago, that put the sign, window size of, I mean, the full commercial window, you know, side sign window proposal telling people about this wonderful replacement that he wanted there for us. So it hasn't gone away. In fact, as the neighborhood and commercial interests get stronger property that in Alexandria that was worth nothing when we started now is very valuable. I mean, we helped create that value. Now they'd like to like us to get out. That's the story that the artists face across the country, though. And, you know, they get in the neighborhood, usually a rundown neighborhood. They make it kind of attractive and interesting for people. And then the commercial interests start to move in. And the artists have to move on. It's one of the reasons when people, groups from other cities talk about wanting to start something like this, I say, 'if you can get a building, focus on a building that's already in the city ownership. You'll have the politics to fight, but you won't have somebody wanting it for commercial purposes for you.' [01:20:56][178.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:20:58] How does it make you feel when these commercial developers try to, you know, piggyback off your hard work and the Art Center's acclaim, not only nationally but, within the region as well? [01:21:10][12.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:21:11] Well, it's a battle to be expected. You know, but because it's straight commercial, it has to do with somebody has money. [01:21:28][16.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:21:29] Right. [01:21:29][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:21:30] You know. [01:21:30][0.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:21:33] Okay, well, we've been talking for an hour and 20 minutes. This has been absolutely fabulous. But, you know, being an artist yourself, I was hoping we could discuss your own artwork if that's all right. So, do you have a preferred medium for art? You've mentioned you've done a lot of things, is there anything that you're always been really drawn to? [01:21:56][22.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:21:57] I guess I'm basically a painter, but, that's what I've always gone back to. But I haven't done any silkscreen printing since I had moved my studio to the house here for the printing, and I had a fire that almost burned the roof of the house off, and that, I didn't have the space to do there. So I quit silkscreen printing at that point and haven't done that for 20 years now. You know. Photography, I used a certain extent is props for my painting and whatnot. Fire enameling I still do, like the enamel that's behind you. But I found that my more recent problems, I really can't stand long enough to sift the enamel onto the plates. Yeah, it's all flat and you have to stand over it and sift your enamel onto the surface. And then put it in the kiln etc.. It's physically hard to do. And right now I'm kind of beyond that. Yeah. You know I can't even stand. So that's one. But I can still paint and I still have a little easel over here. And I continue to paint, time to time. Silkscreen printing, as I said, I haven't done it a long time. And photography I've used mainly as a prop for the painting and other things to get

designs. Or if I'm traveling, particularly to get things I think that could be a the core of a painting or whatever when I got back here, you know. So. [01:24:02][125.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:24:07] How do you choose the subject matter for your art? [01:24:09][2.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:24:15] That's hard. You try to find something that really speaks to you, but that doesn't mean anything when you say that. And sometimes I don't really figure it out till I'm back here and look at it, you know. How can I use this? Well, if I crop it here and crop it there would it give me a design? Would it be good for what medium? Would it really be enough to be of interest in a large painting? Is it simple enough in design or to be done in silkscreen printing? But I haven't done silkscreen printing now in quite a long time. Mainly because again, I don't have the work space for it. And it's, the fumes from it, and cleaning up after it is all hard. [01:25:29][74.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:25:32] I imagine that takes a toll. [01:25:32][0.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:25:33] Yeah. [01:25:33][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:25:36] How would you describe your own art style? [01:25:37][1.7]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:25:43] What do you mean? What I'm doing in terms of design? [01:25:45][2.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:25:45] Yeah. [01:25:45][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:25:50] It's not abstract, but there's a lot of abstraction within my designs. And I mean by that is, and I think it always is behind anything that you're doing, whether it's painting or printing. You're trying to get an interesting design that you can work from that has a lot of interest in it. Things that can be different, things that could be brought up. What can be cropped in or kept, you know. It's hard to describe because it's a very personal thing as you look and try to decide how you can make a good painting out of it. I take a lot of photos, and most of my painting now is based somehow on some of the things I've seen. but I may change it, I may crop it a lot, you know, to get enough interest to carry the space. It's hard to describe why you choose a particular design. [01:27:19][89.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:27:21] Yeah. Very personal process. [01:27:22][1.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:27:26] And some designs are better for certain media than for others. [01:27:30][3.5]

Kerry James Reed: [01:27:32] How so? Like what design would be best for painting for example. [01:27:35][3.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:27:36] Well, painting is the most flexible of all methods. Because there are so many different kinds of styles that you can do in painting, work that you can do. But if I'm doing, for instance, one of the fire enamel behind you, that has to be something that can be rendered in that medium. Usually it's a relatively simpler design and one that is loose in style because you're working with fine grains of enamel that are sprinkled onto the surface. And the way you fire it, of course, will determine a good bit about how the thing turns out to the timing of the firing process. So it is more complicated than putting paint on a brush and putting it on the wall. [01:28:51][74.9]

Kerry James Reed: [01:28:54] Ok. Well, I just have some closing questions. That's all right with you? This has been absolutely fabulous. So, what are some hopes you have for the city of Alexandria moving forward? [01:29:09][14.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:29:10] For the Factory? [01:29:10][0.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:29:11] No, just for the city. [01:29:11][0.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:29:12] For the city. Well, I would hope that it doesn't ever get to the point of being, quote, too commercialized. And look, it's nice that we have a number of restaurants, but you know how many you find they can have, particularly if they push out other things, other activities. I'm glad that things are, for the most part, except for the factory in town, relatively small scale so that you keep a variety of activities. And I'm grateful that we are no longer doing any urban renewal. You know, so that we can keep buildings of various ages. Oh, well, it's good we have visitors and people buy things, and the residence, but you know, you don't want it to begin to too commercialized. You know, then you lose some of the character of the town. City has come a long way in the last 50 years in terms of looking like it was renovated. It was pretty down at heels when we were starting. [01:30:56][104.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:30:57] Yeah, well, I would imagine the Art Center has been a big help to that. [01:31:03][5.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:31:03] Oh, yeah. [01:31:03][0.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:31:04] Yeah, especially along the King Street commercial corridor. [01:31:07][2.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:31:08] Yeah. It was really nothing down there. We're at the point now that we don't want to become too commercialized. It's great to have a number of good restaurants. That's an improvement. But how many do you need? You know can become a point. You want to have enough for people to do without it seeming sort of over commercialized. Fortunately, most things in Alexandria are on a relatively small scale. Which, you know, they can't tear down any more of King Street. [01:32:00][52.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:32:01] Right. [01:32:01][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:32:03] You know. [01:32:03][0.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:32:05] Do you think, you know, public art programs or just public programs that are like the Torpedo Factory, sort of, curtail some of that over commercialization? [01:32:15][10.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:32:17] Oh, yeah. If we were not there and you had a whole lot more little boutiques and things, and that's what it would be. They would rent out spaces and maybe the restaurants would continue. I mean, they've taken the whole King Street, it's all restaurants now. And they could continue with that right on through the building. [01:32:46][29.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:32:47] Right. What are some hopes you have for the Torpedo Factory Art Center moving forward? [01:32:55][8.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:32:57] That it continues, basically. That's the main thing. That's never been something that we could be sure of. You know, I think when I felt when I was state delegate, that also gave me some leverage over the city at that point. It was one of the good side benefits of that, we had relatively peace with the city during that period. Because there are always other forces in town. [01:33:39][41.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:33:40] Right. [01:33:40][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:33:43] And basically it's political. [01:33:45][2.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:33:49] Really quickly, did you support any other public arts programs while you were a delegate? [01:33:53][4.1]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:33:55] Well, I went out to several different communities that wanted to start something similar. And recommended to them what were possibilities. I did one in Florida. One was down near the North Carolina line in far, far southwest Virginia, another was just north of the North Carolina line about mid state. Some others that I've forgotten, one was in Yorktown. Trying to remember. And the one in Charlottesville, which has been one of the real successful ones. It's in a former school building. So, yeah, those had some impact over. But it was not an arts caucus, so to speak, to lead in the House of Delegates. [01:35:20][85.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:35:22] That's really funny. Do you have a favorite piece of art that you've produced? [01:35:31][9.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:35:35] That's hard. These that I got in the room here are favorites that I've kept. Again, you produce so much stuff you can't keep it all. And I'm now in the position of having to dispose of a lot of things in my studio at the factory. I'm trying not to think about it, you know. But we're probably going to end up, giving a lot of it to the Art League for

them to have. They have a fundraiser in February where people buy tickets for \$200. Maybe it's \$250 now, I've forgotten. And as their name is called, they get the choice of what's been donated on the walls. [01:36:40][65.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:36:41] Oh, that's very interesting. [01:36:42][0.5]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:36:43] Yeah, they've done that. Someone suggested that as a fund raiser back when the Art League was in Arlington. So they've been doing it ever since. And it's a major source of funding for the Art League. [01:37:03][20.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:37:04] Interesting. [01:37:04][0.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:37:05] They do it every spring. Oh, excuse me, no, it's always in February. [01:37:11][5.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:37:12] February. Does the Art League do many fundraisers or is it just that one? [01:37:17][4.4]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:37:17] No, they don't do many. That's the major one. And just they take a little commission, of course, on sales. [01:37:25][7.8]

Kerry James Reed: [01:37:26] Right. I'm going to have to get tickets to that. I was not aware. [01:37:34][7.9]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:37:34] Yeah. It's a pretty good fundraiser. [01:37:37][2.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:37:38] Hopefully they don't sell out. Oh, it is February. [01:37:40][1.8]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:37:42] Yeah. It's the first day of February. [01:37:42][0.8]

Kerry James Reed: [01:37:43] I need to get on that. And lastly, if you could hold onto one memory forever, what would it be? [01:37:50][7.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:37:51] Oh, gee. I don't know. Maybe when we first got in the building there, we had 16 foot extension poles, the paint roller. And we were actually cleaning the place and painting it. It was all government green and dirty. And every, every 2 or 3 days I'd go buy another 15 gallons of antique white paint. I gave it to the city later. Eventually I thought I'd improve the building and we would, volunteers and myself and others, would get those paint rollers and cover the dirt. [01:38:48][56.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:38:52] Well, you did an amazing job. And the Art Center was a big part of my childhood, so it has been an absolute pleasure to interview you today. Thank you so much. [01:39:01][9.3]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:39:02] Well, you're welcome. Oh, I hope it becomes something.
[01:39:04][1.9]

Kerry James Reed: [01:39:04] Oh, it definitely will. Thank you. [01:39:05][1.0]

Marian Van Landingham: [01:39:06] Ok. [01:39:06][0.0]

[5475.6]