



City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Alexandria Legacies*  
**Oral History Program**



**Project Name:** *TWIG Oral History Project*

**Title:** *Interview with Anita Carson*

**Date of Interview:** *January 21, 2022*

**Location of Interview:** *Interview conducted via Zoom*

**Interviewer:** *MaryAnne Beatty*

**Transcriber:** *Colleen Mason*

Also present during the interview was Janet Hawkins.

**Abstract:** Anita Carson discusses her work in the hotel industry before marriage. Soon after she arrived in Northern Virginia she began volunteering with TWIG. Ms. Carson served on many different committees for TWIG and she was recently honored for her twenty-five years as a TWIG member.

**This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording**

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<p>Maryanne Beatty:</p>	<p>Hi, I'm Maryanne Beatty. I'm with The Twig Historic Preservation Ad Hoc Committee. I'm here with my colleague, Janet Hawkins, and we're honored to be able to interview today Anita Carson. Anita is a long time Twig. She is currently the Chair of our Fundraising &amp; Marketing Committee, Together We Ignite Giving. And I wanted to make sure I got that right because it is so important, and she and her team are doing a fabulous job, and we want to hear about that, and her history with Twig and her history with the city. So, Anita, welcome.</p>
<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>Thank you very much, Maryanne. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the invitation to share my story, and I look forward to telling you all the things I have to say about my love for Twig.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Good. Well, we're gonna start off with telling us a little bit about you. I know you hail from South Carolina and would love to know how you got here and settled in Alexandria and, uh, made a life here for you and your family.</p>

**MEETING HER HUSBAND**

<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>That's right, Maryanne, I am from South Carolina, I'm a proud South Carolinian, and I grew up there, went to college there as well, and then for career purposes, I moved to New York for several years, and worked there in the hotel industry. I completed my hotel training with Hilton Corporation and had a very exciting life in New York, working at the New York Hilton and the Waldorf Astoria, which as you know, is a very famous hotel.</p> <p>So I did that for several years, and then I had the opportunity to move to London to continue my hotel training with a British company, Trust House Forte, and I learned a lot of things about sipping tea and enjoying the British culture, which was exciting for me, but all of that was before I married my husband. In 1984, I went back to my ten-year high school reunion, and my husband was there at the time, and he had been in the Navy. He is a naval officer, and he was very impressive at the reunion. He asked me, did I know that he flew his own jet to the reunion. And of course, I was pretty impressed by that. And neither of us had married. And, you know, ten years from high school to then, the reunion, and there were several people in our high school class who had married. But we were single, and I had traveled lots of places around the world, and he had been serving on an aircraft carrier. And he had served in several countries. So, we both had that love for travel in common, and we had a very nice evening at the reunion. And we met in May, on this occasion, and then we married in December. So, we literally were a May to December couple. [laughs] So, you've heard of that saying. But we were almost in our thirties, so we thought, well, we'd lived a lot of our exciting life and we wanted, of course, both of us were at that age where marriage was a possibility. So, having said that, Maryanne, we married in 1984 and then Trey was stationed in the Navy in Jacksonville, Florida. He got his naval</p>
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	<p>post-graduate degree at the naval post-graduate school, his MBA, and then we moved to New Orleans on an assignment for a couple of years, where he worked in the headquarters for the financial arm for all of the armed forces, the Army, the Navy, et cetera. And then, in 1994, we had the privilege to move to Washington. Trey was offered a position at the Pentagon. So, he worked for the Budget Office, for the Secretary of the Navy, Donald Rumsfeld’s office, and was assigned there. And we had a two-year-old child and started our life in Washington. So that’s how I got here, with my husband.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>I think that’s probably the story of a lot of people. I came here as a child with my father, who was stationed at the Pentagon. So, you know, I think military is very, uh, you know, when you’re part of the military family, there’s a lot of connectivity with the Washington area. So once you got to Washington and you started to get settled in, how did you get connected to the community?</p>
<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>You know, it was interesting, Maryanne, and you probably know this better than anyone, and as a military wife, and being in a military family, you’re always so afraid to make friends sometimes because you know, eventually, we have to leave them, right? And so I, when we moved to DC, I didn’t know anybody here at all. I was fortunate enough, though, as I said, to have a child, who was, uh, in school, in pre-K, and one of our Twig members, Pat DePuy, was a room mother at Alexandria Country Day, and our son was in pre-school there, and she invited me to come to a coffee. I think it all starts at a coffee, right, Maryanne? Or a reception. [laughs] So, she invited me to come to a coffee and meet some of the Twig members. And, uh, it was so exciting for me because I really, as you know, wanted to meet new people, having just moved here. And I also wanted to meet like-minded women. And I was interested in volunteering. So, volunteering is a passion of my family, and we’ve been given quite a bit of that over the years, so I wanted to meet interesting women that had that similarity that I had.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>And, so, uh, so, when you were, you know, getting your connections made, and I know Twig was something that you looked at and, how did you get involved in Twig, who was your sponsor, and how did that all come about?</p>
<p><b>FIRST GETTING INVOLVED WITH TWIG</b></p>	
<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>Well, Pat DePuy was my sponsor, and then Gina Galloway was my endorser. You know, you have to have one of each. So, they, uh, they both were at the coffee that day and introduced me, and I was just so filled with such warm, welcoming spirit from the Twig members. And I do think that we all have that love for family and community, and I particularly was interested in supporting the hospital, because I think that, obviously, our local hospitals are an institution that everyone needs at some point in their lives, and that there was a willingness to help someone less fortunate. I</p>

	<p>felt I was fortunate in my lifetime to experience what I had and the family and the bonds that I had, and I wanted to give back. And I could see, with the activities that Twig was doing, the pledges, the money, the financial support, um, I could see that there was a love for the community and a love for the hospital. And that really did fit in with my ambitions, to support that cause.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Very nice. And I know you were recognized at the Twig Luncheon last year for your tenure with the Twig organization, and how many years is that, how many years have you been a member?</p>
<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>Thank you for asking this, Maryanne, I'm so proud of this, and in fact, when you mention this, it kind of brings a tear to my eye, and I am quite emotional about it because I served twenty-five years, twenty-five! [Holds up fingers] It's hard, in this lifetime, to do anything for twenty-five years. And some people don't work for twenty-five years. So, I really felt that, and a goal of mine was to meet that twenty-five-year mark, that celebration. So, I really did put a lot of my time, and I was working at the time, too, you know, I've always been working, I had a career at the same time as my husband, so we sort of combined those efforts. But, you know, it was very important for me to reach that milestone. So, I was honored and received a beautiful silver tray engraved with my name and the numbers of years of service. And, you know, looking back on my years, looking back five years, every single position, every single committee, every effort, was something I was so proud of. And it really is my identity, basically. I feel like it is who I am.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Um hm. That's very nice. Well, speaking of committees and groups and things that you've been involved with, can you give us a little overview of, you know, the committees you've been on and, you know, twenty-five years in [unclear]?</p>
<p><b>SERVING ON DIFFERENT COMMITTEES</b></p>	
<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>Yes, well, you know, it is quite an interesting question there, Maryanne, because I always like to say, I like to say what committee I'm not on instead of the ones I have. And, of course, I still have others to think of, as well, that I didn't do. But I think I served on almost every committee as an officer and as committee chair, except with the Thrift Shop, which I never did, which, I didn't seem to have that retail love, but just volunteering there, and I never served as Treasurer, so math was not my skill set, so, I served on almost every single committee, Entertainment, Special Events, I was the Cookbook Chair, uh—we used to have an event in Old Town, sorry, in Alexandria, called the Cooks' Tour, before the Historic Alexandria Homes Tour, we had a Cooks' Tour, where patrons and guests would visit different homes, and their kitchens especially, where they prepared food and cooked. So, I actually was chair of that as well. And, you know, I served as Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Vice President, Past President, of course President, so I really</p>

	feel like, I'm so proud that I gave one hundred percent, every committee I served on and as an officer in Twig, so hopefully someday, maybe they'll ask me, Maryanne, to be a Treasurer or Thrift Shop Chair, do you think that's possible? [laughs]
MB:	Might be. [laughs]
Anita Carson:	So I am the chair of the fundraising arm, as you mentioned, it's the Corporate Fundraising and Marketing Chair, and it is in fact what you said, Together We Ignite Giving, and that gives me even more opportunity, even after twenty-five years, I feel like it's even given me more ambition and more passion to raise money for Twig, which eventually, as you know, goes to the hospital.
MB:	Um hmm. That's wonderful, wonderful. Well, I wanted to focus a little bit on your time and your tenure as president and what you thought, what your goals were and, supporting the organization and the hospital.
Anita Carson:	<p>Well, thanks for asking that too, Maryanne, all your questions are great, and they really bring me, brings to mind things that I love about Twig. I was vice president in 2006 and 2007, and just before me was our Twig president, Janet Hawkins. And I worked very closely with Janet, I'm proud to say that she was a terrific mentor for me. And I think any time you serve in an organization like Twig, having that person ahead of you to sort of direct you and lead you and advise you is so crucial to my role as president. So, I appreciate so much having that opportunity with Janet.</p> <p>Um, my goal, really, in being president, you know, we worked so hard, there's, uh, you know, we worked in the Thrift Shop, we sold carnations on the street, we have fundraising events, there's a lot of physical and, um, effort that we put into what we do. So, it is more than people might see on the outside. So, one of my goals was to, let's have some fun! Right? Let's continue that hard work, but let's mix in some fun. So, we used to have skits at our general meetings. We would have people, our Twig members, dress up in costumes, and we would highlight different activities that we were doing. I remember we had, like, a Kentucky Derby party. And we highlighted that at one of the meetings, with people dressed up. And we had a cruise event, where "Sailing into the New Year!" that type [of] thing. And we also just had a lot of fun. I wanted it to be rewarding for what we do, but I also wanted the Twigs to come together as members and really enjoy the friendship. I think you know, your being a Twig as well, the friendships are really the positive force that makes us do what we do, because we have friends that support us, friends that take care of us, listen to us, um, it's amazing, that camaraderie. And I think that that's a big part of what I wanted to do as Twig president, to engage that hard work with that camaraderie, together, so that we were able to flourish.</p>
MB:	[Nods] So true. Well, you just led me into my next question, about special friendships, or connections that you've made through the years and if you

	had any more to say about that.
Anita Carson:	Yeah! I think that, uh, almost every Twig is your friend. There's different levels of friendships, as you know, but there's been several Twigs, most recently in the last five years, that have really supported me in my family life. Unfortunately, I had a, my father passed away last year and my mother passed away a few years ago—.
MB:	I'm sorry.
Anita Carson:	And, you know, those kinds of things that happen, Twigs come together. Maryanne, I must have gotten two hundred sympathy cards when my mother and father passed away, and people bringing food, and flowers, and phone calls. And I've never been involved in an organization that had such caring friends, that I felt really cared about me and my family. And, you know, at the end of the day, that's all we have, is our family, our memories, so, <u>some</u> , I'm so blessed. I think it's one of my greatest life's accomplishments is to not only accept friendships from Twigs, but to be a friend. And I'm hoping that I made a difference in that and put myself out there for them as well.
<b>MEMORABLE PROJECTS</b>	
MB:	That's very nice. Very nice. I have another question, um, about memorable projects or specific things that really stick with you, that you've done throughout your tenure with Twig.
Anita Carson:	Yeah. I, you know, one of the greatest programs that we had, Twig has to, every year, refresh what we do, and we have those standard Thrift Shop activities, etc., but we're always looking for this development of how to be better and how to give more and give back. So, one of the projects that we were involved with was an organization called Antiques in Alexandria. And it was a premier antique show here, held at Episcopal High School. And, uh, I was on the board of that committee, I think eight or nine years total, and other Twigs were as well. It wasn't just me, it was other Twigs, but we had the opportunity to staff and raise money for an auction. We had an opportunity to really get involved in this antique business, believe it or not, which I didn't have the skills for, but boy, did I learn a lot about it! But, for antique collectors all over the east coast and our local community would come to this antique show. And they would buy tickets, we would have a lovely preview night, there would be dancing and a band, and we, throughout the weekend, we would have this antique show where buyers would come in and purchase antiques. And the monies raised from that, Maryanne, you're gonna like this because it didn't only just go to Twig, but it also helped the Athenaeum [the Northern Virginia Fine Arts Association Art Center] and the Lyceum [The Alexandria History Museum.] So, uh, the Athenaeum and the Lyceum board members were also serving on Antiques in Alexandria. So, it was a great relationship between the historic, Office of Historic Alexandria and those two, the Athenaeum and Lyceum, and Twig! So, what happened, we

	<p>would make maybe a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand dollars, and we would divide those up between Twig and those other two that I mentioned. So, I think that is one of the joys of being a Twig is participating in that effort. Unfortunately, as you know, people aren't collecting antiques as much as they were then. A lot of people have different design skills. But unfortunately, the founder, who is a living legend in Alexandria, passed away, and his leadership was crucial to operating that show. So we no longer have that show. I wish we did, but we still have friendships. And I must tell you, we gained some Twig members from serving on Antiques in Alexandria, so, uh, you see, it all sort of evolves together and, and—but that was a great project that I was able to support.</p>
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<p>MB:</p>	<p>Yes. That's nice. So, uh, I think I'm gonna shift directions just a little bit and talk about the hospital and talk about our relationship with the hospital. So, uh, in your, in your mind, what do you think are some of the most significant contributions that Twig has made to the hospital? Or important?</p>
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**TWIG'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ALEXANDRIA HOSPITAL OVER THE YEARS**

<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>You know firsthand, Maryanne, that we have a terrific Archive Committee in Twig. And we have images and documents and meeting notes and all of that from all our many years. I think we're almost in our ninetieth year of Twig – yeah, we started in 1933, so, we're coming up on ninety years. So, uh, I love to go through our Dropbox account and look at some of those images and newspaper clippings from those many years ago. And it's amazing how, one year you might see in 1937 we gave a, uh, a blood pressure machine or an incubator for a neonatal care unit.</p> <p>There's a wide variety of things that Twig has done to support the hospital. We even used to have, like, patient, uh, programs where they would go in and just make the patients happy, like, Twigs would go in and do some sort of, like, clown appearance or something, you know, to lighten the mood of the patients. So, we've done so many things, from, like, just simple thermometers to cotton swabs to everything you can think of. But, uh, I think the most, obviously, and this is a tribute to all Twigs, we have several units in the hospital that are named Twig. Like, the Twig Pavilion, and the Twig Post-Surgical Center, the Intensive Care Unit. So, we have a lot of our "name" [hand air quotes] at the hospital. In fact, some people would say to me, 'Why don't you just name it the Twig Hospital?' [laughter] you know, you've given so much. So, uh, I think our pledges have been really based on need from the hospital, what they needed. And, you know, the standing, the hospital as it stands, is a brick and mortar facility, and we've contributed and made all of that happen. And we also give to the Nursing Scholarship. Every year we have been supporting a nurse that wants to further their career, and we provide a nursing scholarship. So I think that's really important for nurses, too. But I know that the brick and mortar is crucial, but I also think that the</p>
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	<p>leadership of the hospital knows that Twig is there to support them. And we often go to them and say, “How can we help you?” In 2020, we gave \$100,000 to the Covid Preparedness, Emergency Preparedness Fund, which was a great need. They didn’t need any brick-and-mortar at the time, they didn’t need anything, they wanted us to help them with the COVID pandemic. And we rose to the occasion. We gave \$100,000 for that. And I was so proud of that because I think that, what I’m trying to relay is that I think we do react to whatever the hospital needs from us. And we step up and provide that.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>I think that was a great answer. And then, sort of as a follow up, moving forward, uh, what should we be doing to support and, uh, you know, to support them, because there’s a lot of things happening, moving forward.</p>
<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>There are. And, uh, some of the future, the immediate needs of the hospital, again, it’s not the brick-and-mortar aspect, but there are some needs, currently. We are proposing, at our next board meeting, and taking a vote from our membership, to support a simulation lab, which the hospital has said that they need. And this is a training lab, where nurses and professionals can come there and be trained, with mannequins and equipment, that they can learn how to be more skillful in what they do. Uh, that’s one of the projects that we’re proposing, coming up shortly. The other one is a financial aid, or financial assistance, for patients. I didn’t know, Maryanne, that when a patient goes home from the hospital, that they need equipment. And sometimes Medicare or Medicaid, they aren’t covered. Or maybe they get this equipment once every four years. What happens if this equipment breaks down or they need more of it? So, we are definitely, as the Fundraising Chair, we’re definitely responding to the needs of the hospital. And those are two projects I’m hoping we will confirm and be able to support the hospital, because financial aid in our community is crucial to all of us, having the healthiest and happiest community that we live in.</p>
<p><b>WHAT MAKES ALEXANDRIA HOSPITAL SPECIAL?</b></p>	
<p>MB:</p>	<p>I think you answered that. My last question is, what is it about the Alexandria Hospital that makes it so special to our city and to our residents who live here?</p>
<p>Anita Carson:</p>	<p>Maryanne, we’re so fortunate that we have a lot of organizations and corporations that are based here in Alexandria. And the hospital has a great foundation team that, uh, that they go and ask, you know, annually if not more than once, to support the local hospital, because we only have one, we only have one hospital in Alexandria. And the better that the hospital does and how they achieve their success is, it pertains to how we support them and what we can do. So, we’re all members of the community. When we need the hospital, we want them there for us, and we want to be there for them. So that really is the strength of who we are.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>That was very well put. Uh, these, I’ve asked all of my questions. Is there</p>

	anything you would like to add before we wrap up?
Anita Carson:	I would just like to add, lastly, I could not be here today talking about this if I didn't have the support of the other Twigs and the other officers and the committee chairs and all that. I think it's a really fine-tuned organization, and it's a group of women who, you know, there's other things we could be involved in but this group of women is really unique, and I'm sure the hospital executive team would tell you that they're grateful for what Twig does, and that's a great reward for me.
MB:	Thank you very much. That's wonderful.
<b>TWIG'S SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY</b>	
Janet Hawkins:	Uh, as always, I have a couple questions to ask. [laughs] Uh, anyway, so, Anita, thank you very much for your nice comments about when I was president and you were, you were, as I always say, the lady in waiting! She did a great job. So, I've got two questions to ask you. One is about your time as president, and the other one is about something more recent. Uh, so, Anita was president when we celebrated our seventy-fifth anniversary. So, I was just wondering if there was anything from that time that stood out to you.
Anita Carson:	Well, it was definitely a great celebration. And I, it just happened to be that I fell into the presidency in that year, which was fantastic! So, but I think, Janet, we made the very best of celebrating. I remember we had a very big reception at the Lyceum, and Mayor Euille was there, and he gave us a commission from the City, Patsy Ticer was there, you know, she's a former Twig, unfortunately passed away now [in 2017]. But we had a great celebration that evening, but we tried to make sure we celebrated all year, right, Janet? So, we were in the George Washington Parade, and we actually had a trolley that we rented, or they maybe gave to us, we had a trolley full of Twigs, waving and yelling and talking about that seventy-fifth anniversary. And I had the privilege of being in a limousine? It was a convertible where I had the opportunity to sit in a beautiful dress, next to a former Twig, sorry, another Twig president and I was able to wave at the crowd and I love to talk about it! [laughs] Uh, so I was there, waving in the parade, you know, my mother called me later and said, "How did it go?" And I said, "Mom, I was so proud," I was up front, I really enjoyed it, and it was a great opportunity for me to, you know, be there and be present. So that was a great celebration, and you know, Janet, too, if you look into our archives, all of the celebration of the seventy-five-year celebration were there. We had a beautiful, printed program, we had other speakers that talked about their years as president, and, uh, I think that, I wouldn't have known of any other celebration that could have been greater. And I look forward to celebrating our hundredth year. Who's gonna be president then?
JH:	You know, I think about how old I'll be [laughs] [unclear] will be about ninety! We're hoping that whoever is our president for our ninetieth—will

	<p>that be Michelle? Yeah, Michelle. And somebody else, perhaps, will plan something that was a year-long event, because I think it was kind of fun. But anyway, yeah. The other question is something more current. Maryanne's a fairly new Twig, but one of the things we haven't really talked about is our technology changes over the years. When I joined Twig, when you signed up to work at the shop, there was a giant piece of paper that was passed around at the meetings. And then we had another president who helped us update our website and started the Volunteer Matters program. Her name was Cassie, is still, Cassie McLaughlin. But one of the things that I think that Anita might want to talk about, if you're willing, is that how you got Twig more involved in communication and social media, and then, also just a little bit about our technology. I mean, we used to actually count money and use a cash register at the shop. Just a little bit about that, because I know you've been very involved in all of that.</p>
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**HOW TWIG HAS USED NEW TECHNOLOGY**

Anita Carson:

I have, Janet, and I'm proud to say that it really is very different than when I started and when you started, as you mentioned. Thank goodness for technology, and there is lots of technology available now for nonprofits, so I think that we've taken full advantage of that, to update our website, as you mentioned, also, to register or to sign up for volunteer shifts, because we do have that very important aspect of how we raise money. A couple of years ago I was able to install, and we did a lot of research on this, install the Square System, which is the payment system at the Thrift Shop. And I was fortunate to work on that team. So now we don't have the calculators and, you know, pushing the credit cards into the machine. Janet, you remember, though, it was a long time that it was cash only, no credit cards. I think it was your year that we started accepting credit cards. So, I, to follow up on that, as you know, technology changes, things advance, we now have the Square System, it's so easy, you just tap your credit card, and you've got everything you'd want from the Twig Shop! So, I really love that as well. So, uh, and in addition to that, uh, social media and, and communications. It's, it's not only important for us to know what we do in the hospital, but we need to share this information with our community. And as you know, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, all of that's global, and we have been able to express ourselves as to who we are and our purpose, our mission, through social media. And update our supporters. Lots of our customers check our Instagram and Facebook pages to see what's on sale at the Thrift Shop. Uh, they learn about fundraising activities. Uh, we're now involved in the Chamber of Commerce, for the first time, we're members of the Chamber of Commerce, and we've been on virtual Zoom sessions with them, meeting new members, so that's a technology that we would not have had in the past, right? Uh, so we're advancing that all the time, our communications team works very hard to share information with each other, but it's not

	only internal, but external communications that I think is—we want the most external exposure. We want people to know what we do. And sharing that is important. I hope that answered your question, Janet.
JH:	Yes, I just thought it would be great for you to talk a little bit about that. As I said, as I listen to these interviews, I think about stuff that has changed so much [laughs] since I've been with Twig, and you joined Twig before I did, so it was kind of interesting.
Anita Carson:	I always say, only our hairstyle changes! [laughs]
JH:	Hair color, too. So, anyway, well, I think that's it. Unless there's anything else, Maryanne?
MB:	I can't think of anything. I think it was—thank you!
JH:	Alright. I'm going to hit the stop button, but I do want to thank you, Anita. It was wonderful to hear what you had to say.
Anita Carson:	Thank you for the opportunity, Maryanne and Janet. It was a pleasure to be here, and I'm honored to be a Twig and I hope to continue being a Twig!